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Ordinary Sailors: The French Navy, Vichy and the Second World War

Alexander John Upward

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**Ordinary Sailors: The French Navy, Vichy and the Second
World War.**

Alexander John Upward

**Dissertation submitted
to the Eberly College of Arts and Sciences
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in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

**Doctor of Philosophy in
History**

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ABSTRACT

Ordinary Sailors: The French Navy, Vichy, and the Second World War

Alexander John Upward

After the debacle of the Fall of France in 1940, the one organization that managed to maintain its discipline and functionality virtually intact was the French Navy. This is the story of how subsequently that navy was able to exert a disproportionate influence on the Vichy regime of Marshal Pétain. Such influence achieved its apogee between February 1941 and April 1942 when the navy's Commander-in-Chief Admiral Darlan served simultaneously in several of the regime's highest offices. During this period France continued to flirt with the possibility of actively engaging Great Britain in war on the side of Nazi Germany. It was also the period when Vichy introduced some of its most repressive measures against its own citizens and entered upon policies that led ultimately to active collaboration in the deportation of Jews to Auschwitz.

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Introduction

This is not a dissertation about the Holocaust, even if that is where the narrative of events leads it. It is a dissertation about the French Navy in wartime. The title is provocative and clearly an homage to Christopher Browning's *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland*. As with Browning's "ordinary men," no one pulled on the uniform of the French Navy with the liquidation of innocent civilians in mind. By the same token, however, it is unclear that anyone wearing that uniform did anything to inhibit the execution of policies that in the logic of a Nazi dominated Europe, certainly after January 1942, could lead nowhere else. The French Navy played a disproportionate and largely unremarked role in the formulation of the Vichy regime's program and was overwhelmingly implicated in the policies of state collaboration that that regime embraced.

Yet *Ordinary Sailors* is not a polemic against the French navy. Rather, it seeks merely to restore the navy to some position in the narrative of events in France during the Second World War, a narrative in which it has been mainly conspicuous by its near total absence. Furthermore it does so bearing in mind the opinions of two prominent Frenchmen. In his book *Strange Defeat: A Statement of Evidence Written in 1940*, noted historian Marc Bloch observed:

In no nation is any professional group ever entirely responsible for its own actions. The solidarity of society as a whole is too strong to permit the existence of the sort of moral autonomy, existing in isolation, which any such total responsibility would seem to imply...The psychological conditions in which they lived were not altogether of their own making, and they themselves, through their members, were as their origins had moulded them. They could be only what the social *fact*, as it existed in France, permitted them to be.¹

Bloch was referring specifically to the case of the French General Staff, but could equally have been writing about the French navy.

¹ Marc Bloch, *Strange Defeat: A Statement of Evidence Written in 1940* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co, 1968), 126.

On the other hand, Edgar Faure, French counsel for the prosecution at the Nuremberg Trials and future French premier, was less forgiving. Writing on the subject of France and trials for crimes against humanity, Annette Wieviorka demonstrated Faure's frame of reference at Nuremberg: "Every crime," he explained, implies a chain of transmission; it matters little to an executive that his signature appears on a document. That executive's responsibility is established "by the fact that a criminal act was perpetrated administratively by a department whose hierarchy ends with that executive." And, he explained, "In all hierarchical state departments there exists a continuous network of authority which is at the same time a continuous network of responsibility."²

The French navy was not a criminal organization in the terms laid down, with the support of a French judge, for the Nazis at Nuremberg. It was, however, a "professional group" in Bloch's terms and a "hierarchical state department" in Faure's and it was so at a time after the Fall of France in 1940 when, as Admiral Darlan's Chief of Staff would put it: "Sardonic critics complained that two thirds of France was overrun by the Germans, and the remaining third by the Navy."³ It is clear that activities that would now be considered criminal were perpetrated at that time and equally clear that someone was responsible. It might be inferred from the fact that because the worst depredations of the war years were committed after the return to power of Pierre Laval, the navy's responsibility was limited. In this context, Jean-Marc Berlière's observation in his work on the French police during the Occupation that "[Laval] replaced incompetent admirals and the fanatical amateurs of the collaborationist parties with experienced,

² Annette Wieviorka, "France and Crimes Against Humanity," in *Lives in the Law* ed. Austin Sarat, Lawrence Douglas and Martha Umphrey (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006), 218.

³ Rear Admiral Paul Auphan and Jacques Mordal, *The French Navy in World War II* (Annapolis MD: United States Naval Institute, 1959), 149.

high-level civil servants...”⁴ seems exculpatory. Yet charges of incompetence scarcely amount to an exoneration.

The problem for the navy, and for the Vichy regime at large, was that it achieved the summit of its influence at a time when two assumptions were widely prevalent. The first was that Germany was going to win the war. The second was that Hitler was a man who operated within the framework of the accepted norms of international diplomacy. Politicians in France were not alone in thinking the latter. Although he may have changed his mind by 1940, in 1938 Neville Chamberlain had concluded that “in spite of the hardness and ruthlessness I thought I saw in his face, I got the impression that here was a man who could be relied upon when he had given his word.”⁵ This view was challenged by Paul Reynaud in a riposte to General Weygand’s assertion in June 1940 that the war was lost: “[Y]ou are taking Hitler for Wilhelm I, the old gentleman who took Alsace-Lorraine from us, and that was that. But Hitler is Genghis Khan.”⁶ Reynaud’s was not the general attitude of the authorities in Vichy, however, and the result was described by Tony Judd: “The political irresponsibility of the rulers of Vichy France is well documented now, depending as it did upon a willful refusal to look honestly at their own weakness, the true aims of the occupiers, or the increasingly predictable consequences of their initiatives and concessions.”⁷ The navy had its part in this.

In 1940 the navy emerged from the debacle of the fall of France as the only organ of state that remained functionally intact. In the vacuum left by the collapse of parliamentary government and the destruction of the French Army it was natural that the new regime should

⁴ Jean-Marc Berlière, *Policiers français sous l'Occupation* (Paris: Perrin, 2009), 36.

⁵ David Faber, *Munich, 1938: Appeasement and World War II* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2008), 300.

⁶ Julian Jackson, *The Fall of France: The Nazi Invasion of 1940* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 103-104.

⁷ Tony Judd, *The Burden of Responsibility: Blum, Camus, Aron, and the French Twentieth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 13.

turn for support to the only French organization capable of military action and one which was intimately involved in the protection of the French Empire, France's only other available bargaining asset in the new relationship with a victorious Germany. Yet historically the navy had consistently had a significant role within the French state, even before calamity brought it to such visible political prominence under the Vichy regime.

That being said, the role of the navy had temporal limitations even within the limited timeframe of the existence of the Vichy regime. If naval power and Empire were the two main negotiating assets available to France after the armistice, they were also both wasting assets. The Empire, on the one hand, because of the incursions of the supporters of de Gaulle and the military and diplomatic efforts of the Allies. The navy, on the other hand, because it found itself with limited resources and considerable constraints as a result of the efforts of the Armistice Commissions. The Allied invasion of North Africa in November 1942 had the effect, as far as the navy was concerned, of linking this set of problems into a single crisis that robbed it of any institutional power. Vichy was overrun by the Germans and on 27 November the fleet was scuttled at Toulon. To all intents and purposes the Vichy navy was at an end and although a Free French Navy as a fighting organization continued to exist, even incorporating surviving elements of the Vichy version, it had no institutional influence on the subsequent developments in metropolitan France. Here, then, is where this dissertation ends.

Explaining the Absence of the Navy in Vichy Historiography

The early histories of Vichy were to a greater or lesser extent all about blame. The French Committee of National Liberation led by de Gaulle in Algiers had declared the Vichy French State to be illegitimate and thus opened the way for it to establish a provisional government that could claim to be the natural inheritor to the Third republic. In terms of the

historical narrative this enabled de Gaulle to foster the unifying national myth of massive resistance to the German occupier bravely pursued while a handful of Nazi collaborators betrayed their country in Vichy in support of an aberrant regime. Post-war purge trials firmly placed the blame on the collaborationists and by implication removed the stain of guilt from everyone else. The complicated legal situation which differentiated between collaboration with Germany and Vichy⁸, while simultaneously placing the new government beyond the reach of claims of legal liability from the victims of either⁹, also had the historical effect of airbrushing French involvement in the Holocaust from the historiography of the war.

The immediate political situation that gave rise to the judicial purges that occurred in the wake of the Liberation was described by De Gaulle: “The news that reached us from a vast majority of the departments gave evidence of the tremendous confusion there... Too much outrage, accumulated over four years, was fermenting under the lid to avoid an explosion in the chaos following the enemy’s flight and the collapse of his accomplices.” What followed was the period of *l’épuration sauvage*. For De Gaulle, the way forward was clear: “Among the various currents that had roused passions to a pitch where the slightest concession would sweep away its authority, the state must discharge two imperative obligations: Justice must be rendered and public order assured. This must be done vigorously and without delay, or it would never be done at all.”¹⁰

⁸ Anne Simonin, “What’s *Really* Good About ‘Infamous Sanctions’: The Case of France in 1791 and in 1945,” Stanford Humanities Center Lecture, 29 January 2010.

⁹ Vivian Grosswald Curran, “Recent French Legal Developments Concerning a War-Time Arrest and Imprisonment Case,” *Maryland Journal of International Law* 25:264 (2010).

¹⁰ Charles de Gaulle, *The Complete War Memoirs of Charles de Gaulle* (New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, Inc., 1998), 677, 710.

For Tony Judt, “the concept of a purge was unproblematic”, in as much as it had been an instrument used in France before.¹¹ In fact the most recent manifestation of such activity had occurred under Daladier in October 1939, when then Interior Minister, Albert Sarraut, had undertaken a nationwide purge of Communists. It was in fact under the version of the Penal Code reinforced in July and September 1939 that articles 75 to 86 were deployed in the prosecution of collaborators for having “intelligence with the enemy”.

From the start, however, there were contradictions at work in the formulation of policy. First of all, the Penal Code as it stood in 1940, while it addressed issues of outright treason, did not precisely envisage a situation where the country had been overrun by the enemy. Acts of denunciation, for example, which cost the lives of many, were not in and of themselves strictly criminal. Secondly, concerned to preserve the sense that the purges were guided by judicial principle rather than motivated by a desire for political revenge, there was a keen desire to avoid the introduction of retroactive legislation, not least because the most recent precedent for this had been initiated by the Vichy regime. It promulgated a law on the 23 July 1940 that confiscated the property of those who had fled the country between the 10 May and the 30 June 1940, in other words before the Vichy regime was in place.¹² Having himself been sentenced to death *in absentia* by the Vichy regime on the 2 August 1940, de Gaulle may have been particularly sensitive to the ramifications of this form of retribution.

The broad outlines of the post-war Provisional Government’s policy had been laid down in the Charter of the *Conseil National de la Résistance*, an umbrella organization designed to place a variety of resistance movements in the French interior under the authority of de Gaulle,

¹¹ Tony Judt, *Past Imperfect: French Intellectuals, 1944-1956* (New York: New York University Press, 2011), 57.

¹² Jean-Paul Cointet, *Expier Vichy: L’épuration en France, 1943-1958* (Paris: Perrin, 2008), 185; Henry Rousso, “L’épuration en France une histoire inachevée,” *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d’histoire*, 33 (January - March 1992): 78-105.

which made its appearance on the 15 March 1944. According to this the “punishment of traitors and the eviction from the administration and professional life of all those who have dealt with the enemy or have actively associated themselves with the governments of collaboration” was to be assured.¹³ This had, in fact, been preempted by the founding ordinance of the *Comité Français de Libération Nationale* (CFLN), which initially brought together Generals Giraud and de Gaulle as joint heads of a single committee in Algiers that gradually took on the appearance of a Provisional Government.¹⁴ Thus the purge of collaborationist officials had already been announced with the formation by the CFLN of a purge committee on the 18 August 1943.¹⁵

De Gaulle’s initial impulse was to emphasize the unity of the French nation in opposition to the German Occupation and the regime of Pétain. So, in a speech broadcast on the radio on the 31 December 1944, he observed: “Aside from a minute number of wretches who consciously preferred the triumph of the enemy to a French victory[...], the huge mass of the French people have never desired for anything but the good of their country.”¹⁶ Unfortunately the reality in the country from which he had been absent for four years revealed evidence of extensive collaboration, whether active or passive, which demanded that the net of accusation be cast considerably wider than the original conception of the purges envisioned, if only to ensure that justice was removed from the arena of individual retribution and placed squarely in the hands of the state.

This left the problem of retroactive legislation, which was eventually circumvented by a Gallic legal sleight of hand. While traitors were to be judged according to the existing statutes in

¹³ Yves Beigbeder, *Judging War Crimes and Torture: French Justice and International Criminal Tribunes and Commissions, 1940-2005* (London: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 2006), 170-172.

¹⁴ Julian Jackson, *France: The Dark Years, 1940-1944* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 458-459.

¹⁵ Robert O. Paxton, *Vichy France: Old Guard and New Order* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 330

¹⁶ Cointet, *Expier Vichy*, 156.

the *Haute Cour de justice*, lesser infractions of article 75 were to be covered by local *cours de justice*, created by an ordinance on the 26 June 1944, and designed to put an end to unofficial acts of summary justice. A third level of jurisdiction, working alongside the *cours de justice*, was assigned to the *chambre civique*, which aimed to ensure both that none of the guilty got off scot-free, while taking pains to grade punishment according to the gravity of the crime. The Minister of Justice, François de Menthon, explained that the punishment of “national degradation” could be meted out for a new crime of “national indignity”, which was more or less a state of being in collaboration with an illegitimate Vichy state. Designed to get around accusations of *ex post facto* justice, this tended to have the effect of minimizing the importance of any actual, specific crimes that may have been perpetrated by the Vichy regime.¹⁷

It was not without criticism. In 1947 the *Yale Law Journal* suggested: “In general it has been sufficient to sustain convictions if evidence existed of anti-Allied sentiments or support for Vichy policies.” Writing in 2000, Anne Simonin pithily expressed the view of Jean Paulhan: “Carried out in the name of the Law, the purges were nothing other than the improper legalization of revenge.” In historical terms it meant two things. Firstly, that the activities of the Vichy regime, particularly those that related to the deportation of Jews, were airbrushed from history. Secondly, that “crimes against humanity” were not a feature of the French purge trials. As Annette Wieviorka put it: “The Nuremberg trials took place elsewhere – geographically, politically, and judicially. France, a signatory of the London accords that established the Nuremberg tribunal, accepted de facto the new notion in international law of crimes against

¹⁷ See Jean-Paul Cointet, “Epuración légal : 400 000 dossiers, moins de 800 morts” *Historia* 693 (September 2004) pp 68ff; Dirk Luyten, “Dealing with Collaboration in Belgium After the Second World War: From Activism to Collaboration and Incivism,” in *Dealing with Wars and Dictatorships: Legal Concepts and Categories in Action*, ed., Liora Israel and Guillaume Mouralis, (Berlin: Springer Science and Business Media, 2013); Anne Simonin, *Le déshonneur dans la République* (Paris: Grasset, 2008).

humanity. But accepting this notion did not mean integrating it, either in French law or in concept.” Crimes against humanity were not recognized in French law until 1964.¹⁸

In consequence the first trial in France for crimes against humanity was that of Klaus Barbie in 1987. At the time of the purges, in the statutes provided by both the CFLN and the subsequent Provisional Government (*gouvernement provisoire de la République française* or GPRF), anti-Semitic policies were not made the object of any specific criminality. Thus Robert Brassilach, writer, journalist and editor of *Je Suis Partout*, who on the 25 September 1942 had declared in *Je Suis Partout*, “we must treat the Jewish problem without sentimentality, we must separate from the Jews *en bloc* and not keep any little ones,” was not charged with any offences against the Jews or for encouraging their deportation. Rather he was tried under Article 75 for “intelligence with the enemy” and his lengthy indictment described how he had actively and willingly participated in promulgating pro-German propaganda and had entered into relationships with official enemy institutions.¹⁹ In the trial of Marshal Pétain, the subject of anti-Semitism was scarcely touched upon and occupied precisely seventeen lines in an indictment that was thirty-three pages long. It has also been suggested, furthermore, that the contrast between the anemic slenderness of prosecution briefs and the bulging archives that stuffed the environs of the Palais Bourbon from which those briefs were drawn probably also worked to the benefit of those who had engaged in anti-Semitic activities.²⁰

The conduct of the collaboration trials invited criticism from both Left and Right that eventually coalesced into a broad consensus that opposed their continuation. In intellectual

¹⁸ Rousso, “L'épuration en France une histoire inachevée,” 101.

¹⁹ Alice Kaplan, *The Collaborator: The Trial and Execution of Robert Brassilach* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 149; Michael Curtis, *Verdict on Vichy: Power and Prejudice in the Vichy France Regime* (London: Phoenix Press, 2004), 234-235.

²⁰ Cointet, *Expier Vichy*, 200, 257, 276.

circles, François Mauriac and Albert Camus disagreed publically over the conduct of the purges in December 1944. Writing in *Combat* on the 11 January 1945, Camus was famously moved to complain that ‘[whenever] I speak of justice, M. Mauriac speaks of charity’. By August 1945, however, Camus had shifted his position: ‘The word *épuration* is already painful enough’, he wrote, ‘[the] thing itself has become odious.’ By 1948, in a lecture to the Dominican community of Latour-Maubourg reflecting on the hopes and disappointments of the Liberation, on the rigors of justice and the requirement of charity he declared that in the light of events: “In our quarrel, it was monsieur François Mauriac who was right.”²¹

At the opposite end of the political scale, writers of the hardline Right who were opposed to the Fourth Republic and absolutely convinced that the Vichy government’s policy of collaboration was the correct course of action formed the *Opposition Nationale*. According to Anne Simonin, the literature of the *Opposition Nationale* aimed overall to provide attenuating circumstances for collaborators who were threatened with legal “purging” in court. “In a way”, she wrote, “the *Opposition Nationale*’s classical culture helped lend credence to its beliefs, as did its dexterity in handling syllogism, that method of reasoning so well known to students of Rhetoric: ‘A collaborator is not a traitor but a defeated man; a defeated man is a victim; a victim is innocent; therefore a collaborator is innocent.’ This is one way of expressing the syllogism that underlay the *Opposition Nationale*’s ‘bad faith’ discourse, and which hoped to show that the collaborators judged for ‘treason’ (Article 75 of the Penal Code) were innocent.”²²

²¹ Judt, *Past Imperfect*, 68-71.

²² Anne Simonin, “The Right to Innocence: Literary Discourse and the Postwar Purges (1944–1953),” *Yale French Studies* 98 (November 2000): 5-28.

Widespread distaste for the purges was gradually reflected in political action. On the 16 August 1947 the first amnesty for certain categories of convicted collaborators under the age of 18 became law.²³ Subsequent amnesties reduced rather rapidly the number of people who remained in prison. An initial 32,000 persons had been incarcerated, but that number was down to 13,000 by December 1948, to 8,000 by the following year, and to 1,500 by October 1952. At the end of the Fourth Republic, there remained in French prisons just 19 persons sentenced for their wartime activities or writings.²⁴

Henry Rousso considered that the purges, representing as they did a set of values that took shape during the war, marked a step in the way the Occupation would be remembered historically.²⁵ Julian Jackson agreed: “The *épuration* is interesting because it allows us to observe the French people, whether from below in the *épuration sauvage*, or from above in the courts, constructing their first representations of the Occupation.”²⁶ Certainly they helped to determine what went into and what was left out of the early narratives of Vichy. Up to a point, what was left out was Vichy’s complicity in Nazi anti-Semitic policies, the navy’s sympathies towards the Vichy regime, and any notion that there may be some point of conjunction between the two.

The navy’s Vichyite predilections are a commonplace that is never mentioned, or mentioned only in passing when writing about the French army. Thus, writing in 1961 about the army and politics, George A. Kelly observed: “The Navy, damaged in reputation by its virtually complete attachment to Vichy and its former chief, Admiral Darlan, had been extremely chary of

²³ Cointet, *Expier Vichy*, 438.

²⁴ Judt, *Past Imperfect*, 59.

²⁵ Henry Rousso, *Le syndrome de Vichy de 1944 à nos jours* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1990), 34.

²⁶ Jackson, *France: The Dark Years*, 578.

politics in the postwar period and especially defensive and unsure of itself.”²⁷ Writing in 1970 about the Algerian Crisis, Philip Maynard Williams described the navy as “a bulwark of Vichy.”²⁸ The purges themselves may have contributed to the navy’s invisibility in the narrative of Vichy and the Occupation. In 1939 the navy had 10,306 officers. Of these, at war’s end, 50 were purged, 440 took “voluntary redundancy,” and 808 took early retirement.²⁹ Overall this meant that the navy lost 226 fewer officers than the air force, whose sympathies tended to be Gaullist. What makes this statistic even more surprising is the contention of Darlan’s Chief of Staff that in 1939 the navy, unlike the army, “was a tightly knit and homogenous group of dedicated officers and men – a Navy in which all were proud to serve and in which everyone obeyed without question the orders of their superiors, and these superiors in turn unhesitatingly carried out the directives of the Government, *regardless of the political party which might for the moment be in power.*”³⁰

That the purges, moreover, continue to have an obstructive effect on historical research into the wartime period was explained by Robert Gildea: “The archives of the wartime period were closed for several decades after the Liberation but a law of 3 January 1979 liberalized access by laying down a thirty-year rule. Exceptions were made for files ‘containing information likely to harm private individuals or concerning state security or national defense,’ which were closed for sixty years, and judicial documents, including purge trials, which were closed for a hundred.”³¹

²⁷ George A. Kelly, “The French Army Re-Enters Politics 1940-1955,” *Political Science Quarterly* 76: 3 (Sep., 1961): 387.

²⁸ Philip Maynard Williams, *Wars, Plots and Scandals in Post-war France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 151.

²⁹ Cointet, *Expier Vichy*, 139.

³⁰ Auphan and Mordal, 18, 23 (my italics).

³¹ Robert Gildea, *Marianne in Chains: Daily Life in the Heart of France During the German Occupation* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2002), 8.

Out of power, in February 1947, de Gaulle confided to his personal secretary Claude Mauriac, that what was needed was a *rassemblement* to bring the French together.³² Two months later, on the 7 April 1947, de Gaulle launched the *Rassemblement du Peuple Français* (RPF) in a speech in Strasbourg. He refused to call it a political party, preferring to define it as a sort of reincarnation of Free France. As Andrew Shennan put it: “[A] non-partisan national reserve, open to all patriotic French men and women.” It was not the success he might have hoped for, but it signaled the renewal of the idea of de Gaulle as the unifier of France. Gradually disengaging himself from the movement by 1954, he held what purported to be his final press conference in 1955. In October 1957 he intimated to Jacques Vendroux, however: “Our country will not tolerate much longer the weakness of those who are leading it...It will not be long before they are obliged to come looking for me.” Seven months later de Gaulle was back in power.³³ It was in the shadow of these events, together with an emerging Cold War and crises in Indochina and Algeria that Robert Aron wrote his history of Vichy.

Vichy Historiography

These early histories by writers such as Robert Aron, who had worked (one hesitates to say “collaborated”) with de Gaulle during the war, or François-Georges Dreyfus attempted to rehabilitate the reputation of Marshall Pétain by developing the “sword and shield” theory of the Resistance in France and placing the blame for the worst depredations of the Vichy regime squarely upon the shoulders of Pierre Laval. This, despite the best efforts of Laval’s son-in-law René de Chambrun³⁴ and others, remained the orthodox view until the late 1960s when Eberhard Jäckel issued a challenge in his 1966 *France in Hitler’s Europe*. A greater impact was produced

³² Jonathan Fenby, *The General: Charles de Gaulle and the France He Saved* (New York: Skyhorse Publishing, 2011), 326.

³³ Andrew Shennan, *De Gaulle* (New York: Longman, 1994), 61-72.

³⁴ René de Chambrun, *Pierre Laval: Traitor or Patriot?* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1984).

by Robert Paxton's 1972 *Vichy France, Old Guard and New Order, 1940-1944*, which among its many achievements demolished the myth that Vichy had provided a shield against the occupier and demonstrated that the regime not only collaborated willingly but drew upon considerable popular support and found its roots in the pre-war anti-parliamentary right. Vichy was not, therefore, the aberration of the Gaullist mythology.

The idea of continuity, ironically embraced by the "Talleyrand of Aubervilliers"³⁵ himself, Pierre Laval – who routinely referred to his 1942 administration as his fifth government – opened the door to the study of Vichy's role in the deportation to almost certain death of 75,000 Jews. Zeev Sternhell went further, attempting to demonstrate that not only did France have a history of anti-Semitism, but that the roots of fascism could also be traced there, although the most extreme positions on this matter have been challenged by John Sweets.³⁶ Since Paxton's work was published, however, so intense has been the pursuit of truth regarding Vichy's role in the Holocaust that it has risked becoming what Henry Rousso referred to as an "exclusive paradigm."³⁷ This danger was recognized in Julian Jackson's monumental and magisterial synthesis of the scholarship related to Vichy when he observed: "it would be as wrong to read the entire history of the Occupation through the prism of anti-Semitism as it would be to leave it out entirely."³⁸

Overall, however, the tendency in historiographical terms in the interim between Paxton and Jackson's works has been to add nuance to the interpretation of events in France during the war. This has been assisted in part by the work of, for example, Robert Frank (*la mémoire*

³⁵ Curtis, 84.

³⁶ John Sweets, "Hold that Pendulum! Redefining Fascism, Collaborationism and Resistance in France," *French Historical Studies* 15:4 (Autumn 1988): 731-758.

³⁷ Henry Rousso, "Une justice impossible. L'épuration et la politique antijuive de Vichy," *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 3 (May - Jun., 1993): 745-770.

³⁸ Jackson, *France: The Dark Years*, 354.

empoisonnée) and Henry Rousso (*The Vichy Syndrome: History and Memory in France since 1944*) on the interpretative role of memory. Other contributions to the development of a shades-of-grey portrayal of collaborationism have been provided by historians approaching the subject from different perspectives. H.R.Kedward's work has been described as a social history of the Resistance, and Richard Vinen too chose to follow a "bottom up" examination of life under German occupation (and Vichy administration) in an attempt to document the attitudes and motivations of the lower classes in France during the war. The regional studies of John Sweets on Clermont-Ferrand and Lynn Taylor on the Nord Pas-de-Calais also add texture to interpretations of collaboration and resistance. Similarly Philippe Burrin's *La France à l'heure allemande* – an excellent pun in French that translated rather prosaically in English editions as "France Under the Germans" – attempts to differentiate between levels of collaboration, introducing the notion of "accommodation" as an explanation of the attitudes of many French people faced with the quotidian challenges of life in wartime France. This body of scholarship represents the growing effort to recognize the complexity, nuance, and variety of experiences under Vichy and the Occupation. Ambiguity and ambivalence are revealed to be consistent themes and readers are urged not to rush to quick judgments. The single consistent element among all of these writers seems to be that they love France.

Concerning the various aspects of the French Empire after the First World War, Martin Thomas is the first to admit that the "literature on these subjects is vast."³⁹ That being said, when his own book appeared his publisher offered this accompanying fanfare: "*The French Empire Between the Wars* is the first study of the French Colonial Empire at its zenith in the 20 years following the First World War." More work, however, has been produced on the

³⁹ Martin Thomas, "Albert Sarraut, French Colonial Development, and the Communist Threat, 1919–1930," *The Journal of Modern History* 77 (December 2005): 918, n3.

experiences of the French Empire during the Second World War, such as Eric T. Jennings' *Vichy in the Tropics: Pétain's National Revolution in Madagascar, Guadeloupe, and Indochina, 1940-1944*. Anne Raffin has written about French Indochina during the war, and even more recently Ruth Ginio examined the activities of the Vichy authorities in French West Africa.

Martin Thomas' book on the interwar French Empire, however, is one whose index offers only three references to the French navy. This is interesting on two counts. Firstly, Thomas has himself written extensively on the subject of the French navy. Secondly the possession of far flung imperial possessions provided a large part of the *raison d'être* of the French navy. As Colin Forster succinctly pointed out: "colonies require a navy and a navy requires colonies."⁴⁰ Yet not only has the navy escaped investigation in the historiography of Vichy or Empire, but the history of the navy itself has remained aloof from the historiographical trends described above.

Operational histories of the French navy, while not superabundant, have been published in both English and French. French accounts, notably Phillippe Masson's 1991 *La Marine Française et la Guerre: 1939-1945*, are remarkably candid about the technical deficiencies of a force rather too frequently referred to by others as the best navy France had had since either Colbert or Vergennes. Anglophone accounts, perhaps unsurprisingly – and contrary to the assertions of François Depla⁴¹ – tend to revolve around the controversial subject of the Royal Navy's attack on Mers-el-Kébir. Concerning that subject British historians have generally adopted an apologetic tone, while Americans have favored a vague Anglophobia in their ruminations upon an issue that remains prickly to those in France who continue to be aware of it.

⁴⁰Colin Forster, "French Penal Policy and the Origins of the French Presence in New Caledonia," *Journal of Pacific History* 26:2 (Dec 1991): 138.

⁴¹ "On Mers-el-Kébir, the literature is superabundant – and almost all French" ("[sur] Mers-el-Kébir, la littérature est surabondante – et presque toute française") François Delpla, *Churchill et les Français: Six personnages dans la tourmente 1939-1940* (Paris: Plon, 1993), epilogue, http://www.delpla.org/article.php3?id_article=387.

In 1986 Alex Wassilieff, a former *contre-amiral* in the French navy whose destroyer had been torpedoed by the British in the Eastern Mediterranean, published *Un pavillon sans tache: De l'armistice au sabordage, la verite* (“Flag Without Blemish: From the Armistice to Destruction, The Truth”). Relying heavily on the Aron vision of Vichy, the book seeks to rehabilitate the navy’s reputation, placing Darlan predictably in opposition to Laval and Germanophiles like Benoist-Méchin. The latter is a particularly neat trick since Darlan had confidence in Benoist-Méchin who has been described as the admiral’s “right arm.”⁴² Nonetheless this is an orthodoxy that has gone largely unchallenged, indeed has in some ways been reinforced by biographers of Darlan like Hervé Coutau-Bégarie and Claude Huan.⁴³ The fact that Wassilieff considered that some form of rehabilitation was required is perhaps unintentionally instructive, however. The reality of the navy’s role in Vichy proves as complex, ambiguous and varied as everything else connected with the regime.

To date the absence of the navy from the historiography of Vichy has been striking. For example, in his lengthy account of the little known deportations from France to Martinique beginning in February 1941, Eric Jennings describes how so-called undesirables were expelled from Metropolitan France (where the Prime Minister was an admiral), transported on French ships (overseen by a department run by the same admiral), and taken to a French colony (governed by an admiral). Jennings explicitly compares this exodus to the precedent provided by the tropical prison colonies (originated by the navy), and describes the reception areas as “de

⁴² Michèle Cointet, *Nouvelle histoire de Vichy* (Paris: Fayard, 2011), 405; Bernard Costagliola *La Marine de Vichy: Blocus et collaboration, juin 1940-novembre 1942* (Paris: Tallandier, 2009), 192, n 2.

⁴³ See for example: Hervé Coutau-Bégarie and Claude Huan, *Darlan* (Paris: Fayard, 1989).

facto political prison camps”⁴⁴ (run by the navy), all of which is achieved without actually *mentioning* the navy.

That this oversight might be considered astonishing was recognized in the program for a colloquium on the role of the navy in contemporary politics that was held at the Château de Vincennes, home of the French Naval Archives, among other things, in January 2010: “Because of the scale of the human, financial, and technical resources that it mobilizes, as well as the singularity of its mission, the navy is at once a player and a favored asset in the realm of domestic politics, a reality that goes largely unrecognized in historiography.”⁴⁵ Yet this historical blind spot for the integration of naval affairs into the wider affairs of state is neither new nor unique to the history of wartime France. When in 1928 Colonel Lord Sydenham of Combe wrote the Forward to *National Policy and Naval Strength and other Essays* by Vice-Admiral Sir H.W.Richmond, he observed that “[the] treatment of naval war by historians has tended to promote misconceptions. While our general histories, usually permeated by bias of one kind or another, lay stress upon outstanding naval achievements, they ignore the measures which made them possible and the vital factors which combined to render them momentous. On the other hand, purely naval history traces naval operations with accurate detail, while leaving out of the account the concurrent conditions, political and economic, even religious and dynastic, which may have deflected or favoured the employment of sea power.”⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Eric Jennings, “Last Exit from Vichy France: The Martinique Escape Route and the Ambiguity of Emigration,” *The Journal of Modern History* 74:2 (June 2002): 319.

⁴⁵ “Par l’ampleur des moyens humains financiers et techniques qu’elle mobilise, tout comme par la nature et les forms singulières de ses missions, la marine militaire est un acteur et un enjeu privilégiés de la politique intérieure très peu pris en compte jusqu’ici par l’historiographie.” That the eventual colloquium on this servant of the Republic (until 1940) took place in the *Pavillon de la Reine* (“Queen’s Pavillion”) was, as this paper will suggest, entirely appropriate.

⁴⁶ Vice-Admiral Sir H.W.Richmond, *National Policy and Naval Strength and other Essays* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., Ltd., 1928), vi.

The Structure of the Dissertation

Part of the purpose of this dissertation, then, is to reintegrate the French navy into the overall narrative history of the French state. With this in mind, Chapter One aims to provide a relatively brief synthesis of the current research with a particular emphasis on three areas: the navy's relationship to the State, to the Church, and to the Empire. In doing so it will initially discuss the specific relationship between the state and the navy in the context of the extension of state power across the Kingdom of France, using as a starting point Alan James' groundbreaking work on the navy and government in early modern France.⁴⁷ That this should prove to be a symbiotic relationship is not immediately self-evident. Clearly a navy would not exist without a state. That a state requires a navy is less clear, particularly a state like France where the borders are roughly divided equally between the land and the sea. Certainly this fact has led to a kind of schizophrenia in matters regarding French defense strategy. Certainly, too, there was reliably an element in the military that questioned the very need for a navy at all; and the reality that no successful occupation of France was launched from the sea until 1944 would seem to add weight to their reservations. Nonetheless, Alan James argues that the navy was an essential element of royal authority, not least because those areas most resistant to that authority tended to be peripheral and maritime in character.

The relationship between state and navy very early on operated on several levels. On a personal level it provided Cardinal Richelieu with a pathway to influence and the establishment of a family powerbase in the provinces. As a loyal servant of the crown, however, Richelieu's support of the navy was also motivated by a sense of the close relationship between state wealth, international trade and sea power. A sense that perhaps lay at the heart of the growing naval

⁴⁷ Alan James, *The Navy and Government in Early Modern France, 1672-1661* (New York: Boydell & Brewer, 2004).

perception that what was good for the navy was good for France, that in fact their interests were indistinguishable.

Naval influence was consolidated under Colbert during the reign of Louis XIV.

According to Chalmers Hood, by the time of the 1930s not much in France had changed:

The navy maintained the ports and patrolled the coastline at home and in the colonies as well. Warships accompanied the fishing fleets on their long voyages, providing medical and postal services in addition to arbitrating international fishing disputes with other nations...Throughout the country the lighthouses, some lifesaving services, and even the fire department in Marseille fell under the jurisdiction of the minister of marine...In most other countries, one or more civilian agencies evolved to oversee such non-combatant naval tasks, but in France they remained as much a part of the ministry of marine as the main battle fleet...All of these duties had been organized by Colbert in the seventeenth century and had survived virtually unchanged into the mid-twentieth century.⁴⁸

Whether people were aware of it or not, the navy was extremely influential in France, and it always had been.

A commonplace of French history is that there are two competing visions of France, one insular and land-based, the other expansive and maritime. The situation of the two Frances as expressed in the nineteenth century was encapsulated by Hyunh Kim Khanh in his 1986 book on Vietnamese Communism:

Continental France was firmly planted on its own European soil and ever concerned with the threat of its powerful neighbor, Germany. Maritime France, the nation of colonial expansion, belonged to the Church, the military caste, and the circles of high finance – the France with which ordinary citizens had little contact. It was maritime France that cast its eyes over the horizons and dreamed of adventure. Its traditional adversary, unlike that of continental France, was Great Britain, not Germany. Within the home country, maritime France was represented by an unpopular colonial lobby, the *parti colonial*, composed of members of the military establishment, the Church, and the banking and industrial enterprises. Thus, over the centuries, the history of domestic France and that of the French colonial empire seldom converged; the two France's were impelled by different forces and went separate ways.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Chalmers Hood, "The French Navy and Parliament between the Wars" *The International History Review* 6:3 (August 1984): 395.

⁴⁹ Hyunh Kim Khanh, *Vietnamese Communism, 1925-1945* (Ithaca New York: Cornell University Press, 1986), 148.

The corollary to this view is that the French navy has historically always been seen as a sort of “poor relation” among the armed services. This is quite patently not the case. In reality the navy has tended to go from strength to strength. It is this very continuity that goes some way towards explaining how the navy came to be so influential in the Vichy regime.

Not unconnected with this influence was the navy’s development as a force for political conservatism. Chapter Two examines the internal struggles that brought the navy to this ideological stance in the period after the Revolution and leading up to the Second World War. That the navy should turn out to be politically conservative is, perhaps, in some ways surprising. Aristotle, for one, considered that there was a link between navies and democratic forms of government.⁵⁰ Russian and German sailors had been at the forefront of Communist revolutions in 1917 and 1918 respectively. Royal Navy sailors left their strike meeting at Invergordon in 1931 singing the *Red Flag*. When the Royal Indian Navy mutinied in 1946, the only political party to offer its sailors support was the Communist Party of India. By contrast Martin Thomas described life within the French Ministry of Marine like this: “In practice, this introspective cohesion was notable for the prevalence of high Catholicism, a disdain for the parliamentary procedures of the Third Republic and an intense pride in a long naval history which owed little to the ideals of the French revolution...Long before Mers-el-Kébir, the Marine was a fertile ground for the notions of patriotic renewal that Pétain was supposed to represent.”⁵¹

⁵⁰ *Politics* VI.6 2 quoted in N.A.M.Rodger, *The Command of the Ocean: A Naval History of Britain, 1649-1815* (London: Penguin, 2004), 577.

⁵¹ Martin Thomas, “After Mers-el-Kébir: The Armed Neutrality of the Vichy French Navy, 1940-1943” *English Historical Review* 112:447 (June 1997): 646.

The experience of the French navy in the First World War was in some respects a familiar replication of the navy's experience in all of France's major conflicts where the dominant preoccupation was the defense of her land borders. A comparative statistical analysis compiled by Lt. Cmdr. Russell Grenfell in 1941 is illuminating in this respect: "The personnel of the British Navy, which stood at 145,000 in July 1914, expanded during the war to the neighbourhood of half a million men. By contrast, the French Navy which began the war 70,000 strong, did not increase beyond 80,000. The war-time naval personnel of Britain was therefore over five times the size of that of France. And the difference was much greater than one of numerical ratio. On the British fell almost the whole brunt of the naval war."⁵² The French navy did most of its fighting on land. French naval gunners served with conspicuous gallantry on the Western Front, an experience that, as in the Franco-Prussian War, enhanced the navy's standing in public perception. It also introduced Darlan to Clemenceau's Minister of the Marine, Georges Leygues, producing the alliance that would guide the French navy through the strictures of the Washington Treaty system. In addition, it was the naval officers who served on the Western Front rather than those who "languished on their battleships" who gained the most rapid promotion and became part of the circle of *Amis de Darlan* (A.D.D. – "Friends of Darlan") who proved so influential in Vichy.⁵³

Chapter Three deals with the period from the end of the First World War to the Fall of France in 1940. This was the period that saw the development and ultimate collapse of the international treaty systems and with it the forging of relationships that France would take with her into war. With Britain, an often acrimonious relationship hampered the development of coordinated policy, and when that policy failed, provided the fuel for a bitter Anglophobia that

⁵² Russell Grenfell, *Sea Power* (London: J Cape, 1941), 86.

⁵³ Coutau-Bégarie and Huan, *Darlan*, 49-51.

reached its zenith in the navy with events at Mers-el-Kébir. At the same time both domestic and international events conspired to create a political shift to the right in France that the navy, with its propensity for authoritarian conservatism, found entirely congenial.

When the Second World War broke out the Daladier government took a number of measures that seemed to presage some of the developments under Vichy. Radical left-wing parties and their publications were suppressed and internment camps for enemy aliens were opened, for example. Some have suggested that this was a necessary preliminary transition towards authoritarianism which, together with the shock of defeat, made the Vichy regime acceptable to the French people.⁵⁴ During this time, as a military organization in time of war, the navy became increasingly involved in the formulation of foreign policy and gained a seat at the highest level of ministerial and inter-governmental discussions. As the political and military situation deteriorated, the navy also managed to steer clear of the deluge of public criticism that accompanied first inertia and subsequently defeat. This was perhaps exemplified by Pétain's famous comment upon entering the naval headquarters at Maintenon on the 5 May 1940: "At last. Something that works."⁵⁵ Technically the navy remained undefeated, at least this was certainly the position maintained by its Commander-in-Chief, who claimed on the 1 December 1940 that "[the] Navy was never beaten."⁵⁶ Rumors of the French navy's success at sea produced nothing short of astonishment in German naval intelligence circles.⁵⁷

Chapter Four begins with an examination of the navy's role in active collaboration with the Germans, particularly in the fields of naval construction and, more generally, in supplying

⁵⁴ Nico Wouters, "Municipal Government during the Occupation (1940-5): A Comparative Model of Belgium, the Netherlands and France" *European History Quarterly* 36:2 (Apr., 2006): 221-246.

⁵⁵ Coutau-Bégarie and Huan *Darlan*, 211. This story was repeated by Darlan in an interview with Henri Béraud for the nationalist newspaper *Gringoire* (No. 650 30 May 1941) and so may be self-serving.

⁵⁶ Hervé Coutau-Bégarie and Claude Huan, *Lettres et notes de l'amiral Darlan* (Paris: Economica, 1992), 253.

⁵⁷ *War Diary: German Naval Staff Operations Division (GNSOD)*, Part A, Volume 5, 12 January 1940 (Washington DC: Office of Naval Intelligence, 1948), 58.

Germany with its strategic necessities. Key to its role in this area was the command of Admiral Darlan. The chapter ends with a discussion of his role in the Vichy regime and the policies it developed.

There is no doubt that Darlan was in favor of collaboration with the Occupation regime.⁵⁸ In notes written in preparation for the trial that would end with his execution for treason, Pierre Laval observed with irony that “Admiral Darlan remained in office for a period of one year and three months, during which time the Germans obtained from him naval, military and economic assistance that I would neither have offered nor agreed to.”⁵⁹ Robert Frank observed: “Indeed it was under Darlan that collaboration achieved its height and its greatest degree of efficiency.”⁶⁰ Robert Paxton suggested that “Admiral Darlan was probably the person best suited to embody the idea of ‘State Collaboration’”.⁶¹ For Denis Peschanski: “The Darlan year seemed to be a turning point, with a perceptible reinforcement of the French tools of state repression through fundamental reforms and a singular growth of centralized control.”⁶²

The extent to which this desire translated into practical results is recounted in, among other things, a memorandum written in July 1943 by the German ambassador to Vichy Otto Abetz and published after the war.⁶³ One index of the success of Darlan’s efforts is the progressive release of French naval prisoners of war, meticulously recorded in the correspondence between the Admiralty and the French delegation to the Armistice Commission

⁵⁸ French National Archives (AN) 2AG/656 Contains Darlan’s conversations with the Germans.

⁵⁹ Quoted in Jean-Paul Cointet, *Histoire de Vichy* (Paris: Editions Perrin, 2003), 200.

⁶⁰ Robert Frank, “Pétain, Laval, Darlan” in *La France des années noires*, Vol. I, ed. Jean-Pierre Azéma and François Bédarida (Paris: Seuil, 1993), 334.

⁶¹ Robert O. Paxton *Vichy France: Old Guard, New Order*, 369.

⁶² Dennis Peschanski, “Exclusion, persecution, repression,” in *Le régime de Vichy et les Français* ed., Jean-Pierre Azéma and François Bédarida (Paris: Fayard, 1992), 222.

⁶³ Otto Abetz, *Pétain et les allemands: Mémoire d’Abetz sur les rapports franco-allemands* (Paris: Editions Gaucher, 1948).

in Wiesbaden.⁶⁴ The records also give lists of naval personnel detached to perform functions in almost every conceivable area of human endeavor, from engineering to sports training and law enforcement; industry, physical training and internal security, naturally, all being integral to the program of the National Revolution or cooperation with the Germans, or both. The extent of French collaboration was naturally a subject of considerable interest to the British, a fact attested to by cabinet discussions of the relevant intelligence reports.⁶⁵

Chapter Five describes another area of collaboration, although one less straightforwardly designed to further the wartime ambitions of Nazi Germany, that of military engagement against the Allies. On the face of it this seems an uncomplicated area of inquiry, simply a matter of who was shooting at whom. Politics, however, are more complicated. So while, for example, the efforts of the French navy to frustrate the ambitions of the Allies in the Mediterranean tended to work in favor of the Germans, the efforts of the same navy to undermine Japanese designs in the Far East were not unhelpful to the Allies. This was reflected in a greater level of Anglo-French cordiality there than elsewhere. It also seems important to emphasize that the French navy was not merely an instrument of warped political will, which under Article 9 of the Charter of the IMT would have made it eligible for the dock at Nuremberg, but remained the French navy, even when it was fighting on the wrong side. In other words, one feels viscerally that there was a qualitative difference between the mentalities of someone who pulled on the uniform of a French sailor and someone who pulled on the uniform of the SS. Above all the navy, whether it sailed under the flag of Vichy or De Gaulle, understood itself to be acting in the interests of France.

That being said, the legal and organizational mechanisms that allowed 75,000 Jews to be deported from France to Auschwitz were put in place while the French Government, to all intents

⁶⁴ French National Archives (AN) AJ/41/ 1890 à 1916.

⁶⁵ The National Archives (UK) CAB 65

and purposes, was in the hands of the French navy. This is the subject of Chapter Six. Consistent with Darlan's policy of using naval personnel wherever practicable, many of those on detachment found themselves involved in the infrastructure of Vichy's anti-Jewish machinery, engaged in activities ranging from economic confiscation to deportation. This included Admiral François Bard, chief of staff to Admiral Laborde at the war's outbreak, who became Paris Prefect of Police, in which capacity he oversaw the establishment of the Drancy internment camp in the capital's northern outskirts. It became the principal French transit camp for deportees to Auschwitz. Better known, perhaps, was another *Ami de Darlan*, Admiral Charles Platon. Platon was the author of a draft law to increase the harshness of anti-Masonic measures, and was described by the president of the commission for secret societies Maurice Reclus as "a true madman of sectarian bigotry and repression."⁶⁶ Becoming Minister of the Colonies in September 1940, "he was executed by the Resistance in August 1944."⁶⁷ At the other end of the scale of responsibility, Rodellec du Porsic became chief of police in Marseille and along with his naval deputies was enthusiastically committed to the round-up and deportation of Jews. At the time, although he was personally on detachment, the salary of his deputies was paid by the Admiralty.⁶⁸

Raymond Aron, former editor of *France Libre* in London during the war, commented in an interview that "...all political battles are equivocal. Politics is never a conflict between good and evil, but always a choice between the preferable and the detestable."⁶⁹ That this is an outmoded way of viewing the Vichy regime is certain, but it is possibly the way the French navy

⁶⁶ *France During the German Occupation 1940-1944*, vol II (Stanford CA: Hoover Institution Publishing, 1959), 620.

⁶⁷ Curtis, 339.

⁶⁸ Service Historique de la Marine (SHM) TT B 150.

⁶⁹ Raymond Aron, *The Committed Observer: Interviews with Jean-Louis Missika and Dominique Wolton* (Chicago: Regnery Gateway, 1983), 246.

viewed its activities at the time. It is a kind of pragmatism that manages to relativize evil. And in spite of the disreputable conduct of the regime they served, one of the things that is striking, for example, is the lack of antagonism between sailors who served Vichy and those who sided with De Gaulle. Admiral Auphan's co-author Jacques Mordal was picked out of the water off North Foreland by HMS *Albury* along with Lt Jacquelin de la Porte de Vaux. Separated before the Armistice they would find themselves on opposite sides throughout the rest of the war. Mordal recalled: "Meeting unexpectedly one evening after the liberation, we fell into each other's arms, calling each other 'You dirty Vichyite!' and 'You dirty De Gaulliste!' Then we ran together to the nearest bar to swap reminiscences. We almost left our whole month's pay there."⁷⁰ There is a sense that the feeling was that whichever flag they served, the key thing was to serve France. Elsewhere, where feelings may have been rawer, similar accommodations were reached. When the port of Bizerte in Tunisia was recovered for the Allies, the then Director for Health Services in the Fourth Maritime Region (*Directeur du Service de Santé de la IVème Région Maritime (Algérie-Tunisie)*) recalled that "petty quarrels soon disappeared; we no longer dared to scoff at the supporters of de Gaulle in the Rowing Club Mess at the Admiralty and learnt to cope with the Free French sailors."⁷¹ One person who had an explanation for this was Admiral Darlan: "Our trade is singular. It is carried out above, on or under an element that demands a long, scrupulous and particular kind of training for anyone who attempts it...we are, then, singular by function."⁷²

It should be noted that such a conciliatory attitude was not that which typically prevailed in France at the Liberation. It has been estimated, after all, that about 10,000 people were killed

⁷⁰ Auphan and Mordal, 80, n 8.

⁷¹ Médecin-Général de la Marine Nationale Angelo Louis-Marie Hesnard, *Conscience d'un homme qui était Amiral: Témoignages sur l'occupation allemande de Bizerte et le procès DERRIEN*, <http://bernard.hesnard.free.fr/Hesnard/Angelo/Bizerte14.html>.

⁷² Alain Darlan, *L'amiral Darlan parle...* (Paris: Amiot-Dumont, 1953), 43.

by summary justice or outright assassination in the course of *l'épuration sauvage*.⁷³ Those who had left France for London or Algiers tended to greet those whom they first met who had chosen to stay in France with distrust, or “even a sort of repulsion.”⁷⁴

The fact of the matter is that the Gaullist navy was no less Catholic or conservative than its Vichy counterpart. So the founder of the think-tank *Économie et Humanisme* in Marseille and lecturer at the Pétainist school of Uriage, Father Louis Lebret, had been a naval officer. Admiral Thierry d'Argenlieu, Free French representative in New Caledonia, meanwhile, had, as Father Louis de la Trinité, been a priest. Nor were all sailors in the Vichy navy wholly committed to the anti-Semitic policies of their government. According to one document produced by Section VII of the *Commissariat Général Aux Questions Juives* (CGQJ), of six former naval officers called upon to be provisional administrators of “Aryanized” Jewish property in 1942, four eventually declined. Not, however, because of any inherent sympathy for the plight of Jews *per se*, but because the CGQJ made no provision for exempting former naval personnel.⁷⁵

Also revealing is that the French, of all stripes, were as exasperating to the Allies as they were to the Germans. Eisenhower recalled: “A further factor was the complete dependence of the French Army...upon American supplies. This was an additional irritant to their pride and, although they constantly insisted upon the need for greater amounts of every kind of equipment and matériel, they were naturally galled by the realization that without them they were completely helpless. All this tended to make them peculiarly sensitive and therefore difficult to deal with when they could find in any question, no matter how trivial, anything they thought

⁷³ Rousso, *Le syndrome de Vichy de 1944 à nos jours*, 16.

⁷⁴ Cointet, *Expier Vichy*, 193.

⁷⁵ Center of Contemporary Jewish Documentation, cx 64.

involved the national honor.”⁷⁶ Less diplomatic, although to the same effect, was Hermann Göring. A French delegation, including Pétain and Darlan, met Göring at Saint-Florentin in December 1941. As Julian Jackson puts it: “[When Pétain] presented the usual French demands and complained at Germany’s lack of co-operation, he was told [by Göring]: ‘Who won this war, you or us?’”⁷⁷

If there is no litany of French naval war crimes trials, no catalogue of witness statements, no famous pictures of French sailors committing atrocities or guarding concentration camps, there remains compelling evidence that by instinct and tradition Vichy was a regime that was to their taste. And for a limited, but critical, period it was also a regime that was in their hands. This is, then, a complex tale from the most complex of times. This dissertation is not an attempt to demonize an entire organization, therefore, but rather to uncover the nature of its activities and to contextualize them. Some things are just plain wrong, but when confronted by an impossible situation it takes extraordinary men to take the moral heights of righteousness. This is not the story of extraordinary men, however. It is the story of ordinary sailors.

⁷⁶ Dwight D. Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe* (New York: PermaBooks, 1952), 455-456.

⁷⁷ Julian Jackson, *France: The Dark Years*, 183.

CHAPTER ONE

Making a Navy

Introduction

Writing on *The Navy and Government in Early Modern France*, Alan James suggested that as “an essential instrument of royal authority...the navy provides a point of entry for historians into both the representation and the function of power in France.” He continued, “[the] navy’s place in the consolidation of Richelieu’s personal authority should alert us to the central role of naval affairs as an important avenue of political advancement. Maritime affairs should be given their proper place at the heart of the fiscal military state.”¹ Certainly in the context of this dissertation, it is important to emphasize that the navy did not materialize magically after the Fall of France, ready to take over the country. Rather, it historically had a central role in the function of government and, at various stages of its development, enjoyed considerable public support.

It is common currency in French naval history that two Frances coexist within the hexagon of her territory, a phenomenon remarked upon by Edmund Burke, writing in 1796. “The first,” he suggested “wished France, diverted from the politicks of the Continent, to attend solely to her marine, to feed it by an encrease of commerce, and thereby to overpower England on her own element...The others, who were by far the more numerous, though not the most outwardly prevalent at court, considered this plan for France as contrary to her genius, her situation and her natural means. They agreed as to the ultimate object, the reduction of the British power...but they considered an ascendancy on the Continent as a necessary preliminary to that undertaking.”²

¹ Alan James, *The Navy and Government in Early Modern France, 1572-1661* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2004), 1,4.

² Edmund Burke, *Thoughts on the Prospect of a Regicide Peace (Letter II)* (London: J. Owen, 1796), 108.

Philippe Masson is another who admits the existence of an atavistic French attachment to the land as a reliable and secure source of wealth. Thus while the *Physiocrates* of eighteenth-century France extolled the land as the sole source of affluence, across the English Channel Adam Smith was penning *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* and imagining the free market economy. According to Masson, throughout the modern era, the rich Parisian bourgeoisie has traditionally invested its wealth in the purchase of land in the Île-de-France, while the French economy until the nineteenth century remained wedded to a solid agricultural and artisanal base that betrayed a profound mistrust of large industrial and commercial concerns. Even at the time of writing, Masson argued, France remained in the grip of a protectionist mentality at times of crisis, even though it was now an industrialized country whose economy relied on its ties to the outside world. This distrust of the vagaries of international markets combined with a sense of land as an intrinsic element of identity and security, of course, was a theme famously invoked by Pétain in his speech to the French people on the 25 June 1940:

I will not fool you with misleading words. I hate the lies that have done so much harm to you. The earth does not lie. It remains your salvation. It is the motherland itself. A field that falls fallow is a portion of France that dies. Fallow land sown again is a portion of France reborn.³

And so, according to the introduction of Theodore Ropp's masterful account of French naval policy between the beginning of the Third Republic in 1871 and the year before HMS *Dreadnought* made her appearance in 1905: "The French Navy thus began life as a luxury of the central government that was of no importance in the life of the people at large or in the defense of their interests. Its hold on national opinion was insignificant. Its officers and men became a

³ Philippe Pétain, *L'Appel du 25 Juin 1940* (Extract): "Je hais les mensonges qui vous ont fait tant de mal. La terre, elle, ne ment pas. Elle demeure votre recours. Elle est la patrie elle-même. Un champ qui tombe en friche, c'est Une portion de France qui meurt. Une jachère de nouveau emblavée, c'est une portion de France qui renaît. »

closed corporation, drawn from a limited number of noble families and coastal towns....In times of peace or financial hardship, the navy tended to be one of the first areas in which the government tried to save money.”⁴ Surely not propitious circumstances in which to plan a long term maritime strategy, or even to consider one at all.

The Navy and the Growth of State Power

Such is the traditional narrative. In reality support for the navy in governing circles remained remarkably consistent as it made the transition from being a central part of Richelieu’s state-building project, as well as a core element in the consolidation of Richelieu’s personal power, to being a major representation of royal power within a growing state apparatus, to being a bureaucratic entity of considerable influence with a voice in both foreign and domestic policy.

Richelieu was certainly consistent in his efforts to extend central authority, albeit personified by himself, to the maritime periphery of France. Throughout his ministry, a clear pattern emerged either of co-operation with governors or, more often, of placing clients or of holding governorships himself. Joseph Bergin observes that “it seems safe to conclude that the combined value of his governorships at the time of his death was at least 1½ million *livres*. Every important governorship in the maritime provinces of France from Lower Normandy to the proximity of the Gironde was in his hands”⁵

Where they were not directly in his own hands, they were often in those of family or political allies. Richelieu’s brother-in-law Brézé became governor of Calais in 1632. While Normandy remained in the hands of the duc de Longueville, Richelieu held the governorship of

⁴ Theodore Ropp, *The Development of a Modern Navy: French Naval Policy, 1871-1904* (Annapolis MD: Naval Institute Press, 1987), 2.

⁵ Joseph Bergin, *Cardinal Richelieu: Power and the Pursuit of Wealth* (New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 1985), 88.

Le Havre, where he was represented by his maternal uncle Amador de la Porte, while his cousin La Meillerage was both governor of Rouen and *lieutenant général* of Normandy. Another cousin, Pontchâteau, held Brest. Furthermore, that the main naval authority in Brittany was now a *surintendant des finances* rather than a powerful noble with a history of disobedience to the crown was probably seen in Paris as an advantage and a welcome change from the recalcitrant former governor the duc de Vendôme.

Government interest in naval affairs continued under Louis XIV. As Étienne Taillemite described it, “[As] soon as Colbert was put in charge of naval affairs, he gave free rein to his taste for regulation and legislation. Little by little, the various aspects of the service found themselves codified, and the Secretary of State decided to gather all these texts together into two large ordinances.”⁶ It is difficult to overestimate the impact that these had. The first *Ordonnance pour la Marine* that set forth these responsibilities was promulgated in August 1681 and dealt with the merchant service. Its contents were the subject of a commentary in the *Journal of the Society of Comparative Legislation* by H.A. de Colyar, a British King’s Counsel, writing in 1912. De Colyar observed:

This Ordinance comprised, besides other matters too numerous to mention, all that concerns the duties of Admirals, the jurisdiction of Admiralty officials, the mode of procedure to be adopted in Admiralty cases, the prerogatives of Consuls in foreign countries, the organization of French merchants, and of navigation of the ports of the Levant...It also prescribed the conditions of capacity for employment of pilots and captains of ships, obliged ships making long voyages to carry chaplains and surgeons, regulated the policing of the coasts and of the seashores, introduced measures for saving life at sea, and provided for the infliction of the death penalty on those who robbed shipwrecked persons.⁷

⁶ Étienne Taillemite, *L’Histoire ignorée de la marine française* (Paris: Perrin, 1988), 91.

⁷ H.A. de Colyar, “Jean-Baptiste Colbert and the Codifying Ordinances of Louis XI,” *Journal of the Society of Comparative Legislation* New Series 13:1 (1912): 81.

When Colbert died, his son and successor Jean-Baptiste Antoine Colbert, Marquis de Seignelay “stepped into his place without any break in continuity.”⁸ The second ordinance, published after Colbert’s death in 1683 went into print in 1689 and ran to 450 pages in length. The Ordinance of 1689 and antecedent legislation outlined in great detail the procedures by which the various agencies of the navy were to construct and maintain the king’s ships and to provide the men and materiel necessary to sustain the fleet over a lengthy campaign

In the Mediterranean it had been Richelieu’s concerns about Spain that led him to call for the construction of a galley fleet numbering no less than thirty galleys. Colbert actually built such a fleet and Seignelay increased it to over forty, convinced as he said in 1689 that the construction of galleys was “as important for the Royal service as that of vessels.”⁹ Part of the manpower for the galleys was provided by slaves, but the majority was made up of *forçats*, men condemned to the galleys for a variety of crimes. As the fleet increased in size the system of procuring *forçats* had to be refined. Colbert exerted pressure on judicial officials to get them to increase the numbers being sent to the galleys. As Bamford observes, “Colbert molded their actions in many ways by his pressure to satisfy the manpower needs of the galleys.”¹⁰

In particular, Colbert urged magistrates to commute death sentences to life service in the galleys. In the 1680’s Seignelay sought to have the penalty for desertion from the army changed and apparently Louis XIV was so impressed by the intelligence that 8,000 deserters had been executed in a single year that in 1684 he issued an ordinance adjusting the policy. In future,

⁸ Geoffrey Symcox, *The Crisis of French Sea Power 1688-1697: from the guerre d’escadre to the guerre de course* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974), 2.

⁹ Paul Waldon Bamford, “The Procurement of Oarsmen for French Galleys, 1660-1748,” *The American Historical Review*, 65: 1 (October 1959): 31.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 37.

rather than execution, deserters faced the prospect of being mutilated, marked with a *fleur-de-lis* on each cheek and condemned to the galleys for life.

Linked together to form “chains” in groups ranging from fifty to several hundred, *forçats* came from all over France to converge on the principle galley port at Marseille. Colbert was responsible for reorganizing this service and established itineraries for the principle chains and for branch routes to gather prisoners from prisons situated off the main arteries. Three chains, from Paris, Brittany and Bordeaux, converged on Marseille. While these chains were scarcely recruitment posters for the navy, it is difficult to conceive of a more impressive way of demonstrating the scope and reach of royal authority in France. When in 1748 the *Corps de galères* was finally abolished, men continued to be condemned to the *galères de terres*, the few remaining vessels being used essentially as prison hulks for the accommodation of convicts who slept aboard and usually worked ashore by day. These convicts remained the responsibility of the navy and would play a part in the navy’s future colonial projects.

This relationship in the arsenals between the navy, convicts and the French state had considerable significance since French naval arsenals were among the largest industrial establishments in eighteenth-century Europe. Perhaps surprisingly, the smallest French arsenal employed nearly as many men as the largest British shore establishment. From 1666 to 1670, Louis XIV’s greatest efforts on the Atlantic and Channel coasts included the renovation of the port of Le Havre and the construction of a new arsenal at Rochefort. Brouage had originally been slated as France’s second Atlantic arsenal, but found itself engulfed by political intrigue during the Fronde and consumed by Protestant revolts after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, emphasizing once more that the task of governmental centralization continued to be a work in progress and one in which the future of the navy was intimately concerned. During the second

Anglo-Dutch war in 1666 the stones went down for the foundation of Rochefort's monumental *corderie*, construction of which occupied about two thousand men over a period of four years. Rochefort would also come to boast the first dry dock in the Western world. Construction of the arsenal at Brest also accelerated under Colbert and continued under Vauban, who visited Brittany at intervals throughout the 1680s. Vauban also devised a plan for the expansion of the Mediterranean arsenal at Toulon. Although the scale of this plan was reduced by Colbert, the arsenal was indeed expanded to include a covered *corderie* and buildings for constructing, arming and disarming ships. Between 1679 and 1691 the government invested at least 3.2 million *livres* on port construction at Toulon.¹¹

In 1667 Colbert decided that a special magistrate was required to maintain public order in Paris and rid the city of disorderly elements and created the post of *lieutenant de police de Paris*.¹² Before the Revolution this post repeatedly fell to men who had been or would become Secretary of State for the Navy, notably Sartine for example, or who were related to the Secretary of State for the Navy, like Louis Charles de Machault d'Arnouville. The very first *lieutenant de police* Gabriel Nicholas de la Reynie was a former intendant for the governor of the maritime province of Guyenne. This may reflect a propensity at the time "to account for failings in government administration in terms of personal corruption and malfeasance": Nicholas-Réne Berryer, one of Louis XV's Secretaries of State for the navy, became so after ten years as *lieutenant-général* of the police of Paris.¹³ Following the Revolution most holders of the post of Prefect of Police that succeeded the *lieutenances* were lawyers, irrespective of the regime they

¹¹ Michael A. Osborne, *The Emergence of Tropical Medicine in France* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2014), 15-20.

¹² Pierre Clément, *Histoire de la vie et de l'administration de Colbert contrôleur general des finances, ministre secrétaire d'état de la marine, des manufactures et de commerce, surintendant des bâtiments* (Paris: Guillaumin, 1846), 244.

¹³ James Pritchard, *Louis XIV's Navy, 1748-1762: A Study of Organization and Administration* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1987), 14.

served, and none of them had naval connections until the Fall of France in 1940. In May 1941 Admiral François Bard became Prefect of Police for Paris.

One of the more esoteric ways in which the navy made its presence felt in France concerned trees. According to the 1689 ordinance the construction of a first rate ship of the line (about 100 guns) required 3,100 oak trees, a third rater about 2,400.¹⁴ In 1669, therefore, Colbert issued the *Édit portant règlement général pour les eaux et forêts*. By better managing its territory, Colbert hoped to empower the state and expand its financial resources. Forestry reforms thus found their place among a raft of innovations that called for new maps of the kingdom, better accounting practices, a more systematic imposition of taxes, the creation of roads, canals, ship-building facilities, and ports to enhance trade and the navy, establishment of new manufacturers to replace imports, and better assessment and use of natural resources. From this point on Colbert was able to use the archive of the reforms with its evidence of missing trees to shift the balance of power away from noble families and toward his administration.¹⁵ Given who Colbert was and what the trees were for, this represented another way in which the navy insinuated its influence over a wider segment of French society than merely that which hugged the country's coastlines.

In its details the extent of the mandate of the Ministry of Marine is astonishing. It provided, for example, the primary institutional basis for the development of colonial medicine. The navy established medical schools at Rochefort, Brest and Toulon, each with upwards of two hundred students. The Academy of Science developed a network of correspondents extending from Canada to the West Indies, to Cayenne in South America, to the Indian Ocean; but it also

¹⁴ John A. Lynn, *The Wars of Louis XIV, 1667-1714* (London: Routledge, 2013), 88.

¹⁵ Chandra Mukerji, "The Great Forestry Survey of 1669-1671: The Use of Archives for Political Reform" *Social Studies of Science* 37: 2 (April 2007): 227-253.

“recruited colonial officialdom, including the Marquis de la Galissonnière (*lieutenant général de la marine* and former *gouverneur général* in Canada) and the Count de la Luzerne (*minister de la marine* and former *gouverneur général* in the Antilles).”¹⁶ Resident academicians also often held posts within the colonial system. In the 1660s and 1670s, motivated by the economic potential of the colonies, Colbert also initiated the collection of plants and animals in cooperation with the Academy and the *Jardin du Roi*, under whose direction several prominent botanists were dispatched overseas. As McClellan and Regourd have stated: “Medicine, astronomy, cartography, botany, and the marine sciences were pressed in every way to produce useful outcomes. French colonial science was heavily institutionalized – witness the *Académie Royale des Sciences*, the *Académie Royale de Marine*, the *Société Royale de Médecine*, the *Société Royale d’Agriculture*,...botanical gardens, port hospitals, and other organizations”¹⁷ – all centered around the Ministry of Marine.

Surprisingly little has been written of Jean-Frédéric Phélypeaux, comte de Maurepas, this man for whose family the navy had represented something of a personal fiefdom for three generations and who held on to his post until political intrigue involving Madame de Pompadour resulted in his disgrace in 1749. Under Maurepas, however, French naval vessels were also deployed on scientific expeditions. During the 1730s and early 1740s they were sent to the North Pole, the Equator, the Caribbean, the Far East and along the coasts of Africa. In order better to coordinate these efforts, Maurepas set up a *dépôt des archives* and a *bureau des cartes et plans* under whose direction a number of hydrographic maps of the world were completed. The French school of cartography, led by Jacques-Philippe Buache and Nicolas Bellin, became

¹⁶ James E. McClellan III and François Regourd, “The Colonial Machine: French Science and Colonization in the Ancien Régime,” *Osiris 15 Nature and Empire: Science and the Colonial Enterprise* (2000): 36.

¹⁷ *Ibid*: 48.

world renowned.¹⁸ Maurepas directed Bellin to make hydrographic charts of all major oceans and coastlines of importance to France. Among the resulting works was a large maritime chart of the Mediterranean published in 1737. In 1740 Bellin published a chart of the Balearic Islands, which included a detailed geographical analysis of their interiors. Underlining the relationship between mapmaking and power, Bellin presented his work to the *Académie des Sciences*, explaining to its members the map's potential diplomatic significance in the light of recent international developments: namely the outbreak of the War of the Austrian Succession in the year of publication.¹⁹ As if to emphasize how valuable they were considered, at this time the archives and hydrographic office were the only ones in the navy department to be in possession of a permanent address.

Colbert had aligned state interests and mapmaking during the reign of Louis XIV by ordering maps for military planning, commerce and governmental administration. According to Christine M. Petto, the work of eighteenth century geographers and hydrographers reveals a growing alignment of mapping and power “for a state less concerned with the ‘cult of image’ of the Sun King and more directed by scientific authority and rational thought in service of well-reasoned government.”²⁰ In line with developments in other countries, mapmaking in France now served a bureaucratic state, that “form of ministerial government initiated by Louis XIV, but, according to James B. Collins, more interventionist and imprinted with modern

¹⁸ John C. Rule, “Jean-Frédéric Phélypeaux, comte de Pontchartrain et Maurepas: Reflections on His Life and His Papers,” *The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association* 6:4(Autumn 1965): 369-370.

¹⁹Christine M. Petto, *When France was King of Cartography: The Patronage and Production of Maps in Early Modern France* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2007), 69-70.

²⁰ *Ibid*, 59.

characteristics such as police, poor relief, education, and public works.”²¹ The navy was active in all of these areas of state activity.

Consistent with Colbert’s drive towards the greater bureaucratization of state administration was the development of a centralized state archive. Richelieu had begun to develop a state information organization but never created a central state archive under his control. He did, through the founding of the *Académie Française* in 1634, sponsor historians to write propagandistic works and supported a large campaign of reason-of-state writings to underwrite the claims of absolutist government, but it was again left to Colbert to build upon these foundations. According to Jacob Soll:

Absolutism came to mean the royal domination of the parlement for Louis XIV, and this came in part through the mastery of legal documentation. Like the church, in the quest to achieve absolute power, the French crown would need its own central and secret policy archive. Colbert had sought to remedy this situation not only by creating an archive, which could be used to defend the state’s interests, but also by replacing the independent Gallican historians with a corps of internal, bureaucratic scholars—men such as Foucault.²²

Linking his own collection to that of the Royal Library, Colbert constructed one of the four greatest document repositories in Europe and built the machinery of a system of information retrieval and propaganda to serve the needs of the state. Although the organization did not survive in its entirety the death of Colbert, according to Soll, “[p]art of Colbert’s rapid-response archive lived on in the new permanent archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and in an erudite training academy for diplomatic bureaucrats, founded by Colbert’s nephew, Jean-Baptiste

²¹ Ibid, 60

²² Jacob Soll, “The Antiquary and the Information State: Colbert's Archives, Secret Histories, and the Affair of the Régale, 1663-1682,” *French Historical Studies* 31:1 (Winter 2008): 11.

Colbert, marquis de Torcy.”²³ As we have seen, at this time the archives and hydrographic office were the only ones in the navy department to be in possession of a permanent address, and existed for the same reason: to address the needs of the kingdom regarding government justifications in issues arising from questions of state prerogatives.

Placing the work of intelligence services in the context of the development of centralized state administration, Sébastien Laurent suggested that from the time of the *ancien régime* to the present day, French governments, whether operating on their own territory or overseas, have relied upon four distinct administrations for the organization of their instruments of intelligence gathering: the diplomatic service, the navy, the police and the army.²⁴ Under Louis XV these offices collectively represented something of a revolving door, in a manner reminiscent of the cabinets of the Third Republic in the 1930s. Thus the comte de Maurepas, naval minister for a quarter of a century under Louis XV, returned from the political wilderness to become the *éminence grise* of the court of Louis XVI. Berryer, who was lieutenant general of police from 1747 to 1757, subsequently became naval minister. Rouillé, who replaced Maurepas at navy, went on to become foreign minister. The duc de Choiseul and his cousin the duc de Praslin swapped navy and the foreign ministries for over a decade until 1770. Sartine, having been lieutenant general of police for fifteen years, moved to navy in 1774. In other words, for the three decades leading up to the American Revolution, three of the four administrations identified by Laurent as being central to French intelligence were dominated by men with links to the navy. Furthermore, as far as the foreign ministry was concerned, until the time of the government of the Consulate, the navy had authority over all French consular affairs. To give but one example

²³ Ibid, 28.

²⁴ Sébastien Laurent, “Pour une autre histoire de l'état: Le secret, l'information politique et le renseignement,” *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d'histoire* 83 (July – September, 2004): 177.

of the repercussions of this fact: “[The] French *ordonnances de Marine* gave consuls the task of ensuring respect for the regulations concerning sojourns in the Levant and Barbary, and they interpreted this fact as giving them consular jurisdiction and police powers as attributes of state sovereignty that extended to all persons of French origin.”²⁵ Where holders of high office were not linked by attachment to the navy, they were sometimes, like Vergennes and Sartine, connected by the embryonic intelligence organization known as the *secret du roi*, whose agenda ultimately favored animosity towards Britain, somewhat to the advantage of the French navy. Even Choiseul, not himself initiated into the *secret du roi*, enjoyed at court the political support of the prince de Conti, who was its sometime leader.²⁶

So, by the time of the French Revolution, as William S. Cormack put it, “[the] Ministry of Marine was a major branch of royal government and was responsible for all French maritime and overseas activity.”²⁷ Not to mention all the responsibilities intendant upon an organization that domestically acquired raw materials for, built, armed and crewed fighting vessels, as well as having a continuing role in the administration of the criminal justice system.

The Myth of Poverty

Naval allocations fell to 17,200,000 *livres* in 1767; and yet the navy continued to grow, a pattern that continued until the 1790s. Baugh points to the conundrum: “[Despite] the crisis of French finances in the 1780s, the pace of French naval building did not slacken; indeed, it was kept going right down to 1792. He then cites Jan Glete’s explanation: “We are in fact facing a major political mystery - an enormous peace-time shipbuilding program undertaken by an

²⁵ Christian Windler, “Representing a State in a Segmentary Society: French Consuls in Tunis from the Ancien Régime to the Restoration,” *The Journal of Modern History* 73:2 (June 2001): 250-251.

²⁶ Pierre Muret, “Les Mémoires du duc de Choiseul,” *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine* 6:6 (1899-1914) (1904/1905): 382.

²⁷ William S. Cormack, *Revolution and Political Conflict in the French Navy, 1789-1794* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 29.

insolvent regime which faced political ruin.”²⁸ To add to the confusion, James Pritchard points out that “[at] no time between 1764 and 1769 did the navy obtain significantly greater funds than during the period from 1750 to 1754; on average the funds granted during the earlier period exceeded those of the later one by nearly one million *livres* annually.”²⁹ Yet, taken together these assertions seem to demonstrate a considerable consistency of effort over a sustained period under a variety of Secretary of States of the navy, despite the waning enthusiasm of a sovereign increasingly preoccupied with reinforcing his domestic authority.

By January 1778, French foreign minister Vergennes was willing to intervene in American affairs without Spanish support because, in Dull’s words, “*for the moment* France had achieved *effective* naval parity with Britain.”³⁰ Naval minister Sartine estimated that the programs envisaged for 1778 would reach 100 million *livres*. In April 1779, Sartine requested 127,866,000 *livres* for that year, together with a further 20 million to reduce the naval debt. The navy estimated that it spent 143 million that year, and its initial estimate for the requirements of 1780 was 138 million *livres*. Sartine considered that 175 million would be necessary in 1781. Dull calculates that the minimum probable naval expenses for 1782 and 1783, by which time the Marquis de Castries had taken over the navy ministry were, respectively, 200 million and 165 million *livres*.

Even after the hapless de Grasse was defeated at the Battle of the Saintes in 1782, a feat for which he is often better remembered than for having secured the independence of the United

²⁸ Daniel A. Baugh, “Withdrawing from Europe: Anglo-French Maritime Geopolitics, 1750-1800,” *The International History Review* 20:1 (March 1998): 21.

²⁹ Pritchard, *Louis XV’s Navy*, 212.

³⁰ Jonathan R. Dull, *The French Navy and American Independence: A Study of Arms and Diplomacy, 1774-1787* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), 97.

States through his maneuvers in the Chesapeake,³¹ as in 1762 enthusiastic support was given to a program of naval reconstruction. “Led by the Estates of Burgundy,” Dull informs, “various members of the court, cities and organizations volunteered the funds to replace the battle losses; eventually over 6,000,000 livres were received with which two 118s, one 80, and three 74s were built.”³² On 1 January 1787, the French navy comprised 62 ships of the line. Even after the end of the American war, with the death of Vergennes in 1787, his restraining hand was removed and de Castries continued the naval race with Britain. Between 1780 and 1790, France added 50,000 tons of battleships to her fleet.³³ Between 1783 and 1789, France alone built 28 battleships and 23 frigates.³⁴ In the course of the 1780s the French and Spanish navies together achieved a tonnage superiority of 34 percent over the British fleet. In 1790 there were 73 French and 72 Spanish ships of the line against 145 British. According to N.A.M. Rodger, “[in] five years of heavy peacetime expenditure, the Bourbon powers had achieved a battle fleet equal in numbers, and composed of larger ships, in spite of the fact that the British themselves were also expanding.”³⁵

The enormous effort continued under Castries’ successor, César-Henri, comte La Luzerne, who predicted in a *mémoire* of December 1788 that the fleet’s effective strength in 1789 would include 64 ships of the line and 64 frigates.³⁶ By the time of La Luzerne’s resignation in October 1790 the number of ships of the line had risen to 70. “Never” he reported

³¹ See Philip Robert Dillon “The Strange Case of Admiral De Grasse,” *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 51:3 (1927): 193-206.

³² Dull, *The French Navy and American Independence*, 287. On naval spending see also pp. 143, 167, 198, 349.

³³ Andrew Lambert, *War at Sea in the Age of Sail, 1650-1850* (New York: Smithsonian Books, 2005), 152.

³⁴ Richard Harding, *Seapower and Naval Warfare, 1650-1830* (London: University College London Press, 1999), 261.

³⁵ N.A.M. Rodger, *The Command of the Ocean: A Naval History of Britain, 1649-1815* (London: Allen Lane, 2004), 361.

³⁶ Cormack, *Revolution and Political Conflict in the French Navy, 1789-1794*, 22-23.

“has France been able to put to sea such considerable naval forces.”³⁷ Even after the Revolution, naval construction continued. 25 ships of the line and 22 frigates were added to the fleet, so that by the time war with Britain broke out in February 1793, the French navy had achieved its high-water mark in terms of eighteenth-century tonnage, boasting 73 ships of the line and 64 frigates. Furthermore, the new ships were “technically equal to any ships in the world.”³⁸ Under the government of the Committee of Public Safety the French fleet, rescued from potential oblivion by the intervention of Jeanbon St André, applied itself to rebuilding and refitting and between 1793 and 1794 fully 19 ships of the line were laid down.³⁹

Nor was Napoleon dismayed by the loss at Trafalgar. According to Lawrence Sondhaus: “In October 1805, within days of the disaster at Trafalgar, the French minister of Marine and Colonies, Vice Admiral Denis Decrès, started to lay the groundwork for the reconstruction of the French fleet.”⁴⁰ The fruit of his labors, drawing upon the resources of an expanding continental empire, meant that “at the war's end the French had over 80 line of battleships ready – a number dangerously close to that of the Royal Navy, whose declining strength could muster only 102 such ships in commission in 1812 and 1813 and no more than 99 in 1814. Worse still, these figures misrepresent the real balance of force, because force depends on firepower; and while the French had 6 ships of 130 guns and none of less than 74, British totals include ships of as few as 60 guns, no ships of more than 120 guns, and only two of those.”⁴¹

³⁷ Taillemite, *L'Histoire ignorée de la marine française*, 279-280.

³⁸ Harding, *Seapower and Naval Warfare*, 261.

³⁹ *Ibid*, 268.

⁴⁰ Lawrence Sondhaus, “Napoleon's Shipbuilding Program at Venice and the Struggle for Naval Mastery in the Adriatic, 1806-1814,” *The Journal of Military History* 53:4 (October 1989): 350.

⁴¹ Richard Glover, “The French Fleet, 1807-1814; Britain's Problem; and Madison's Opportunity,” *The Journal of Modern History* 39:3 (September 1967): 245.

With the end of the war, the French fleet was halved in size from 180,000 tons in 1815 to 84,000 in 1840, but remained the only significant maritime rival to Britain, which declared a “Two Power Standard” in 1817, stating that the Royal Navy should be equal to the combined strength of the next two naval powers.⁴² Even though, according to Taillemite, the naval policies of Louis XVIII and Charles X achieved a perfection of inconstancy, gradually the situation again improved.⁴³ By September 1817 the fourth navy minister of the Restoration had already entered office. The Comte Molé criticized the naval budget, reduced to 45 million francs, as derisory. His successor, baron Portal, who took his place in December 1818 concurred, and proposed a fleet of 38 ships of the line and 50 frigates, requiring a minimum budget of 65 million. Despite an agreement in principle from the King and the Chamber, the budget rose only slowly, reaching 60 million in 1822 and not attaining the requested 65 million until 1830. In 1824 the next naval minister, the marquis de Clermont-Tonnerre, obtained royal approval for a planned fleet of 40 ships of the line, 50 frigates and 80 light vessels. When the baron Tupinier, the director of naval ports, submitted to the Secretary of State a report on the material state of the navy in 1838, 40 ships of the line and 50 frigates remained the accepted standard. By this time, however, Tupinier was confident enough to open with the thought: “The time when there was any question whether France needed a powerful navy is already distant from us.”⁴⁴ In fact, far from being the perennial “poor relation” it is often painted, the navy in the long term went from strength to strength.

⁴² Lambert, *War at Sea in the Age of Sail, 1650-1850*, 210-211.

⁴³ Taillemite, *L'Histoire ignorée de la marine française*, 309.

⁴⁴ Baron Jean Tupinier, *Rapport sur le matériel de la marine* (Paris: Imprimerie Royale, 1838), 5.

The Navy and the Church

If the navy of Richelieu had boasted considerable connections with the Roman Catholic Church, under Louis XIV this was even more the case. Traditionally galley commanders in the French navy had often been drawn from the ranks of the Knights of Malta and in 1674 about two thirds of them found themselves in this circumstance. The Order of Malta also often had a hand in the promotion of officers who were not recruited from France's coastal regions, particularly those from Paris and Burgundy. Membership of the order sometimes helped to compensate for the qualities of a particular officer's nobility, and the order contributed towards attracting landsmen from major families such as the Barrin de la Galissonière, who may never have been to sea before engaging in the king's service. Ten percent of Louis XIV's naval captains were affiliated to the Order of Saint John of Jerusalem, of whom more than half came from France's interior.⁴⁵ It is instructive, then, that Robert Aron reported how the Commander-in-Chief of the Vichy navy, Admiral Darlan, although by rank and position entitled to the highest decorations, "one day demanded two new ribbons, the Order of Malta and the Medal of Public Health."⁴⁶

The Catholicization of the navy continued apace when with the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685 France witnessed an exodus of Huguenots from the country. The numbers involved are not entirely clear, but it has been calculated that "thousands of Huguenot sailors successfully evaded Seignelay's dragnet in their flight to more accommodating states."⁴⁷ This no doubt contributed to the decline in the number of personnel in the navy between 1686 and 1696

⁴⁵ Marie-Christine Varachaud, Michel Vergé-Franceschi and André Zysberg, "Qui étaient les capitaines de vaisseau du Roi-Soleil?" *Revue Historique* 287:2 (April-June, 1992): 334-335.

⁴⁶ Robert Aron, *The Vichy Regime, 1940-1944* (New York: Macmillan, 1958), 276.

⁴⁷ Donald Pilgrim, "The Colbert-Seignelay Naval Reforms and the Beginnings of the War of the League of Augsburg," *French Historical Studies* 9:2 (Autumn 1975): 257.

of some 9,000 sailors, representing 16 percent of the whole.⁴⁸ The only branch of the service that benefited from the new restrictions on religious observance was the *corps de galères*. As noted by Bamford: “One seventeenth-century Protestant writer who was himself condemned estimated that six hundred Protestants were on the galleys as early as June 1685.”⁴⁹

Starting in 1689 the day of the officer trainees of the *garde* began with Mass. Since 1685 the Jesuits had been given the task of instructing their wards in the duties of a good Christian, making sure that they paid regular attention to the sacraments and avoided foul language. Book XX of the 1689 Ordinance specifically made provision for seminaries to train priests for the navy.⁵⁰ On board ship the Jesuits also provided the navy’s chaplains. After the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes all *gardes* were required to be Catholic.⁵¹

Seignelay was, however, sufficiently pragmatic to realize that it would be impractical to the point of disaster to rid the navy of all its Protestants. Yet even where religion was tolerated, it invariably had an adverse effect on the prospects of promotion. One case in point was Abraham Duquesne, described by Mahan as “the best French officer of the century.”⁵² In January 1677, Colbert felt compelled to inform him that the king was upset that consideration of Duquesne’s religion prevented any greater advantages accruing to him. The previous year Duquesne had defeated the Dutch under de Ruyter outside Agosta. Duquesne found it particularly galling to be denied a vice-admiralty and placed under the orders of Jean d’Estrées, a man fourteen years his junior, whose performance against the same de Ruyter had been so pitiful

⁴⁸ Geoffrey Symcox, *The Crisis of French Sea Power 1688-1697: from the guerre d’escadre to the guerre de course* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974), 19.

⁴⁹ Paul Waldon Bamford, “The Procurement of Oarsmen for French Galleys, 1660-1748,” *The American Historical Review*, 65: 1 (Oct., 1959), 39-40.

⁵⁰ Taillemite, *L’Histoire ignore de la marine française*, 108.

⁵¹ Michel Vergé-Franceschi, “Un enseignement éclairé au XVIIIe siècle: l’enseignement maritime dispensé aux gardes,” *Revue Historique* 276:1 (July – September 1986): 35.

⁵² Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History*, 165.

in 1672 and 1673. In 1678 d'Estrées again excelled himself when in an attack upon the Dutch island of Curaçao, having ignored all advice, he managed to run most of his squadron on to reefs off the Île d'Aves, occasioning the death of several hundred men, the loss of a more than a dozen vessels and more than five hundred cannons. The captain of d'Estrées' flagship, Nicolas Lefebvre de Méricourt, was prompted to write to Seignelay that in his opinion the admiral was unqualified to command a squadron, or even a ship.⁵³ Scarcely surprising that in 1671 Colbert would observe that Duquesne was disgusted at having to serve under the orders of d'Estrées.⁵⁴

With Napoleon's exile in 1815, according to Stewart Brown, "[in] France, the Restoration of the Bourbons to the throne brought increased influence for the Catholic Church. Conservative French thinkers, including Vicomte de Bonald, Joseph de Maistre, and the young Felicité de Lamennais, convinced many that only a strong Catholic Church could impose authority over the rebellious hearts and minds of fallen humanity and thus protect the social order from a renewal of revolution."⁵⁵ Catholic revival in France was, however, just part of a European-wide revival which owed a debt of gratitude to a shift in the intellectual climate that accompanied the Romantic Movement. For James F. McMillan "Chateaubriand's *The genius of Christianity* (1802) did more than any other single work to restore the credibility and prestige of Christianity in intellectual circles..." and between 1815 and 1880 "Catholic Christianity in

⁵³ Archives nationales (AN): CHAN MAR-B4 8, ff. 261-274.

⁵⁴ History being what it is, opinions differ. John A. Lynn quotes Daniel Dessert (*La Royale, vaisseaux et marins du Roi-Soleil*): "all the so-called glory of Duquesne comes down to two days' in neither of which Duquesne showed great talent when commanding a fleet." Jean d'Estrées, by contrast, Lynn rates "an able commander with a strong interest in the West Indies. After rising to vice-admiral in 1669, his campaigns in the Dutch War brought notable victories." John A. Lynn, *The Wars of Louis XIV, 1667-1714* (London: Routledge, 2013), 92.

⁵⁵ Stewart J. Brown, "Movements of Christian awakening in revolutionary Europe, 1790-1815," in *The Cambridge History of Christianity, Volume 7: Enlightenment, Reawakening and Revolution, 1660-1815*, ed. Stewart J. Brown and Timothy Tackett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 592.

France was completely transformed from the ruinous state to which the Revolution had reduced it.”⁵⁶

All of this had a bearing on the French navy, if for no other reason than geography. Peter McPhee pointed out that Catholicism was strongest in the west and Brittany, along the Pyrenees and in the southern Massif Central, “regions characterized by a strong clerical recruitment of boys from local families well integrated into their communities and cultures.”⁵⁷ Suzanne Desan, agreeing with Timothy Tackett that the divisive experience of the oath of 1791 was a crucial factor in determining regional religious culture, points out that the areas that rejected the oath correlate surprisingly well with the regions that continued subsequently to have a strong allegiance to Catholicism. Thus: “Much of the Massif-Central, Alsace-Lorraine, and the west, especially Brittany, became known for religious fervour, while Limousin, parts of southeastern France, the Loire valley, and the Paris Basin experienced a decline in observance.”⁵⁸ The same, according to Maurice Larkin, was true at the end of the nineteenth century and beyond: “Observance was highest in the remote pastoral areas of France, such as the Breton Peninsula, the Massif Central, and the eastern uplands, where there was less sustained contact with the changing patterns of secular behaviour and attitudes, and where traditions lasted longer.”⁵⁹

When on the 24 December 1896 a new law was promulgated with reference to maritime inscription, its first article described those to whom it applied: all those of French nationality who earned their living by means of water navigation, whether on sea or ashore, or on rivers and

⁵⁶ James F. McMillan, “Catholic Christianity in France from the Restoration to the Separation of Church and State, 1815–1905,” in *The Cambridge History of Christianity Vol. 8 World Christianities c.1815-c.1914*, ed. Sheridan Gilley and Brian Stanley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 218-219.

⁵⁷ Peter McPhee, *The French Revolution, 1789-1799* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 15.

⁵⁸ Suzanne Desan, “The French Revolution and Religion,” in *The Cambridge History of Christianity, Volume 7*, 268.

⁵⁹ Maurice Larkin, *Religion, Politics and Preferment in France Since 1890: La Belle Epoque and Its Legacy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 6.

canals as far as the tidal reach, or if they were not tidal, as far up as seagoing vessels could ascend.⁶⁰ This largely corresponded to the regions of France where Catholicism was strongest.

The Navy, the Church, and Empire

One area where naval and religious concerns had traditionally found a point of conjunction was the Empire. If incidence of regional Catholicism and naval recruitment coincided, relationships between the navy and the colonial settler were generally cordial because they also tended to come from the same places. David Hackett-Fischer suggests that, in an example of “colonial lag,” “[the] founders of Quebec came by sea from maritime towns, and the language of their descendants still has a nautical flavor that derives from the maritime coast of western France in the seventeenth century. Today a *Québécoise* will *débarquer*, or disembark from her car, as if she were stepping ashore from Champlain’s ship.”⁶¹

More prosaically, between 1633 and 1635, immigrant ships to Quebec came mostly from Norman ports, comprising as much as 31 percent of the total number of settlers. 60 percent of colonists to the Lawrence Valley came from the provinces of northern and western France, mostly between the valleys of the Loire and the Seine. 30 percent came from the four provinces in the west center of France, while all the other provinces in France added only 10 percent of Quebec’s colonizing families. “The primary area of recruitment was a triangle that extended from the seaports of Dieppe and Honfleur inland to Paris, a hundred miles from the sea,” writes Hackett-Fischer. “The secondary area ran along the Bay of Biscay from Nantes and La Rochelle to Brouage and Royan, and reached inland as far as Tours and Loudon.”⁶² Not surprisingly these

⁶⁰ Jacques Captier, *Étude historique et économique sur l’inscription maritime* (Paris: V. Giard & E. Brière, 1907), 297.

⁶¹ David Hackett-Fischer, *Champlain’s Dream* (Toronto: Vintage Canada Edition, 2009), 472-475.

⁶² *Ibid*, 472-474.

collectively were generally the areas covered by the various manifestations of the classes of inscription of the French navy.⁶³

Religion, it has been argued, was as important a part of the colonial experiment as politics.⁶⁴ When the charter for the *Compagnie des Isles de l'Amérique* was renewed in 1635, for example, it contracted to transport 4,000 colonists to the islands under the provision that they were both French and Catholic. In a report of 1642 it transpired that it had exceeded this number by 3,000 and included among them a large number of members of religious orders. In fact those who invested in such companies dedicated considerable amounts to the establishment of these orders in the new possessions and their charters obliged them to undertake to maintain a given number of priests and other missionaries. As a result, according to records published after the expulsion of the Jesuits in 1762, religious orders amassed vast territories overseas.⁶⁵

The Jesuits had been introduced to Canada in 1611 under the sponsorship of Madame de Guercheville, wife of the governor of Paris, with the support of a host of notables, including Marie de Medici who donated 300 *livres* to the initial endowment. By 1625 the Jesuits were actively engaged in trying to expel the Protestants who had established the colony; an effort which in due course came to fruition. Lost during the breach between England and France over the question of La Rochelle, the colony had been recovered from the English under the provisions of the Treaty of Saint Germain-en-Laye in 1632. In the same year, Isaac de Razilly was commissioned to put the Company of New France in possession of Port Royal, “for which purpose he was given an armed ship named *Espérance de Dieu* and the sum of 10,000 *livres*; he

⁶³ Patrick Villiers, “Du système des classes à l’inscription maritime, le recrutement des marins français de Louis XIV à 1952,” *Revue Historique des Armées* 2 (1982): 45-55.

⁶⁴ Leon Deschamps, *Histoire de la question colonial en France* (Paris: Plon, 1891), 120.

⁶⁵ Joseph Chailley-Bert, *Les compagnies de colonisation sous l’ancien régime* (Paris: Armand Colin & cie, 1898), 31-42.

was also to take with him three Capuchin missionaries.”⁶⁶ A cousin of Richelieu, Razilly was also a Knight of Malta. He was also a friend of François Leclerc du Tremblay, better known as Father Joseph, the original *éminence grise* at the time of Richelieu, a firm *dévo*t who had been elevated by the Pope to the position of Director of Missions to the Levant in 1625.⁶⁷ By the time of Colbert, the Jesuits were the largest landowners in New France and the American Islands. They were not, however, alone. Donations for missionaries flooded in from all corners of France. The Recollects, a reform branch of the Franciscans, may not have been as adept as the Jesuits at recruiting support, nonetheless they succeeded in building the church of *Notre Dame des Anges* in Quebec by 1621, solely financed by alms from France.

With the Restoration of Louis XVIII, one reflection of a gradual reversion to a kind of *status quo ante* was expressed in the navy’s relationship with the church. Alain Cabatous describes how, having to all intents and purposes disappeared between 1792 and 1815, those few naval chaplains who began to go back to sea after that time generally found themselves faced with reticence if not downright hostility from sailors who had lost the habit of worship. The chaplain assigned to the *Lys* at Brest in 1815 was so horrified by his reception that he resolved to stay ashore. In 1823 an ordinance made the naval chaplaincy once more an official body, but progress aboard was slow and it was not until after 1840 that the residual virulent anticlericalism of many naval officers was subsumed. Writing in March 1852, the Head Chaplain to the Fleet Fr. F. Coquereau recommended to those assigned to vessels to get to know the crew a little

⁶⁶ Reuben Gold Thwaites ed., *Travels and Explorations of the Jesuit Missionaries in New France, 1610-1791*, vol. VIII (Cleveland, OH: Burrows Bros. Co., 1897), 288.

⁶⁷ Deschamps, *Histoire de la question colonial en France*, 102.

without becoming familiar and to observe tact in all circumstances. In a slightly odd piece of advice, he enjoined chaplains to avoid raising matters of religion with naval officers.⁶⁸

Yet the progress of Catholic missions in French maritime communities gradually had its effect on the navy as well. R.W.H. Miller contends that a renewal of Catholic observance was reflected in the number of naval officers who served on the committee of or were associated with the *Société Œuvres de Mer* (SOM). Founded in 1894, the SOM was an agency of the Augustinians of the Assumption [AA], intended to minister to the thousands of French fishers off Newfoundland and Iceland. Demonstrating the reversal of attitudes among French naval officers was a short publication issued by the British Catholic Truth Society which offered as inspiration the lives of two of them, Captain Auguste Marceau and Lieutenant Commander Alexis Clerc. Writing in 1902, Lady Amabel Kerr, wife of a British admiral enthused: “Men like Clerc, Joubert, de Plas and Bernaert, with whom their faith was the first object, came after [Marceau], and following in his footsteps infused a new and Catholic spirit in the navy, which it is to be hoped, endures until this day.”⁶⁹ Clerc ended up becoming a Jesuit priest and was killed during the Paris Commune in May 1871.

Clerc met François Robinet de Plas in another revolutionary period, a month after the 1848 revolution that ended the July Monarchy. They met in Brest at a meeting of the St. Vincent de Paul Society and shortly afterwards gathered together a number of other officers to form a club whose purpose was to advise the new Assembly of the provisional government on reform of the navy. In September 1849 Admiral André Romain des Fossés was appointed Minister of the Navy and he selected Commander de Plas as his aide-de-camp and chief of his cabinet. De Plas

⁶⁸ See Alain Cabantous, *Le Ciel dans le mer: Christianisme et civilisation maritime (XVIe – XIXe siècle)* (Paris: Fayard, 1990).

⁶⁹ R.W.H. Miller, *One Firm Anchor: The Church and the Merchant Seafarer, an Introductory History* (Cambridge: James Clark & Co., 2012), 236.

subsequently placed two items on the navy department's agenda: the assignment of Jesuit chaplains to naval vessels and the implementation of Marceau's plan to create a cooperative venture between the French navy and Catholic missions in Oceania and East Asia.⁷⁰

By the end of the Second Empire men like Jules Ferry and Léon Gambetta had become convinced that there was no room for a dominant Church in a modern polity. This conviction was reinforced in the early 1870s following the experience of the "moral order" regime of Marshal MacMahon, which seemed to offer indisputable evidence of a link between increasing church influence and a movement towards restoration of the monarchy. By 1879, moderate republicans like Jules Ferry deduced that the best way to counter rising clericalism was through education. Consequently much of the conflict between Church and State under the Third Republic was characterized by the struggle for, in the words of Maurice Larkin, "intellectual control of the rising generation."⁷¹

A law of 1879, aimed primarily at the Jesuits, banned unauthorized religious orders from teaching in secondary schools. Legislation in 1881 and 1882 made primary education free, compulsory and non-denominational for both sexes. A further law of 1886 provided for the progressive secularization of the teaching profession itself: around half of the nuns and brothers who taught in the nation's primary schools were removed by the early 1890s.⁷² Ferry's initial intention had been to ban all religious orders from any teaching positions in France. Failing in this objective he had the Jesuits banished by ministerial decree in March 1880. In compliance with the decrees Jesuits left their twenty-seven colleges and took exile in England and Belgium.

⁷⁰ Cornelius M. Buckley, *When Jesuits Were Giants: Louis-Marie Ruellan, S.J., 1846-1885 and His Contemporaries* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1999), 87-89.

⁷¹ Maurice Larkin, *Religion, politics and preferment in France since 1890: La Belle Epoque and its legacy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 5.

⁷² McMillan, "Catholic Christianity," 245.

The Paris novitiate eventually found itself in Slough. Meanwhile, most of their schools maintained a struggling existence until about 1885, when the Jesuits began a cautious re-entry. By 1890 twenty-five colleges were again at full strength.⁷³

Taken together, Jesuit secondary schools in the 1890s supplied about 18 percent of the intake to the military academy at St. Cyr, 13 percent to the Polytechnique and, given that they accounted for only 5 percent of the total secondary school population, a staggering 22 percent of the intake to the naval academy, the *École Navale*.⁷⁴ In fact the sole purpose of *Notre Dame des Bons Secours*, exiled to the island of Jersey by Ferry's decrees, was precisely to prepare candidates for the *École Navale*. In 1897, 28 percent of entrants to the *École Navale* had been schooled by Jesuits.⁷⁵ According to John W. Bush: "Once at Saint-Cyr and Navale these students offered leadership and an *esprit de corps* much welcomed by their instructors and commanders. Their former teachers often kept in touch with them, helped them to establish religious organizations in the school, provided meeting rooms for them off campus. Many returned frequently to their alma maters for reunions, retreats, and personal direction."⁷⁶ In March 1899, right in the middle of the Dreyfus Affair, the socialist deputy for the Seine Victor Dejeante asked the Minister of Marine Édouard Lockroy to "cease recruiting from foreign Jesuits prospective officers charged with protecting our country, our institutions, our laws." Lockroy, however, although he made modest attempts to secularize the officer corps, considered it less of a priority than ensuring the primacy of civilian control of the navy and encouraging the democratization of the Grand Corps. In December 1898 Lockroy admitted the public value of an

⁷³ John W. Bush, "Education and Social Status: The Jesuit College in the Early Third Republic," *French Historical Studies* 9:1 (Spring 1975): 125.

⁷⁴ Larkin, *Religion, politics and preferment in France since 1890*, 36.

⁷⁵ Jean Martinant de Préneuf, "La politique de républicatisation de la marine à la Belle Époque," *Revue d'histoire maritime* 14 (2011): 33.

⁷⁶ Bush, "Education and Social Status," 137.

organization like the *Société des œuvres de mers*, with its close links between Augustinian Assumptionists and high ranking naval officers.⁷⁷

Lockroy's successors proved to be more determined to undermine any clericalist tendencies in the navy. Under the direction of Jean-Louis Lanessan (1899-1902) a circular of 12 September 1900 forbade the expression of political or religious views in any official correspondence. On 11 January 1901 it was forbidden to compel anyone to take part in religious services, and on 5 November 1901 morning prayers, religious instruction and compulsory mass were banned, in the face of considerable opposition from senior officers. Following Lanessan was Camille Pelletan (1902-1905), from the left wing of the cabinet, who enjoyed the support of Émile Combes. As late as 1909, Admiral Germinet, commander of the Mediterranean Squadron at Toulon, was dismissed, allegedly for admitting to local journalists that his ships had sufficient ammunition for only three hours of fighting. The *Saturday Review*, however, quoted the *Dépêche de Toulouse* as implying that the real reason for his resignation was that he was "a noted Clerical" and that the Radical M. Louis-Jean Malvy had accused him of being a reactionary.⁷⁸ By contrast, in 1902 the young *contre-amiral* (Rear Admiral) Marquer was appointed chief of the naval staff at a time when he was the sole flag officer who was a freemason.⁷⁹

On 22 September 1902 Pelletan ordered that the Mass of the Holy Spirit should no longer be celebrated at the *École Navale*, and in 1904 decreed that Good Friday should no longer be a day of fasting. On the 24 August 1903 he prohibited the custom of blessing ships at the time of their launching and in September he took the naval hospitals out of the hands of the Church. It

⁷⁷ Martinant de Préneuf, "La politique de républicanisation de la marine à la Belle Époque," 41.

⁷⁸ *Saturday Review* (16 January 1909), 67.

⁷⁹ Martinant de Préneuf, "La politique de républicanisation de la marine à la Belle Époque," 52.

was Gaston Thomson (January 1905-1909) who abolished the corps of naval chaplains on the 6 February 1907, by which time the 1905 law separating church and state had made its passage through the legislature. Many of those who attained high rank by the time of Vichy, however, including Admirals Darlan and de Laborde, had entered the *École Navale* before any of these decrees saw the light of day.

The Navy Finds a Task

Since the losses of the Seven Years' War there had been a certain ambivalence on the part of naval officers regarding quite what their mission was. According to Martin L. Nicolai: "French officers' ardent desire to see the British brought low, however, was not invariably matched by a corresponding ambition for France to take Britain's place as the master of the seas, monopolizing the world's commerce and colonies." Furthermore, "France's customary weakness on the seas, its costly and often disastrous experiences in Canada, Acadia, Louisiana, and India, the concept of the balance of power, and to some extent the anti-colonialism propagated by certain intellectuals meant that officers were usually more concerned about cutting France's enemies down to size than aggressively expanding French territory."⁸⁰

By the nineteenth century a fresh commitment to Empire was beginning to emerge, however. In 1802 Audibert de Ramatuelle, a naval officer who served under the *ancien régime*, the Republic, the Empire and the Restoration, published his *Cours élémentaire de tactique navale* in which he observed: "The commercial life of France cannot flourish without colonies, colonies cannot exist for France without protection; and this protection can only effectively be

⁸⁰ Martin L. Nicolai, "Trade, Colonies, and State Power: French Officers' Economic Views on French and English America, 1755-1783," *Proceedings of the Meeting of the French Colonial Historical Society* 19 (1994): 118-119.

assured them by a navy.”⁸¹ This conviction persisted in many circles for the next century. In 1910, in his history of the navy under Louis XV, G. Lacour-Gayet wrote: “Despite everything that she owes to Clive and to Waren (sic) Hastings, England would never have become the mistress of Hindustan if she had not begun by being mistress of the seas. For, if colonies are necessary for a navy, a powerful navy is even more necessary for the colonies: it is, in fact, the condition of their very existence.”⁸²

Not everyone was a convert, however. In 1822 General Foy declared that colonies were useless in peacetime and dangerous in wartime. In 1829 Henri-Géraud-Lucien Bessières, who criticized the naval budget in the Chamber of Deputies, declared: “Considering the value to us of our colonies and what they cost us, we should be much better off without them.” Portal’s response to such arguments had, in 1819, been that without colonies there would be no navy and in 1829 viscomte Joseph Laîné, former interior minister to Louis XVIII, agreed: “We must have colonies if we are to preserve our navy. This is the contribution which they can make to the safety and defence of the State, whose navy must protect its sea frontiers which are, perhaps more vulnerable than its land frontiers.” Here in genesis was the argument made by the Navy under Vichy. Baron Hyde de Neuville, navy minister in the Jean Baptiste Gay de Martignac administration under Charles X, used the same argument in 1830 in reply to the allegation that the colonies were a luxury.⁸³ In the same year Vice Admiral Duperré was dispatched with a fleet of 103 warships of varying dimensions to escort 575 transports with 35,000 troops to Algiers.

⁸¹ Michel Depeyre, *Tactiques et stratégies navales de la France et du Royaume-Uni de 1690 à 1815* (Paris: Economica, 1998), 114-116.

⁸² G. Lacour-Gayet, *La marine militaire de la France sous le règne de Louis XV* (Paris: Librairie Ancienne Honoré Champion, 1910), 16.

⁸³ Henry Brunshwig, *French Colonialism, 1871-1914: Myths and Realities* (London: Pall Mall Press, 1966), 16.

The conquest of Algiers “provided the beachhead which France eventually expanded into a vast North African Empire.”⁸⁴

According to Theodore Ropp, the “rebirth of the navy in France...was the direct result of France’s humiliation by England in the Near-East crisis of 1840...”⁸⁵ In July 1840 events took a drastic turn when the four great powers, Britain, Austria, Prussia, and Russia, agreed to demand the immediate withdrawal of the armies of the Turkish viceroy in Egypt Mehemet Ali from Syria and his submission to his overlord the sultan. This decision caused great indignation in Paris where the government of Thiers insisted on supporting the pasha in his claims for independence. Mehemet Ali’s refusal to withdraw prompted a bombardment of the Syrian coast by British naval vessels and the seizure of Acre. Despite the bellicose objections of Thiers, the cooler counsels of Louis Philippe prevailed and the affair was resolved without a European conflict.⁸⁶

For the navy the lesson was that in spite of a program of construction that had been pursued since 1820, it was not ready when the crisis erupted and was unable to improvise a fleet at short notice. Over the following four years, the prince de Joinville, a son of the king who had made the navy his career, agitated for greater naval spending. In November 1843 the French naval commander-in-chief in the Pacific, Rear-Admiral Dupetit-Thouars, went beyond his written instructions and formally annexed Tahiti, largely - so he alleged - to prevent the English from doing so. Joinville’s response was to write an article in the *Revue des deux mondes*, in which he set out the reasons for supporting the navy. Above all, he wrote, “at sea as on land, we

⁸⁴ Lawrence Sondhaus, *Naval Warfare, 1815-1914* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 22.

⁸⁵ Theodore Ropp, *The Development of a Modern Navy: French Naval Policy, 1871-1904* (Annapolis MD: Naval Institute Press, 1987), 7.

⁸⁶ G. F. Bartle, “Bowring and the near Eastern Crisis of 1838-1840,” *The English Historical Review*, 79: 313 (October, 1964): 761-774.

want to be respected.”⁸⁷ Eventually in 1846 the Chamber of Deputies voted an extraordinary law providing 93 million francs for naval construction. Opposition was swept aside by Adolphe Thiers, who had resigned the premiership over the Mehemet Ali affair, insisting, like Joinville, that “France must have a fleet that can make her respected.”⁸⁸

If at first the July Monarchy was reluctant even to undertake such colonial responsibilities as it had, the pace quickened in the 1840s as investment into the navy increased. In 1841 the conquest of Algeria was begun in earnest. While Algeria came under the authority of the War Ministry and was therefore largely the domain of the army, its possession gave the navy an increased role in the Mediterranean. “Cost what it may,” said one senior admiral in 1847, “we must ensure that communications with our African possessions remain invulnerable in time of war.”⁸⁹ Elsewhere, as we have seen in the case of Tahiti, the navy was busy on its own initiative. In 1841 Admiral Hell, Governor of Reunion, took over the Comoro Islands off the coast of Madagascar, prompting then Foreign Minister Guizot to announce that French policy from now on would be to create on the world's trade routes a network of naval bases, or *points d'appui*.⁹⁰ In 1842 the Marquesas Islands in the Pacific were occupied by the same admiral who would later seize Tahiti, the West African Squadron was reinforced, and authorization was given for the construction of fortified naval stations along the African West Coast. In 1843 a naval division was dispatched to the Far East with instructions “to protect and if necessary to defend

⁸⁷ C. I. Hamilton, “The Diplomatic and Naval Effects of the Prince de Joinville's Note sur l'etat des forces navales de la France of 1844,” *The Historical Journal*, 32:3 (September 1989): 676.

⁸⁸ Ropp, *The Development of a Modern Navy*, 7.

⁸⁹ C. I. Hamilton, “The Royal Navy, *la Royale*, and the Militarisation of Naval Warfare, 1840-1870,” *Journal of Strategic Studies* 6:2 (June 1983): 192.

⁹⁰ J. A. Kieran, “The Origins of the Zanzibar Guarantee Treaty of 1862,” *Canadian Journal of African Studies / Revue Canadienne des Études Africaines* 2: 2 (Autumn 1968): 148.

our political and commercial interests.”⁹¹ Colonial defense figured so largely in the priorities of the navy ministry, not simply because it had to furnish vessels for their support, but because the colonies continued to be part of its portfolio and because the navy provided their garrisons in the form of *infanterie* and *artillerie de marine*.

Not everyone was happy with these developments. “We are still confronted with an anti-African party which includes several prominent and influential people,” Guizot told the Governor General of Algeria in 1846, “and their views have the silent but no less real support of many others.” For C.M. Andrew and A.S. Kanya-Forstner, indeed, “[the] creation of the second French empire was less the work of central governments than of soldiers and sailors on the periphery who generated their own expansive drives and launched France on a series of conquests far more sweeping than their masters in Paris had ever contemplated.”⁹² Thus, for example, although French interest in the Far East had been piqued during the eighteenth century as a potential counterweight to French weakness in China, French policy only began to be more muscular when in 1847, in another point of conjunction of the interests of navy, empire and religion, the commander of the Far Eastern naval division, despite orders to avoid the use of force, sank five Vietnamese ships before attempting to land French missionaries in Korea. This was not the first foray into Korea, however. In 1844 another admiral, Admiral Cecille, “landed without orders in Corea (sic) and abruptly ordered the Corean Emperor to cease all persecution of the Christians.”⁹³

⁹¹ R. F. Holland, et al, *Theory and Practice in the History of European Expansion Overseas: Essays in Honour of Ronald Robinson* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 10.

⁹² Andrew and Kanya-Forstner, “Centre and Periphery in the Making of the Second French Colonial Empire, 1815-1920,” 11.

⁹³ H. M. Cole, “Origins of the French Protectorate Over Catholic Missions in China,” *The American Journal of International Law* 34:3 (July 1940): 479.

With the transition from July Monarchy to Second Republic to Second Empire, naval policy again remained remarkably consistent. This is perhaps best demonstrated by the report commissioned by the National Assembly in 1849 to investigate the current situation and organization of the navy. Ordered shortly after the departure of Louis Philippe and published under the Second Empire in 1852, it largely showed that the naval establishment conformed to or exceeded that laid down by the ordinance of 1846, with 46 ships of the line afloat or building and 56 frigates similarly.⁹⁴ Although Napoleon III, like his predecessor, proved reluctant at first to embark on costly and expansive overseas adventures, with the successful conclusion of the Crimean War in 1856, France adopted a new fleet program in 1857. This provided for three fleets: one of battleships to preserve France's position in Europe, one of ships for foreign stations to secure respect overseas, one of transports and gunboats for colonial expeditions or in case another Crimean situation should arise.⁹⁵ In the same year, responding to pressure from missionaries, Napoleon III authorized the establishment of a protectorate over Cochinchina. He also sent troops to participate in campaigns in China in 1858-60, to protect Christians in Lebanon during the Druze uprising in 1860, and to install the Archduke Maximilien as Emperor of Mexico.

After the so-called "Arrow Incident" in 1856 provoked the British to punitive action against the Chinese in the Second Opium War, the French seized upon the murder of a Catholic missionary named Chapdelaine as a pretext to join the effort, arguing that his death was an abrogation of the Treaty of Whampoa of 1844⁹⁶. In mid- July 1857, despite strong objections by his ministers, Napoleon III decided on a military intervention in Vietnam as a logical annex to

⁹⁴ "Enquête Parlementaire sur la situation et l'organisation des services de la marine militaire ordonnée par la Loi du 31 Octobre, 1849" in *The Edinburgh Review*, vol. XCVIII (July-October 1853): 240-272.

⁹⁵ Ropp, *The Development of a Modern Navy*, 7.

⁹⁶ Cole, "Origins of the French Protectorate Over Catholic Missions in China," 484.

the expedition to China.⁹⁷ With the temporary resolution of Chinese affairs, the emperor subsequently entrusted the enterprise to Admiral Charles Rigault de Genouilly, commander-in-chief of the French squadron which had been co-operating with the British in naval operations against the Chinese Empire. The admiral's orders were not as specific as the recommendations of the commission set up to study the situation in Vietnam: he was left free to decide, once he had taken possession of the Annamese port of Tourane (Da Nang), whether it would be possible to establish a protectorate or simply to conclude a treaty of commerce.⁹⁸ On 1 September 1858 the French landed at Tourane. On 17 February 1859 Rigault de Genouilly took Saigon.⁹⁹

Once again the navy went on to take an independent line. In 1862 Admiral Bonard, on his own initiative, negotiated the treaty that would cede the three eastern provinces of Cochinchina to France. In August 1863, his successor Admiral La Grandière signed a treaty which placed Cambodia under a French protectorate only a week before the government sent orders not to interfere in Cambodian internal affairs. In June 1867 La Grandière seized the three western provinces of Cochinchina, despite instructions “to avoid anything which might upset the court of Hué.”¹⁰⁰ In January of the same year Rigault de Genouilly, the man who took Saigon, became Secretary of State for the Navy, destined to preside over “one of the best fleets France had ever possessed,” and one endowed with an annual budget of around 210 million francs.¹⁰¹

⁹⁷ Pierre Brocheux et al, *Indochina : an ambiguous colonization, 1858-1954* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 24.

⁹⁸ R. Stanley Thomson, “The Diplomacy of Imperialism: France and Spain in Cochin China, 1858-63,” *The Journal of Modern History* 12:3 (September 1940): 336.

⁹⁹ Taillemite, *L'Histoire ignorée de la marine française*, 338.

¹⁰⁰ Andrew and Kanya-Forstner, “Centre and Periphery in the Making of the Second French Colonial Empire, 1815-1920,” 13.

¹⁰¹ Taillemite, *L'Histoire ignorée de la marine française*, 340.

The Navy and the Third Republic

The general objectives of the navy in the event of a conflict with Prussia were laid down in the 1860s. These were to defeat the German navy at sea, destroy the naval bases at Wilhelmshaven and Kiel, blockade the German coast and land an army corps behind the German lines. When war came in 1870, however, the only actual fight at sea occurred off Havana when the German dispatch boat *Meteor* and the French *Le Bouvet*, having been escorted by Spanish warships into international waters, did such damage to each other that both retired back to Havana where they spent the remainder of the war. Writing in 1897, Clemenceau drew the conclusion that “the utter inadequacy of our battleships is sufficient to illustrate that the hundreds of millions of francs wasted during the Empire, in spite of the precious directions furnished by the Committee of Inquiry of 1849-1851, had resulted in nothing but a magnificent organization of impotency.”¹⁰²

It was on land that the navy provided its most signal service. The “Blue Division” of marines fought at Sedan, distinguishing itself in the defense of Bazeilles. After the fall of the Empire, the Government of National Defense undertook the task of replacing the armies destroyed at Sedan or besieged at Metz, with the navy being called upon to provide a core of military professionals. Between 7 August and 19 September some 8,300 sailors and 5,000 marines arrived to participate in the defense of Paris. Besides providing 17 battalions of infantry and 11 batteries of field guns, the navy was responsible for six of the major forts protecting the capital, while eight of nine defensive sectors were commanded by naval officers. In the provinces, 12 battalions of sailors were formed at Brest, Toulon and Cherbourg, while the Marine depots raised about 8,900 men. Naval troops were much in evidence in the Army of the

¹⁰² Georges Clemenceau, “The French Navy,” *The North American Review* 164:483 (February 1897): 190.

Loire at the first undisputed French victory of the war at Coulmiers, where Admiral Jauréguiberry commanded a division of the 16th Corps. It was this victory that allowed the recapture of Orleans from the Prussians.¹⁰³ In all the navy furnished 55,300 officers and men, 1,032 guns and 29,300 rifles to the army.¹⁰⁴

The result of all this was slightly surprising. As Theodore Ropp puts it: “The navy emerged from the war in the strange position of having accomplished little on the sea while winning on land the admiration of the whole population, and from this can be dated the peculiar popularity that the navy subsequently enjoyed in Paris...In spite of its lack of success upon the sea, the navy was never more popular than after 1871, and its officers were given important political positions in the new Third Republic, which replaced the empire of Napoleon III.”¹⁰⁵

If defeat and the need for economic retrenchment initially robbed the Third Republic of its overseas ambitions – many blamed the outcome of the war on Napoleon III’s reckless adventurism abroad, making colonial expansion politically inadvisable – it is perhaps not surprising that the first person to try and get empire back on the agenda was a naval officer. From December 1872 the Governor of Cochinchina, Admiral Dupré, began pressing for an expedition to occupy Hanoi and the mouth of the Red River in Tonkin. This was, he felt, “a matter of life and death for the future of our domination in the Far East.”¹⁰⁶ In October 1873, without further instruction, he dispatched a naval expedition under Francis Garnier to Hanoi, where Garnier and his 170 men stormed the citadel and seized several positions in the Red River Delta before the intervention of Chinese irregulars brought the foray to a close.

¹⁰³ Stephen Shann, *French Army 1870-17, Franco-Prussian War (2): Republican Troops* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2002), 18-20.

¹⁰⁴ Ropp, *The Development of a Modern Navy*, 25.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid*, 25.

¹⁰⁶ Andrew and Kanya-Forstner, “Centre and Periphery in the Making of the Second French Colonial Empire,” 15-16.

Although Admiral Dupré found himself recalled, the French government did obtain substantial concessions in the treaties that Tu Duc signed with France in 1874. The Vietnamese king recognized French possession of all six provinces in Cochinchina, and the French government gained the right to station consular representatives and small military detachments in Hanoi, Haiphong, and Nam Quon. The French navy could also send gunboats into Tonkinese waters to protect commerce, which was opened to French and other European traders. The theoretical suzerainty of China over the area was not, however, explicitly terminated. Dupré was replaced by Admiral Duperré who, unusually, recommended a French withdrawal, concerned about the resources he was likely to be allocated for his task. This was rejected even in the cautious climate of the time because of the potential effects on French prestige.

It was Annam's renewal of its neglected vassalage to China so that China could act as a counterpoise to French influence that alarmed the French government sufficiently to rouse it to action. Pressure was brought to bear on the Freycinet government by Le Myre de Vilers, who became Governor of Cochinchina in 1879, and Admiral Jauréguiberry, Minister of the Navy and the Colonies in several administrations, to take a firm stand in Tonkin.¹⁰⁷ Charles Le Myre de Vilers, first governor of a civil administration put in place by the short lived Gambetta administration in May 1879, was nonetheless also a former naval officer.¹⁰⁸ In mid-January he informed Paris that he was doubling the garrison in Hanoi, and he appointed Commandant Rivière to head the expedition. With the fall of the Gambetta cabinet, Jauréguiberry returned to the navy ministry under the new Freycinet government. Rivière took 400-700 men to Hanoi.

¹⁰⁷ Thomas F. Power, Jr., *Jules Ferry and the Renaissance of French Imperialism* (New York: Octagon Books, Inc., 1966), 157.

¹⁰⁸ Brocheux, *Indochina : an ambiguous colonization*, 21.

Exceeding his orders, he immediately seized the citadel there. The arrival of French troops in Tonkin prompted an immediate reaction from China, which launched forces across the border from Yunnan and Kwangsi provinces.¹⁰⁹

The fragile state of French domestic politics – there were five cabinets between January 1882 and February 1883 – militated against decisive action finding its origins in Paris, at least in the office of the Prime Minister. Admiral Jauréguiberry, hero of the Franco-Prussian War and former governor of Senegal under the Second Empire, displayed greater political longevity at a critical time when civilian authorities both at home and in the Far East were both proving temporary and showing hesitation. He managed to secure agreement from premier Charles Duclerc for a reinforcement of seven hundred troops to be sent to Tonkin on the *Correze* increasing Rivière's force to some one thousand two hundred. This could be accomplished without requesting additional credits from the Chamber, thereby avoiding an issue that might be fatal for Duclerc's shaky ministry.

With the arrival of reinforcements, Rivière again took matters in to his own hands in March 1883 and seized the fortress at Nam Dinh on the Red River to secure Hanoi's communications with the sea, while his second-in command Berthe de Villars defeated Vietnamese troops and Chinese irregulars outside Hanoi itself. Meantime, in October 1882, Jauréguiberry had revived proposals to send a force of 6,000 troops to Tonkin. Although this did not materialize immediately, it remained somewhat in the air even after his departure from office with the fall of the Duclerc cabinet and was again revived in more modest form with the arrival to the premiership of Jules Ferry in February 1883.

¹⁰⁹ Piotr Olander, *Sino-French Naval War, 1884-1885* (Sandomierz, Poland: Stratus, 2012), 10.

The new governor of Cochinchina, Charles Thomson, wrote that a definitive solution to Tonkin required prompt military action. A force of four thousand troops in addition to the *Correze* contingent would permit occupation of the main strongholds in Tonkin. Ferry agreed. On 26 April the government presented a request to the Chamber for five and a half million francs to cover the costs of three thousand European soldiers and one thousand Vietnamese auxiliaries, plus nine additional gunboats, for the Tonkin expedition. The Chamber approved the request by a vote of 351 to 48. After amendment in the Senate it returned for final, unanimous approval on May 26. The dramatic announcement on May 19 of Rivière's death in an ambush at almost precisely the same spot as where Garnier had been killed nine years earlier gave patriotic and emotional resonance to a decision already taken. Before news of Rivière's death had reached Paris, the French government accepted the idea and the expense of a military conquest of Tonkin.¹¹⁰

A decision was also taken to reinforce the French naval presence in the Far East and the result was the Tonkin Squadron, formed at Cherbourg, and put in the hands of Admiral Amédée Anatole Prosper Courbet on 31 May, 1883. This was designed to support the Cochinchina Squadron, while the Far East Squadron under Rear Admiral Charles Meyer continued to operate in the Chinese theater.¹¹¹ What followed was what the Left wing opposition in the Chamber of Deputies, led by Clemenceau, Édouard Lockroy and Granet, referred to as an unconstitutional, unauthorized and undeclared war with China. After what was really a minor reverse at Lang Son, although treated like a national catastrophe by the Radical and Monarchist Press, Ferry was forced out of office. France, however, managed to reach agreement with China, ultimately

¹¹⁰ Kim Munholland, "Admiral Jauréguiberry and the French Scramble for Tonkin, 1879-83," *French Historical Studies* 11:1 (Spring, 1979): 81-107.

¹¹¹ Olender, *Sino-French Naval War, 1884-1885*, 16.

winning Tonkin and Annam “at a cost of over one hundred million francs and several hundred men.”¹¹²

The opinions of historians regarding this entire venture vary. For Pierre Brocheux: “The Indochinese enterprise was, in fact, one of the important elements in creating a powerful fleet of warships with global range: the French Navy opted for steamships in the great naval building programs of 1846-51 and 1857, and by 1870, it possessed 339 warships, of which 45 were ironclads, as against 375, of which 42 were ironclads, for the British Royal Navy. It also greatly contributed to the development of the French Merchant Navy, whose rise was nevertheless slower.”¹¹³ For Theodore Ropp: “[Ferry] eventually had the French Navy carrying on two undeclared wars simultaneously, in Tonkin and Madagascar, both behind the back of the public and without sufficient forces for either.” Indeed, “the ultimate effects of the navy’s colonial activities on its readiness for European conflict were little short of disastrous. The large fleet maintained for operations on overseas stations was perfectly useless for combat against a European opponent, while vast sums disappeared in the navy’s murky administration as part of France’s new colonial effort.” Nonetheless: “Naval officers were among the most ardent supporters of colonialism.”¹¹⁴ There is little dispute over this last point. Whether empire was a good thing or a bad thing, there was no doubt it was a navy thing. Nor was this true merely in Southeast Asia.

Protection of the Sakalave tribes of the northeast coast from persecution by the ruling Hova Queens provided the pretext for renewed interest in Madagascar. While the Hovas government sent a mission to Paris to discuss relations, the French Admiral in command of the

¹¹² Power, *Jules Ferry and the Renaissance of French Imperialism*, 190.

¹¹³ Brocheux, *Indochina : an ambiguous colonization*, 21.

¹¹⁴ Ropp, *The Development of a Modern Navy*, 142, 148-149, 141.

Indian Ocean Squadron removed Hovas flags from the northeast coast. A year later, just as France suffered a fresh humiliation at the hands of the British over Suez, François de Mahy the Deputy representing Réunion, where colonists displayed a lively interest in the island, had coincidentally just become interim navy minister with the fall of the Duclerc cabinet. It was he who gave the orders for the dispatch of a naval expedition under Admiral Pierre to Madagascar to obtain recognition of a French protectorate over land above the 16th parallel.¹¹⁵ Desultory warfare ensued until a treaty terminating the war was signed on 17 December 1885 providing that the French government acting through a Resident General “will represent Madagascar in all its foreign relations.” It provided further for extraterritoriality, freedom of religion, and an indemnity. The roadstead of Diego Suarez - large enough to shelter a battle fleet- went to France for control and development.¹¹⁶ The first French Resident to arrive in the context of this treaty was none other than Charles Le Myre de Vilers, former aide-de-camp of Admiral de la Roncière during the siege of Paris and former governor of Cochinchina. This was not the end of the affair, however, and by the 1890s the French became embroiled in large-scale pacification campaigns. With success in sight, Hippolyte Laroche, another former naval officer, was appointed governor and given the support of General Gallieni with four companies of the Foreign Legion.¹¹⁷ Like Brière de l’Isle in Senegal and Mangin in Morocco, Gallieni was a product of the Naval Infantry.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵ Jacques Binoche, “Le rôle des parlementaires d’Outre-mer dans la conquête de Madagascar (1871–1897),” *Revue d’histoire moderne et contemporaine* 22: 3 (July-September 1975): 420.

¹¹⁶ Garland Downum, “The Solution of the Madagascar Problem. A Study in Imperial Adjustment,” *The Southwestern Social Science Quarterly* 24:2 (September 1943): 150.

¹¹⁷ James J. Cooke, “Madagascar and Zanzibar: A Case Study in African Colonial Friction, 1894-1897,” *African Studies Review* 13:3 (Dec., 1970): 439; André Lebon, *La Pacification de Madagascar, 1896-1898* (Paris: Plon, 1928), 49.

¹¹⁸ Ropp, *The Development of a Modern Navy*, 143.

Successive naval governors in Senegal, Louis-Edouard Bouët-Willaumez and Léandre-Adolphe-Joseph Bertin-Duchâteau., called in the 1840s for a stronger French presence on the Senegal River.¹¹⁹ For J. Malcolm Thompson the “Navy was an important instrument in France's conquest of West Africa and its inhabitants.” Thus, to assist French companies in St. Louis:

From 1854 to 1865, gunboats of the colony's flotilla (known as the Local Station) shelled any village that blocked trade. To insure that trade remained open, the Navy soon seized control of the gum markets along a five hundred mile stretch of the river. At each of these captured trading centers, the military built a fortified post. Here the Navy placed much of the state's resources and protection at the service of European traders. On land, a few white officers and a garrison of ransomed slaves supervised the transaction of gum sales and adjudicated trade disputes. On the river, gunboats escorted the gum fleets returning to Saint Louis. European wholesalers also used the Navy to free themselves from African middlemen. Gunboats towed French commercial barges to markets up river. Until the 1880s the Navy even leased small motor boats to merchants to defray the costs of maintaining full-time crews.¹²⁰

After a hiatus during the 1860s and 1870s, the succession of Brière de l'Isle to the governorship of Senegal in 1878 marked France's renewed commitment to colonial expansion in West Africa. The plan called for consolidation of French control over the territory surrounding the forts along the Senegal and striking overland to the head waters of the Niger. From there, military planners anticipated the capture of Timbuktu and Lake Tchad thought to hold the key to a vast colonial commerce linked to France by steam. In December 1879 Prime Minister Freycinet declared his belief in the necessity of taking on the vast territories “bathed by the Niger and the Congo.” With Jauréguiberry at the navy ministry, Brière de l'Isle and Freycinet were assured of support. By July 1879 the Navy Ministry was already considering former governor Faidherbe's old plans for building forts and placing a gunboat on the Niger. “By accepting the political and military

¹¹⁹ Margaret O. McLane, “Commercial Rivalries and French Policy on the Senegal River, 1831-1858,” *African Economic History* 15 (1986): 49.

¹²⁰ J. Malcolm Thompson, “When the Fires Are Lit: The French Navy's Recruitment and Training of Senegalese Mechanics and Stokers, 1864-1887,” *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 26: 2 (1992): 277.

implications of an advance to the Niger and by entrusting the execution of his policies to military agents, Jaureguiberry had raised the curtain on the era of French imperialism in West Africa.”¹²¹

The 1880 expedition to explore the Niger basin was led by then Captain Galliéni, director of political affairs at St. Louis, with a mission composed largely of naval officers, including naval surgeon Jean Bayol, who himself went on to become Lieutenant Governor of Senegal.¹²² At the same time, meanwhile, a new front had been opened on the Congo. The explorer and officer graduate of the naval school at Brest, Savorgnan de Brazza, sponsored by the French section of the International African Association, who had been on the river since 1880, and had not unusually signed a slightly irregular treaty of protectorate with the Bateke tribe on the north shore of Stanley Pool. In November 1882 his treaty was submitted to Parliament and ratified unanimously. In February 1883 de Brazza left for the Congo once more, this time as a government commissioner with orders to organize the new colony.¹²³

On the other side of the world, the outstanding questions after 1880 for French policy in the Pacific concerned the consolidation of sovereignty rights over the Leeward Islands (of French Polynesia, about 80 miles northwest of Tahiti) and the future of the New Hebrides. Negotiations over the future of the Leeward Islands were complicated by guarantees to the group of independence given by Britain in a convention of 1847, and the waters were further muddied when the entire issue became associated with a Franco-British dispute over the Newfoundland fisheries. Even before formal annexation in 1887, however, and in tune with the navy's initiatives elsewhere in the world, French naval officers had settled European complaints over

¹²¹ C. W. Newbury and A. S. Kanya-Forstner, “French Policy and the Origins of the Scramble for West Africa,” *The Journal of African History* 10:2 (1969): 264.

¹²² Germaine Ganier, “Note sur Jean Bayol, 1849-1905 (Jean Bayol 1849-1905),” *Cahiers d'Études Africaines*, 15:58 (1975): 288.

¹²³ Newbury and Kanya-Forstner, “French Policy and the Origins of the Scramble for West Africa,” 269.

the head of native courts, appointed native officials and were forced to give support to those appointments with a naval bombardment of Raiatea in the same year. Even as negotiations over the Leeward Islands continued, the French Navy Ministry was embarrassed when news arrived that a French naval officer had demanded a commercial treaty during the visit of the *Hugan* to Rarotonga in September the previous year. Jauréguiberry found himself in the unusual position of having to explain to the Foreign Ministry that the commander of the *Hugan* had acted on his own initiative; and contrary to standing instructions to avoid arousing British suspicions about French intentions in the Pacific.¹²⁴ In other words, the action of naval officers overseas often pre-empted the execution of official policy.

Another aspect of the interest of the navy in the region had its roots in the distant past. When the galley fleet was decommissioned in the mid-eighteenth century, those criminal offenders who otherwise would have been sentenced to galley service now found themselves condemned to service in the *bagnes*, that is to say prisons in which inmates worked in the naval dockyards. By 1814 there were 16,000 of these prisoners, or *forçats*. Responsibility for these prisoners was distasteful to naval sensibilities. Already under the July Monarchy, the Navy Minister Admiral Mackau was to complain of the 3,000 *forçats* in Brest in 1845 that as a workforce they were “the worst and the most expensive.”¹²⁵ Conveniently, under Louis Napoleon it was Admiral Mackau who was called upon to lead a committee charged with producing a report on “changing hard-labour convicts so as to use them for the benefit of colonization.” In 1851 the committee recommended that the *bagnes* be closed down and

¹²⁴ C. W. Newbury, “Aspects of French Policy in the Pacific, 1853-1906,” *Pacific Historical Review* 27:1 (February 1958): 45-56.

¹²⁵ Jean Vidalenc, “Sur la marine française au temps de la Restauration et de la Monarchie de Juillet,” *Revue d'histoire économique et sociale* 47:2 (1969): 299.

selected Guiana as the site for a penal colony.¹²⁶ As a project, of course, the foundation of an overseas penal colony had for the navy the added advantage of requiring expanded naval resources. It also provided a form of template for the treatment of refugees at Martinique during the Second World War.

In the event the penal colony in Guiana was a disaster, although not quite as lethal as the attempt to settle the region had been under Choiseul. Between 1852 and December 1866 a total of 17,229 prisoners were transported there, of whom “nearly half” died.¹²⁷ As a result the Navy Ministry decided to halt the transportation of prisoners to French Guiana (although four camps remained in operation there in 1926) in 1867 and to rely on the Pacific Island of New Caledonia, annexed by the navy in 1853. Camp commandants were drawn from naval officers on the active list.¹²⁸ Although the Ministry of the Colonies was formally separated from the Navy Ministry in 1894, this did not immediately have an appreciable effect on the personnel involved.

Conclusion

The empire that the French navy did so much to help fashion was considerably different from the one envisioned by Richelieu and Colbert. By the time of the First World War the empire contributed less to the French economy than it had under the Ancien Régime. In 1787, even after the losses of the Seven Years’ War, 30 percent of French trade was with the French West Indies. The reactionary Abbé Maury told the Constituent Assembly in 1791 that “without colonial trade... the kingdom will be lost.” The outspoken regicide Bertrand Barère agreed with him. According to C.M. Andrew and A.S. Kanya-Forstner, “The loss of France’s first colonial

¹²⁶ Colin Forster, “French Penal Policy and the Origins of the French Presence in New Caledonia,” *The Journal of Pacific History* 26:2 (December 1991): 147.

¹²⁷ Stephen A. Toth, *Beyond Papillon: The French Overseas Penal Colonies, 1854-1952* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2006), 17.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 39.

empire left a commercial gap which had still to be filled a century later. By contrast, between 1909 and 1913 the second French Empire accounted for only 10 percent of France's external trade."¹²⁹ Furthermore, in 1914 French investment Russia alone was almost three times that in the whole French Empire.¹³⁰ The general indifference of French banks to colonial expansion was reflected in the pattern of foreign investment. In 1914 only 9 per cent of French foreign investment was in the Empire, as compared with 25 per cent in Russia alone.¹³¹ Business and industry shared this indifference to colonial affairs.

There were, however, also proponents of colonial expansion. The *parti colonial*, not insignificantly chaired by a naval officer, Admiral Vallon at its first meeting, exerted an influence on French foreign policy between 1890 and 1914 that belied its small size.¹³² Yet in general it appears that "[the] French conquered an empire when their overseas trade was at a minimum and when their people were totally uninterested in the world beyond the seas."¹³³ For C.M. Andrew, "[whatever] the rationale they offered, Jules Ferry and the colonialists of the Third Republic wanted a great French Empire, as Bethmann-Hollweg wanted a great German navy, 'for the general purposes of French greatness', for reasons of national prestige."¹³⁴ The navy, the engine behind this drive for greatness, became "a vast prestige machine, acquiring

¹²⁹ C. M. Andrew and A. S. Kanya-Forstner, "French Business and the French Colonialists," *The Historical Journal* 19:4 (December 1976): 983.

¹³⁰ C.M. Andrew, "The French Colonialist Movement during the Third Republic: The Unofficial Mind of Imperialism," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 26 (1976): 147.

¹³¹ C. M. Andrew and A. S. Kanya-Forstner, "The Groupe Colonial in the French Chamber of Deputies, 1892-1932," *The Historical Journal* 17:4 (December 1974): 842.

¹³² L. Abrams and D. J. Miller, "Who Were the French Colonialists? A Reassessment of the Parti Colonial, 1890-1914," *The Historical Journal* 19:3 (September 1976): 719.

¹³³ Brunshwig, *French Colonialism, 1871-1914*, 19.

¹³⁴ Andrew, "The French Colonialist Movement during the Third Republic...", 149.

colonies the French people did not want and defending them by the most ruthless possible methods against an enemy the French people did not want to fight.”¹³⁵

Over a period of three hundred years the navy had, however, carved for itself a purpose for being and a role for itself at the heart of the French state. By the beginning of the twentieth century this was certainly being challenged by the more liberal minded politicians of the Third Republic, anxious to concentrate power in civilian hands. Yet often, as under Vichy, the mere act of “civilianization” did not suddenly summon untapped reserves of civilians to perform the tasks that had been the prerogative of the navy and so the personnel thus engaged for a time remained unchanged. It certainly seems unlikely that the navy suddenly lost a sense of what it felt its prerogatives were, even as they were being appropriated. Furthermore, in many ways the empire constructed during the nineteenth-century did not conform to the model outlined by Burke in 1796. Rather than being built and maintained by liberal-minded commercial interests, it found its support from military-minded, Catholic, conservatives. It was therefore entirely congenial to the navy designated to protect it, whose history and culture, attachments to Church, Empire and Monarchy gave it similar inclinations.

¹³⁵ Ropp, *The Development of a Modern Navy*, 142.

CHAPTER TWO

The Great War and the Triumph of Conservatism

Introduction

If one person was certain of the contribution the French navy made to the Allied victory in the First World War, it was Georges Leygues, Minister of the Marine. Speaking at the Sorbonne on the 24 April 1919, he said this:

People are not sufficiently aware of how much they owe to their sailors. They are the ones who kept them alive and whose unseen and tenacious labor prepared the way for decisive victory.

The Marne, the Yser, Verdun, the Somme, and the Aisne; the expeditions to the Far East and Africa, none of these would have been possible had not sailors been guarding from submarine attack the unending flow of vessels that connected our troops on all continents, transported millions of soldiers as well as grain, coal and iron.

The peoples of the Entente would have seen their shores affronted, their ports destroyed and their colonies ravaged, had not the battle squadrons kept the great fleets of the enemy imprisoned in their bases, had not distant divisions hunted enemy raiders on every ocean.

The war would still be going on if the blockade had not precipitated Germany's collapse.¹

Yet, according to Jean de Préneuf and Thomas Vaisset, in 2013 the history of the French navy during the Great War was still largely unknown. Nonetheless, they agreed with Georges Leygues that “the navy made a contribution to final victory that was as essential as it is under appreciated.”² For Matt Perry, however:

The French navy emerged from the war with an ambiguous record... There was no great naval battle to salvage French maritime prestige, no Verdun around which to construct an institutional myth of heroism, no Trafalgar to amplify its global status. The most spectacular events in the Mediterranean were the loss of French warships and the Dardanelles fiasco. The official position was that the navy's control of the Mediterranean and lines of supply from North Africa had been essential to victory. Just as Naval

¹ Aristide Lamont, *La route de la victoire: l'histoire de la grande guerre, août 1914 – novembre 1918* (Paris: Gedalge, 1924), 110.

² Jean de Préneuf and Thomas Vaisset, “Une action en retrait mais décisive (1914-1918),” *Études Marine: L'histoire d'une Révolution: la Marine depuis 1870* 4 (March 2013): 39.

Ministers and naval historians asserted that, without the navy, France would have lost the war, so their opponents polemicized against the navy's balance sheet of war.³

In fact, according to Martin Motte, the French navy was “the Great Forgotten” in the victory ceremonies marking the end of the war. Despite losing 150 vessels and 11,500 men in action, the navy was not mentioned in the law of 10 November 1918 which officially congratulated the army and its leaders. In fact so unfamiliar was the naval uniform to the civilian general public, that the *Revue maritime* was able to recount the story of a naval officer on leave in Paris who was taken to be, by turns, a foreign ally, a gas inspector and a police officer. In short, “more than ever the navy was unappreciated by the larger part of the nation” and felt constrained to explain its role to politicians more inclined to vote credits to the army or the air force.⁴

For many in the navy the war began when the fleet weighed anchor on the 3 August 1914 and divided into three groups, leaving Toulon and making for Philippeville, Oran and Algiers at a casual 11 knots. When the German bombardment of Philippeville and Bône occurred the following morning they had reached the Balearics where they received word of the attacks by telegraph. Admiral de Lapeyrère then decided to keep 3 vessels on station off the Balearics while the rest of the fleet was sent with all dispatch to Algiers. By the time on 6 August he received word that the Germans had appeared at Messina the *Mittelmeerdivision* was beyond his reach. The problem was, in Paul G. Halpern's succinct summary, that “[once the *Gæben* got to sea] the French had nothing large enough to damage her that could catch her.”⁵

Future Minister of the Marine Georges Leygues was reticent about the details of this failure, remarking after the war only that the German vessels “evaded the pursuit of Anglo-

³ Matt Perry, “Vive la France! Death at sea, the French navy and the Great War,” *French History* 26:3 (2012): 346-347.

⁴ Martin Motte, “L'après grande guerre dans la *Revue maritime*, 1920-1923,” in *L'évolution de la pensée navale*, vol. VI, ed. Hervé Coutau-Bégarie (Paris: Economica, 1997), 117, 133.

⁵ Paul G. Halpern, *A Naval History of World War I* (Annapolis MD: Naval Institute Press, 2012), 56.

French ships and took refuge in Constantinople.”⁶ Yet it was a source of fierce controversy at the time. Lapeyrère was the object of particular criticism, especially after his resignation from command in October 1915, with the attack led by Vice-Admiral Bienaimé, now retired and occupying a seat as a nationalist deputy. The criticism culminated in hearings before the Chamber of Deputies’ *Commission de la Marine de Guerre* in 1917, where Lapeyrère was vigorously defended by the Minister of Marine in the first year of the war, Victor Augagneur. In August 1917, Charles Chaumet, former president of the commission who became Minister of the Marine himself in 1917, conducted another enquiry that, more or less reluctantly, exonerated Lapeyrère of blame. The events and the hearings that followed did, however, according to Paul G. Halpern, provide an insight into “the personal animosities and rivalries within the French navy.”⁷

In the Adriatic, Lapeyrère’s first action upon Austria’s entry into the war was to conduct a sweep intended to break up the Austrian blockade of Montenegro. In Corbett’s account: “His plan was with his own battle squadrons and destroyers to steal up the Italian coast, without lights, as high as the latitude of Cattaro. Thence in the early morning he would strike across till he made the Montenegrin coast, while Admiral Troubridge and the French light cruiser squadrons would sweep from Fano island up the Albanian coast to drive the enemy into his arms.”⁸ Unfortunately only the small Austrian cruiser *Zenta* was caught in the elaborate trap and some small torpedo boats escaped inshore. Thereafter the Austrian fleet proved unwilling to leave port under the guns of a superior force and Lapeyrère was left to ponder the problem of using 5,000 tons of coal and 1,000 tons of fuel oil a day with no base either in the Adriatic or near its entrance. Paul G.

⁶ Georges Leygues, *Les marins de France: l’oeuvre de la marine française pendant la guerre* (Paris: Berger-Levrault, 1921), 11.

⁷ Halpern, *A Naval History of World War I*, 57.

⁸ Sir Julian S. Corbett, *Naval Operations*, vol. I (London: Longman, Green & Co., 1920), 85.

Halpern reflected: “As Admiral Docteur later put it, the naval authorities seemed to think that a battle would take place off the piers of Toulon in the first days of the war.”⁹

It was the enemy who finally resolved the conundrum when on the 21 December the Austrian submarine U12 put a torpedo through the bows of Lapeyrère’s flagship *Jean Bart* as she escorted supplies to Montenegro.¹⁰ Although the ship made it safely to dry dock in Malta, the admiral drew the obvious conclusion that such sweeps in to the Adriatic were unnecessarily hazardous and the French blockade became one conducted from a distance in the Strait of Otranto.

Even this more modest commitment proved dangerous, however. On the 24 February 1915 the destroyer *Dague* was lost to a mine off the port of Antivari. Most shocking, however, was the loss of the heavy cruiser *Léon Gambetta* on the night of 26-27 April 1915. Sailing slowly in a straight line as she entered the Strait of Otranto, illuminated by moonlight and the Santa Maria di Leuca lighthouse, she was struck by two torpedoes from the Austrian submarine U 5 and sank in fifteen minutes. In the words of Matt Perry: “France was to lose other warships, notably the *Gaulois* on 27 December 1916, the *Danton* on 19 March 1917, as well as the cruisers *Amiral Charner* on 8 August 1916 and the *Châteaurenault* on 14 December 1917; but the *Léon Gambetta* was the first major French warship to sink and it resulted in the greatest loss of life.”¹¹ There were only 137 survivors.

The *Léon Gambetta* had been built at the enormous cost of 29,948,000 francs and launched in 1901 at a time when the naval construction program was the subject of controversy in

⁹ Halpern, *A Naval History of World War I*, 59.

¹⁰ Paul G. Halpern, “The Anglo-French-Italian Naval Convention of 1915,” *The Historical Journal* 13:1 (March 1970): 109.

¹¹ Perry, “Vive la France! Death at sea, the French navy and the Great War,” 345.

the Chamber of Deputies and the press, and within the navy itself. A report on the sinking by Rear-Admiral Habert exposed a litany of deficiencies, both material and operational, that may have contributed to the ship's foundering. The armor plating had not performed as expected and the watertight compartmentalization had failed. The ship was steaming too slowly and lacked any escort. The *Léon Gambetta*'s loss also threatened to re-open the bitter debate questioning the value of battleships that had done so much damage to the navy's effectiveness and prestige before the war. Certainly it caused a re-evaluation of French tactics in the Mediterranean, and for the rest of the war French battleships were corralled in port at Malta, Bizerte and Corfu, damaging morale and creating a wider perception of general naval inactivity. Widely reported in the press the sinking also helped to reignite a controversy that had convulsed the naval establishment in the nineteenth century. In many respects it was a controversy that lay at the heart of the deficiencies of the French navy in the First World War and one which, having taken on the hue of a political debate, continued to influence the navy after the war was ended.

The Conservative Triumph Over 19th Century Liberalism in the Navy

In some ways the revolution that had the greatest repercussions for the French navy was not that of 1789, or 1830, or 1848 or 1870. It was the Industrial Revolution. In the aftermath of the Franco-Prussian War the French navy found itself in the singular position of being widely admired thanks to the action of its sailors on land, while its actual maritime role had been "so insignificant, so totally powerless to prevent or diminish the disaster that public opinion began to doubt the very necessity of a navy."¹² On the one hand this popularity was reflected in the elections of 1871 which saw the election of 39 officers, of whom 12 were naval, including 9 admirals. By contrast, in 1873 Eugène Lamy, deputy for the Jura, was moved to enquire of the

¹² Capitaine de Frégate Ceillier, "Les idées stratégiques en France de 1870 à 1914: La Jeune École," thesis École supérieure de la Marine, 1928, 2.

Chamber why, if the navy was only useful when it disembarked its crews, was France spending so much money on battleships?¹³ The year before, the Minister of Marine Admiral Poteau had declared that the time was ripe for the navy “to sacrifice itself on the altar of the nation” and the budget of what Adolphe Thiers referred to as a “luxury item” was reduced by 25 percent. The total number of vessels was reduced from 439 to 137.¹⁴ This reduced budget of 147.6 million francs, unlike that of the army, was not enshrined in law but had to be voted on annually, laying it open to the vagaries of the mood of the Chamber regarding the fleet. As a result French naval programs tended to be stillborn or fulfilled only “partially and extremely slowly.”¹⁵ Édouard Lockroy lamented this fact at the end of the century. At a time when England could produce a battleship in 18 months, he wrote, it took France between 10 to 12 years to achieve the same thing. The corollary to this was that, given the speed with which technology was developing, by the time French ships were finished they were often already out of date. In addition, French naval construction was the most expensive in Europe, partly as a result of the cost of importing raw materials, partly because of a lack of competition for government contracts. In Britain, where the workers were higher paid than in France, they could buy three ships for a sum that in France would buy two.¹⁶

For some it seemed that it was time for France to reappraise her maritime strategy. In the straitened financial circumstances after the Franco-Prussian War, many looked to the ideas of Admiral Richild Grivel, elucidated in a study published in 1869. He argued, among other things, that faced with a superior naval opponent, France should concentrate on coastal protection in the first place and then on long-range campaigns of commerce raiding. In the wake of the 1865

¹³ Martin Motte, *Une éducation géostratégique: la pensée navale française de la jeune école à 1914* (Paris: Economica, 2004), 102-103.

¹⁴ Arne Røksund, *The Jeune École: The Strategy of the Weak* (Boston: Brill, 2007), ix-x.

¹⁵ Motte, *Une éducation géostratégique: la pensée navale française de la jeune école à 1914*, 110.

¹⁶ Édouard Lockroy, *La marine de guerre: Six mois rue Royale* (Paris: Berger-Levrault, 1897), 52-53.

crash program of the Royal Navy which gave the British a substantial lead in the on-going naval arms race this seemed to be, as Grivel put it, just common sense.¹⁷ Grivel concluded that instead of concentrating against Britain's strongest point, that is to say the 20,000 cannons of the Royal Navy, France should aim at its weak spot, the 50,000 merchant vessels that conveyed the trade upon which Britain relied for its wealth.¹⁸ Admiral Pothuau seized upon the first part of Grivel's ideas, commenting to Lockroy that the budget needed to be reduced, French land needed to be protected, and if it couldn't do that, what was the point of a navy?¹⁹ In any case, it seemed, the age of the battleship was over. In November 1878 Etienne Lamy again lambasted the construction of battleships, which were, he said, expensive and of doubtful effectiveness. According to *capitaine de frégate* Ceillier, this speech represented the official birth of the challenging and divisive school of thought that became known as the *Jeune École*.²⁰

The leading lights of this strategy were Admiral Hyacinthe Aube, who became Minister of Marine in January 1886 and Gabriel Charmes, foreign affairs editor of the *Journal des débats*. Developing some of the ideas of Grivel, supporters of the *Jeune École* maintained that the advent of steam power and the invention of the torpedo rendered the whole concept of the battle fleet obsolete. From now on battleships would be vulnerable to fast torpedo boats. Furthermore, torpedo boats were considerably cheaper to build than battleships.

One of Lamy's ideas, completely irrelevant from the point of view of strategy, was that the big battleships of Napoleon III's Empire were just another part of the useless imperial façade.

In this fashion Lamy tacitly associated big ships with political conservatism. It was an idea that

¹⁷ Louis Antoine Richild baron Grivel, *De la guerre maritime avant et depuis les nouvelles inventions: attaque et défense des côtes et des ports : guerre du large : étude historique et stratégique* (Paris: A. Bertrand : J. Dumaine, 1869), 278.

¹⁸ Røksund, *The Jeune École: The Strategy of the Weak*, 4.

¹⁹ Lockroy, *La marine de guerre: Six mois rue Royale*, 4; Étienne Taillemite, *L'Histoire ignorée de la marine française* (Paris: Perrin, 1988), 344.

²⁰ Ceillier, "Les idées stratégiques en France de 1870 à 1914: La Jeune École," 4.

found immediate appeal, says Theodore Ropp, because “of the conflict between the politically and navally conservative higher officers and the more progressive younger men.”²¹ According to Halpern, “[the] controversy over the *Jeune École* passed beyond naval technicalities. Reflecting the political and social divisions of the Third Republic, it became interwoven, through the efforts of rival publicists, with more doctrinaire questions of republicans versus conservatives, Right versus Left, and with the rivalry between the *Journal des débats*, a partisan of the *Jeune École*, and *Le Temps*, which favored the traditionalists and their support of the battleship.”²² Theodore Ropp suggested that Aube’s three greatest faults were his technical incompetence, his optimism, and his “taste for resorting to the public press,” his principal publicist being Gabriel Charmes, whose own technical incompetence did not prevent him from pontificating at length upon matters technical.²³

The weightiest part of Charmes’ argument was, however, ideological. For Charmes, the battleship was the embodiment of the aristocratic structures of the admiralty, a sort of waterborne Versailles. Not only would torpedo boats break the iron grip of the battleship clique, thus undermining the culture of nepotism and favoritism in the Admiralty, but communal life on smaller vessels would break down distinctions of social caste and technical specialty to the overall benefit of the navy’s efficiency. That the torpedo boat represented the “triumph of equality” appealed to the basics of democratic thought.²⁴ What caught the public imagination most vividly was the ideological debate rather than any dialogue about abstruse details of naval strategy.

²¹ Theodore Ropp, *The Development of a Modern Navy: French Naval Policy, 1871-1904* (Annapolis MD: Naval Institute Press, 1987), 121.

²² Paul G. Halpern, *The Mediterranean Naval Situation, 1908-1914* (Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press 1971), 48.

²³ Ropp *The Development of a Modern Navy*, 167.

²⁴ Motte, *Une éducation géostratégique: la pensée navale française de la jeune école à 1914*, 207.

With the decrease in the power of conservatives in the National Assembly at the end of the 1870s, and assisted by new laws passed in 1881 relating to the freedom of the press, public debate found greater expression in France and a tendency during the Third Republic to politicize most decisions in the French navy became apparent, “including decisions within the administrative domain.”²⁵ Radical politicians like Georges Clemenceau and Camille Pelletan delivered “the most scurrilous personal attacks” against Admiral Alfred-Albert Gervais because the visit of his squadron to Kronstadt in 1891 had led to the conclusion of an alliance with autocratic Russia.²⁶ Vitriol in this public debate was a two-way street. Critics of Pelletan from the extreme right, who accused him of dishonoring the navy, called in to question his honesty, his physical appearance, his dress sense, his morals and even his sobriety.²⁷

According to Ropp, after Gabriel Charmes there were two navies, “that of the liberal parliamentary philosophers” who supported the torpedo boats and the reactionary conservatives who supported the battleship. Their conflict was played out in public between, respectively, the *Journal des débats*, *Nouvelle revue*, *Revue des deux mondes* and *La Marine française* on the one hand, and *Le Temps* and *Le Yacht* on the other. “The whole situation contained many of the elements of the Dreyfus affair that polarized politics in the 1890s, but without the *cause célèbre* to set it off.”²⁸

Characterized as naval oligarchs, the upper echelons of naval command were accused of avoiding any kind of civilian oversight, whether from parliament or the government, and doing so on the basis of their professional longevity: the sea being their business, they seemed to

²⁵ Ibid 206; Røksund, *The Jeune École: The Strategy of the Weak*, 220.

²⁶ Ropp, *The Development of a Modern Navy*, 168

²⁷ Jean Martinant de Preneuf, “La politique de républicanisation de la Marine à la Belle Époque,” *Revue d'histoire maritime* 14 (2011): 54.

²⁸ Ropp, *The Development of a Modern Navy*, 168.

reason, only the navy was competent to take decisions about the navy. Even Lockroy, who was generally sympathetic to naval concerns, regretted that the Republic had allowed the Ministry of Marine to become a sort of independent government within the government. It seemed to him that there were consistently two policies at work, the government's and "that of the rue Royale."²⁹ While moderate radicals recognized that, because of a necessary sense of hierarchy and discipline there was an inherent tension between military values and those of democracy, most socialists and the left wing of the radicals considered the naval oligarchs to be an active threat to the Republic. In the wake of the humiliation at the hands of the British at Fashoda and with the perceived lessons of the Boulanger affair in mind, wide reform of the navy was touted as a matter of national security: not only was the navy ineffective, but its elite was judged to be of doubtful loyalty to the Third Republic.³⁰

Generally speaking the navy considered itself to be somewhat above politics and, in the phrase of Jean-François Chanet, accepted the Republic and offered "in absence of any realistic monarchical alternative, the loyalty to the civil power that was demanded both by professional ethics and by simple patriotism."³¹ Yet the navy was not immune to the social turmoil in France and found itself caught between acceptance of the movement towards greater democracy and the fear of social decline its leaders thought it might engender. Chanet quotes an anonymous *capitaine de frégate* to illustrate the dilemmas naval officers felt. In the wake of the reforms of Pelletan, who encouraged direct appeals to the minister that avoided the chain of command, supported labor unions in the arsenals, refused to prosecute strikers in Marseille and introduced the 8-hour week, the officer in question sounded almost plaintive: "I am curious to know when

²⁹ Martinant de Preneuf, "La politique de républicanisation de la Marine à la Belle Époque," 34.

³⁰ Ibid, 42.

³¹ Jean-François Chanet, "Marine et politique de 1870 à 1914," *Revue d'histoire maritime* 14 (2011): 20.

people in France are going to understand that the navy is made for war, and that the arsenals were made for the navy.”³² Democracy, for Chanut, introduced an element of tension between the two parts of the naval motto “Honor and Country” (*honneur et patrie*), where “honor” embraced every part of naval tradition while “country” meant a duty of service to the civilian government, even if like that of Émile Combes it seemed to stand for everything inimical to the navy.

Under the ministries of Gaston Thomson and Alfred Picard a series of disasters struck the navy that ultimately brought down the Clemenceau government in 1909. Three cruisers were lost by running aground, the *Sully* in 1905 and the *Jean-Bart* and *Chanzy* in 1907. A submarine sank in 1905 and another in 1906. In three successive years from 1906 to 1908 the battleship *Couronne* experienced explosions on board. In 1907 the battleship *Iéna* blew up at the quayside in Toulon harbor, killing 117 sailors. The following year a gun turret on the cruiser *Latouche-Tréville* exploded, killing another 13. In a debate in the Chamber in October 1908 Delcassé suggested that in peacetime the navy had managed to incur the losses of a major defeat, and discredited the French fleet in the eyes of the whole world. This speech ended Thomson’s ministry. The following year, riding on the back of a report by a parliamentary commission investigating naval affairs, Delcassé launched a direct attack on Clemenceau. The commission had found the navy’s administration to be deficient, particularly in regard to munitions, but was also critical of the slow, defective work of the dockyards, poor organization of their workers, and the absence of repair facilities suitable for the new vessels under construction. Clemenceau’s ministry fell. Worse was yet to come. In 1911, a few days after a turret exploded on the cruiser *Gloire* killing six sailors, the battleship *Liberté* blew up at anchor in Toulon, damaging nearby

³² Ibid, 21. Taken from Anonyme “À Toulon,” *Revue des Deux Mondes* LXXIVe année, 21 (1 June 1904): 593-635.

ships, killing 226 and seriously injuring 136. In twelve years the navy had lost 500 men and a dozen vessels, including two battleships. *The Liberté* disaster had happened three weeks after a Presidential review of the fleet, given especial significance because of the Second Morocco Crisis in July. It also rather spoiled the effect of the judgement of the editors of *The Naval Annual* of 1912 that no navy had made greater progress during 1911 than the French.³³

Ironically, one of the unforeseen effects of Pelletan's ministry had been to increase the small number of those officers who clung to a frankly counter-revolutionary tradition. Critics of Clemenceau's administration suggested that the rue Royale had been recaptured by officers who were more or less hostile to the Republic, a criticism that continued until 1914. When Victor Augagneur took over the ministry, he found that there was a panoply of rules in place that were designed to undermine the authority of the minister. However, as he put it, "I hadn't become minister just so that I could put it on my visiting card."³⁴ By this time, however, the navy was more in step with a wider impulse towards conservative nationalism that brought Raymond Poincaré to the presidency in January 1913 and which allowed parliament to pass a law the following July increasing compulsory military service to a period of three years. By this time, too, having become Minister of Marine in March 1911, Delcassé had been able to take advantage of the twin shocks of the German gunboat *Panther* appearing in Agadir and the destruction of the *Liberté* to get a law passed providing for a large program of naval construction.³⁵ Thanks to the action of de Lapeyrière and Delcassé, according to Étienne Taillemite, by 1914 the navy had revived both materially and in terms of morale.³⁶ With the outbreak of war it seemed both

³³ Martin Motte, "La Royale sans le roi: le déclin naval français vu par Charles Maurras," *Revue d'histoire maritime* 14 (2011): 67-68; Halpern, *The Mediterranean Naval Situation*, 53-57.

³⁴ Martinant de Preneuf, "La politique de républicanisation de la Marine à la Belle Époque," 59.

³⁵ Motte, "La Royale sans le roi: le déclin naval français vu par Charles Maurras," 80-81.

³⁶ Taillemite, *L'Histoire ignorée de la marine française*, 391.

reconciled internally and in step with the mood of the country. And then the *Léon Gambetta* went down.

The Conservative Triumph Over Left Wing Radicalism in the Navy

Even before the war, the Industrial Revolution had slowly been changing the profile of naval personnel. The introduction of steam required mechanics and firemen, electricity required electricians, and developments in gunnery required a greater technical expertise in its users. In other words, the navy was becoming more complicated and the traditional source of manpower, the inscription maritime, was not up to the task of providing sufficient numbers of trained technicians, in part because of the lack of industrialization of the Breton coastal areas. Therefore the navy found itself in the uncomfortable position of having to recruit from unionized industrial labor from the regions of the French Interior. In the words of Martin Motte, “industrialization brought class warfare to the navy.”³⁷

Interestingly some of the criticism of the navy before the First World War had revolved around what was seen as an unhealthy relationship with capital interests. Charmes was critical of the relationships between navy, conservative politicians and industry that underwrote the supposed battleship imperative, a cause later taken up by the Minister of Marine Pelletan that was not entirely without foundation. Paul Doumer, deputy for the Aisne, Minister of Finance in 1895, president of the Budget Committee in 1902, member of the extra-parliamentary committee that investigated Pelletan’s time at the rue Royale, ferocious critic of the former Minister of Marine – it was Doumer who dubbed Pelletan a “national peril” - and ardent advocate of the battleship fleet, became vice-president of the mining and metal conglomerate that was the *Union*

³⁷ Motte, *Une éducation géostratégique: la pensée navale française de la jeune école à 1914*, 18.

des industries minières et métallurgiques in 1911.³⁸ When Pelletan cancelled the construction of the battleships *Liberté*, *Justice* and *Vérité*, whose very names reflected the growing republican influence in government, he justified the decision as being one way to challenge the recurrent conflicts of interest that afflicted a part of the high command, the steel industry and certain politicians who specialized in naval affairs.³⁹

Two of the most prolific writers in the *Jeune École* tradition and disciples of Charmes were Paul Fontin and Lieutenant Mathieu-Jean-Marie Vignot. Journalist Paul Fontin, naval editor to the *Nouvelle revue* and former private secretary to Admiral Aube wrote under the pseudonym Commandant Z. Lieutenant Mathieu-Jean-Marie Vignot, former ADC to Aube wrote as H. Montéchant.⁴⁰ Together in 1891 they produced *Tomorrow's Naval Wars* in which they suggested that the ultimate imperative was the nation's security, even if this meant placing orders overseas to achieve it to the detriment of special interests in France.⁴¹ Going perhaps even further than Charmes, Montéchant also argued that the battleship navy might already have disappeared, were it not for "considerable vested interests" linked closely to its continuing existence.⁴² Indeed to many it seemed that the relationship between the state naval arsenals and private industry scarcely worked to the benefit of the navy. Édouard Lockroy considered that the French metal industries represented a pitiless cartel that imposed upon the navy its ideas, its products and its prices.⁴³

After the war the navy had its own reasons for being suspicious of the Left. Until 1918 sailors had accepted their position with stoic resignation, assuming that the war's end would

³⁸ Martinant de Preneuf, "La politique de républicanisation de la Marine à la Belle Époque," 51.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ropp, *The Development of a Modern Navy*, 167; Røksund *The Jeune École: The Strategy of the Weak*, 97.

⁴¹ Paul Jean Fontin and Henry Vignot, *Les guerres navales de demain* (Paris: Berger-Levaul, 1891), 155.

⁴² Taillemite, *L'Histoire ignorée de la marine française*, 367.

⁴³ Lockroy, *La marine de guerre: Six mois rue Royale*, 52.

bring with it a return to France and demobilization. When in 1919 the reality turned out to be a deployment of undetermined duration to the Black Sea in support of White Russian counterrevolutionaries, however, the result was disillusionment and, beginning on 19 April 1919, mutiny. The initial crisis was resolved when the commander of the Second Squadron, Vice-Admiral Jean-François Charles Amet, consented to send at least some of his ships back to France.

Although a minority of the protestors hoped to take advantage of men's grievances to promote a full-blown communist revolution, nothing of the sort materialized at first and in fact the French navy's experience was not exclusive. In the Royal Navy, refusals to weigh anchor for Russia were recorded at Invergordon, Rosyth, Devonport and Portsmouth. At Milford Haven, eight men of the gunboat *Kilbride* were court-martialed under charges of "non-violent mutiny."⁴⁴ In the French navy, however, a second wave of indiscipline erupted during the summer and fall of 1919. This was not limited to the Black Sea Squadron, but involved others in the Mediterranean and at the base at Bizerte. Ultimately the entire French navy was affected.

According to Philippe Masson, the second wave of mutinies was colored by the atmosphere of revolutionary tension then present in France. This was marked by a wave of strikes, "by the impassioned interest of the masses in the Bolshevik movement, and by the crisis of the Socialist Party, overwhelmed by the 'ultra-left' ...led by Pericat's Communist Party...[which] wanted to incite a full-scale Bolshevik revolution in France."⁴⁵ Radicals on the battleship *France* wanted, in company with the *Jean Bart*, to sail to either Toulon or Marseille, where they would present themselves with the red flag and launch a revolutionary movement

⁴⁴ Leonard F. Guttridge, *Mutiny. A History of Naval Insurrection* (Annapolis MD: Naval Institute Press, 2006), 171.

⁴⁵ Philippe Masson, "The French Naval Mutinies, 1919," in *Naval Mutinies of the Twentieth Century: An International Perspective*, ed. Christopher Bell and Bruce Elleman (London: Routledge, 2004), 98.

supported by the army and the masses of the working class. In June 1919 ships mutinied at Cherbourg, Brest, Lorient and Toulon - including the battleship *Provence*, flagship of Admiral de Bon of later Washington fame. At Bizerte the battleship *Voltaire* mutinied, in the gulf of Petras the battle-cruiser *Guichen*, and there were further incidents in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Black Sea.

Although the movement ended in failure, and although Minister of the Marine Georges Leygues was unwilling to accept that, as Admiral Amet suggested, the main cause for the unrest was Bolshevik propaganda emanating from mainland France, it cannot have escaped the notice of naval authorities that most of the mutineers were not those who had been in the service since 1914. For the most part they were volunteers or recruits who had entered in 1917 and 1918 from the interior industrial regions of France. In total about a hundred sentences were passed down on mutineers ranging from a few months to fifteen years in jail, which is modest compared to the scale of the problem. While there is little available information about what became of the vast majority of mutineers – one might assume that they were demobilized as quickly as the navy could arrange – one thing that does emerge from a study of the interwar service is the popularity of Charles Maurras.

L'Action française, the monarchist nationalist movement with which Maurras became synonymous, emerged, according to Frederick Brown, from the founding prejudice “that Dreyfus could never be absolved of treason and that his unabsolvable guilt served the supremely useful purpose of restoring ‘national sentiment.’”⁴⁶ By 1904 what this meant was a disavowal of the Republic. In Brown’s rendition of the movement, “Salvation lay on the far side of 1789, in the France of monarchs, when rationalism had yet to undermine an organic nation and ‘cosmopolite’

⁴⁶ Frederick Brown, *The Embrace of Unreason: France 1914-1940* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014), 103.

to become a French noun; when Money (almost always capitalized in Maurras's works and implicitly Jewish or Protestant) did not ventriloquize through a parliament; and when the rights of society still prevailed over the individualism propagated by eighteenth century intellectuals. The Republic was feckless for speaking in many voices."⁴⁷

There were a number of reasons why the French navy should be attracted to Maurras. Not the least of which was the interest Maurras showed in the French navy. Before the First World War the French naval advantage over the Triple Alliance had fallen from 100 percent to 12 percent between 1871 and 1878. Even more shocking, their fleets were approaching parity with France at a time in 1879 when the French naval budget was increased to 217 billion francs, more than the combined budgets of Italy, Germany, Austria and Russia.⁴⁸ Between 1895 and 1905, the moment when Germany took from France the position of second biggest navy in the world, the German budget was 800 million francs smaller than the French.⁴⁹ Charles Maurras took up these themes. Quoting statistics taken from *Le Temps*, "official organ of the republican government," Maurras made reference to the years 1907 to 1909, years that, according to him, confirmed the most somber prognostications of the likely results of the ministries of Lanessan and Pelletan and which had witnessed a series of naval disasters. In that period France had laid down seventeen destroyers. Germany, meantime, had laid down ten battleships, three battle-cruisers, six armored cruisers, thirty-six destroyers and eight submarines. France had become the fifth ranked naval power in the world, "below...even Japan."⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Ibid, 104.

⁴⁸ Motte, *Une éducation géostratégique*, 125.

⁴⁹ Motte, "La Royale sans le roi..." 73.

⁵⁰ Charles Maurras, *Kiel et Tanger, 1895-1905: La République française devant l'Europe* (Paris: Nouvelle Librairie Nationale, 1914), 70.

There were also personal reasons for Maurras's interest in the navy. He was born in the Provençal town of Martigues that was linked by a canal to the Mediterranean. Martigues, Maurras was pleased to recall, had provided 800 men for Suffren's campaign in the Indian Ocean during the War of American Independence. Closer to home, Maurras' grandfather had commanded a frigate at the Battle of Navarino and had served under the Prince de Joinville, third son of Louis-Phillipe. Maurras' mother had been particularly struck as a girl by a visit the prince made to the family home.⁵¹ Unsurprisingly Maurras' childhood dream had been to enter the *École Navale*, an aspiration shattered by the onset of deafness at age 14. For Maurras, also, the navy also became inseparable from a sense of nostalgia for royalty.⁵² There was, indeed, as he sported a lifelong Vandyke beard, said to have been "a hint of Richelieu" about him.⁵³

For Maurras, the decline of the French navy before the First World War was the symptom *par excellence* of the sickness that was democracy. Maurras concluded that the reversals suffered by the Republic, such as the perceived humiliation at Fachoda in 1898, came about because by its very nature it was incapable of formulating coherent policy, being too distracted by what he referred to as "the little civil war" of parliamentary and electoral politics. Deprived of continuity and perseverance, democratic republics simply did not have the wherewithal with which to define and achieve specific foreign policy goals.⁵⁴ For the navy this was, argued Maurras, catastrophic. With the Foreign Office unable to decide whether it wanted to prepare for war with Great Britain or the Triple Alliance, the navy did not know whether to build cruisers to interdict British trade, or battleships to protect the Mediterranean. What it ended up with, therefore, was a fleet that was unable to do either.

⁵¹ Brown, *The Embrace of Unreason: France 1914-1940*, 94.

⁵² Motte, "La Royale sans le roi..." 66.

⁵³ Brown, *The Embrace of Unreason: France 1914-1940*, 107.

⁵⁴ Maurras, *Kiel et Tanger*, 12.

As Martin Motte points out, Maurrassian neo-monarchism represented only one small element in a nationalist movement that contained other strains and other personalities who were for the most part republicans, men like Péguy or Maurice Barrès. The movement's daily newspaper attracted only 30,000 subscribers in 1912 at a time when the Catholic *La Croix* had ten times that number. *L'Action française*, however, was the only component of the movement that had articulated a coherent doctrine and which boasted after 1906 the services of an Institute that served as a kind of "anti-Sorbonne." Its influence was therefore magnified out of proportion to its size and drew the attention of men like former Ministers of Foreign Affairs Gabriel Hanotaux and Émile Flourens. Re-released at the time of the Second Moroccan Crisis, *Kiel et Tanger* helped foster the growing mood of nationalism that allowed Delcassé's naval program of 1912 to pass and which brought Raymond Poincaré to the presidency in January 1913. Delcassé himself was drawn to *Action française* towards the end of his life, despite the fact that Maurras had described his role in the Dreyfus Affair as "criminal."⁵⁵

Kiel et Tanger's emphasis on political stability represented for some a re-articulation of Admiral de Cuverville's emphasis after the Battle of Tsushima on what was a recurring theme in naval circles, that "navies cannot be improvised."⁵⁶ Even when the navy was unable to determine what kind of navy it should be, Admiral de Cuverville's epigram was something they all agreed on. "In a navy, nothing is improvised, neither the ships nor the men," wrote the Prince de Joinville in 1852.⁵⁷ None other than Georges Clemenceau ascribed the phrase to Admiral Aube: "The axiom remains true: in the navy nothing can be improvised."⁵⁸ Admiral Darrieus

⁵⁵ Ibid, 159.

⁵⁶ Vice-Amiral de Cuverville, *Les leçons de la Guerre: Port Arthur – Tsoushima, Ce qu'il faut à la Marine* (Paris: Berger-Levrault, 1906), 126.

⁵⁷ Prince de Joinville, *Essais sur la marine française* (Paris: Meline, 1852), 193.

⁵⁸ Georges Clemenceau, "The French Navy II," *The North American Review* 164:484 (March 1897): 308.

used it several times in his book on naval strategy in 1907,⁵⁹ and it was reiterated by Mahan with reference to the continuity of naval policy of the British Government. Interestingly Mahan reflected on the question that taxed Maurras: “Whether a democratic government will have the foresight, the keen sensitiveness to national tradition and credit, the willingness to insure its prosperity by adequate outpouring of money in times of peace, all of which are necessary for military preparation, remains open to question.”⁶⁰ For Maurras, it could not. More generally the insistence upon governmental stability as a prerequisite of successful naval policy became a central theme of French naval historiography after the First World War, not least in the work of Johannès Tramond and André Reussner, such as *Eléments d’histoire maritime et coloniale contemporaine*, produced for the *Service historique de la Défense* (SHD) in 1924.⁶¹

Motte also argues that naval personnel, like their civilian counterparts, were also attracted to *Action française* even before the First World War for reasons that on the face of it had little to do with the institution of which they formed a part. He cites the case of *enseigne de vaisseau* Gabolde, killed in a fire on board the *Liberté*, and hailed by Maurras as a “fervent Catholic” as well as a “patriot of *Action française*,” suggesting for Motte that Gabolde’s attachment to a nationalist movement was prompted as much by a sense of protecting his religion from Republican assaults as it was from protecting France from its enemies. Motte sees a similar sensibility in the claims of *lieutenant de vaisseau* Dominique-Pierre Dupouey in 1914 that a growing number of his colleagues were feeling a sense of “real disgust” for the Republic, while thanking Maurras for embodying “the vein of decency and national honor.” This was written in a

⁵⁹ Gabriel Darrieus, *La guerre sur mer: stratégie et tactique. La doctrine* (Paris: A. Challamel, 1907), 123.

⁶⁰ A.T. Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power upon History, 1660-1783* (New York: Dover Publications Edition, 1987), 67.

⁶¹ Motte, “La Royale sans le roi...,” 83. See also Martin Motte and Jean de Préneuf “L’Écriture de l’histoire navale française à l’époque contemporaine: un modèle national?,” *Revue historique des Armées* 257 (2009): 27-43.

letter forwarded to Maurras by André Gide after its author's death at Nieuport in 1915.⁶² In other words, there is evidence that sailors were drawn in general terms to a Maurrassian campaign for the virtues of order over anarchy and its criticism of excessive republican emphasis on individualism, rather than by the details of the political ideology of *Action française*. Similarly revealing for Motte is the case of Admiral Antoine Schwerer, head of the *Ligue d'Action française* between the wars, whose memoirs make little mention of Maurras' ideas, but rail against the "demolition of the navy" undertaken by the Pelletan ministry and the attacks orchestrated against the navy over the Dreyfus affair, at a time when the navy had demonstrated its loyalty to the regime. It was the feeling in the navy that it was selected for victimization because of the traditions accumulated over centuries as *La Royale*, even though perhaps most of its officers were – as Darlan is said to have been⁶³ – convinced republicans.⁶⁴

Jean-Baptiste Bruneau suggests that naval officers denied any affiliation with *Action française* after the Second World War because of the implications of collaboration under the Occupation such affiliation might have suggested.⁶⁵ That such a connection might be drawn is not surprising as Charles Maurras was put on trial on the 25 January 1945 as the man who, in the words of Arlette Grebel, covering the trial for *France-Libre*: "...encouraged the repression of patriots, denounced many communists and Gaullists, stirred up persecutions of the Jews."⁶⁶ Thus the navy disavowed Maurras, and historians took their cue from this disavowal. It should be pointed out, in passing, that as Diane Rubenstein put it: "It was Maurras's article propounding

⁶² Eugen Weber, *Action française: Royalism and Reaction in Twentieth Century France* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1962), 87.

⁶³ See, *inter alia*, Alain Darlan, *L'amiral Darlan parle...* (Paris: Amiot-Dumont, 1953), 23; George E. Melton, *Darlan: Admiral and Statesman of France, 1881-1942* (Westport CT: Praeger, 1998), 5-6; Hervé Coutau-Bégarie and Claude Huan, *Darlan* (Paris: Fayard, 1989), 117.

⁶⁴ Motte, "La Royale sans le roi..." 84.

⁶⁵ Jean-Baptiste Bruneau, "La Royale et le roi: les officiers de marine et l'Action française, entre appartenance et impregnation," *Revue d'histoire maritime* 14 (2011): 93-116.

⁶⁶ Alice Kaplan, *The Collaborator: The Trial & Execution of Robert Brasillach* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 70.

Pétainist dogma that formed the basis of the prosecutor's case and not the sum of Maurras's works, most of which were forbidden by the Occupation authorities.”⁶⁷

Struck by the disappointment that officers like *lieutenant de vaisseau* Dupouey felt towards the Republic (ironically he served on the *République*), *Action française* tailored its message for a maritime audience. Its appeal was not without paradoxes but, as Bruneau points out, just because Georges Leygues proved between the wars to be an ardent supporter of the navy didn't rob the fundamental thesis of *Action française* of its credibility in the navy's eyes. To escape the implications of this paradox, *Action française* emphasized the admirable qualities of French naval personnel, contact with whom had a beneficial effect on civilian leadership that otherwise would have had nothing to recommend it. Thus it was the very royalness of *La Royale* that allowed it to survive even in the adverse circumstances which saw it in the service of a Republic. In addition, in the passionate political environment of the interwar years, *Action française* resuscitated the specter of the communist menace, a theme, as we have seen, that was likely to resonate with the naval high command. At the same time, Maurras moved away from his traditional anti-Empire stance to embrace a position that was more in line with the strategic resolutions of disparate positions that was currently taking place within the navy.

Maritime propagandists for *Action française* like Pierre Varillon, Jean Gautreau (writing under the pseudonym 'Captain John Frog') and Jacques Monlaü were embraced by the navy, not necessarily through any political conviction, but because of the need to raise the public profile of the navy for the purposes of recruitment. Publicity, no doubt from diverse sources, enjoyed considerable success, with the number of recruits in 1927 passing 6,000, or double that of the

⁶⁷ Diane Rubenstein, "Publish and perish: the 'epuration' of French intellectuals," *Journal of European Studies* 23:89 (March 1993): 71.

previous year. Similarly naval officer candidates increased from 275 in 1926 to 377 in 1927, reaching 471 in 1929.⁶⁸

While public expressions of political views or adherence to political organizations was explicitly forbidden by the circulars of the 30 December 1873 and the 15 November 1905, Bruneau points out that it is more difficult to discern what opinions naval personnel might express in the privacy of their own vessels. One point of interest, however, is that all naval vessels had a free subscription to the *Action française* daily newspaper. Furthermore the Popular Front minister, Gasnier-Duparc, felt constrained to remind officers in 1936 of their duty of political neutrality, suggesting that it was sometimes best observed in the breach. As late as July 1939, Admiral Lacaze, a former Minister of Marine, christened the new Étrel lifeboat *Vice-Amiral Schwerer* after the head of the *Ligue d'Action française*. This might be interpreted as showing a certain official approbation for the man who informed a commission of enquiry into the events of the 6 February 1936 that “our goal is to overthrow the Republic and bring back the monarchy.”⁶⁹

According to Chalmers Hood:

In a strictly hierarchical institution like the French navy, a few spokesmen set the tone and behaviour patterns that their subordinates emulated. Leaders sought intellectual conformity in the navy beyond that normally required in military organizations. Darlan and [Darlan's executive assistant Admiral Louis] de La Monneraye spoke of the need to create a semi-official ideology, while Schwerer addressed the need to purge officers who could not agree with existing opinions of the naval general staff. Georges Débat explained how this kind of pressure influenced the behaviour of midshipmen and junior officers at the École Navale and in the fleet. In his opinion, an officer could not survive either professionally or socially if he did not fit the well-defined intellectual mould established for naval officers. The ships' wardrooms served as informal classrooms where the officer corps could “create in its bosom a strong unity of opinion.”⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Hervé Coutau-Bégarie and Claude Huan, *Darlan* (Paris: Fayard, 1989), 59.

⁶⁹ Bruneau, “La Royale et le roi...,” 107.

⁷⁰ Chalmers Hood, “The French Navy and Parliament between the Wars,” *The International History Review* 6:3 (August 1984): 400.

Another theme that infused the naval officer corps between the wars was that of maritime exceptionalism. This in and of itself was not new and had been expressed by such diverse authorities as A.T. Mahan, Édouard Lockroy and François Darlan. For Mahan “[the navy] acts on an element strange to most writers, as its members have been from time immemorial a strange race apart, without prophets of their own, neither themselves nor their calling understood...”⁷¹ Lockroy was a minister who understood this. He characterized seafarers like this: “Religious because he is respectful of all traditions, royalist at least by temperament, since he has the habit of instant and unquestioning obedience, the maritime world can only feel a mixture of horror and fear for parliament and representative government. He is too used to seeing authority personified in a commander to admire or even understand the subtle constitutional contrivances that divide power and contrive to share it out in more or less equal doses between two assemblies and a president. Such complications appear to him as the very essence of anarchy.”⁷²

It was a characterization welcomed between the wars by the *Revue maritime* and one deployed in an idealized way to win and preserve recruits with a discourse that, in particular, exalted the values of an officer corps as the final redoubt of the nation’s moral fabric. This remained true after the outbreak of war and even after the fall of France in the columns of *l’Action française*: on 19 June 1940 Pierre Varillon felt confident of the leadership role the navy would play, and that France would follow with “invincible hope.”⁷³ In the 1930s, however, Bruneau suggests that this ethos of exceptionalism may well have provided a gateway to an entire anti-democratic ideology. To give force to this contention, Bruneau quotes Paul Chack,

⁷¹ Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History, 1660-1783*, 21.

⁷² Lockroy, *La marine de guerre: Six mois rue Royale*, 62.

⁷³ Pierre Varillon, “Le rôle de la marine française dans le relèvement national,” *L’Action française* 171-183 (19 June – 1 July 1940): 1.

writing in the late 1930s: “One ends up wondering whether by occupation you have more in common with your English, Italian, German or American comrades than with your average compatriot, as defined by some politician in love with mediocrity, this mediocrity that he personifies but which you will leave behind because you will be part of the elite, for you will be a sailor.”⁷⁴

Paul Chack, who entered the *École Navale* in 1893, was fire control officer on board the *Courbet* in 1914 and rose eventually to the rank of *capitaine de vaisseau*. In 1921 he was attached to the *Service historique de la Marine* as director of the *Revue maritime*. With the encouragement of none other than Admiral Castex he embarked upon a second career as a prolific writer of naval history, achieving considerable success. Among his titles were *La guerre des croiseurs* (1922) and *Les belles croisières françaises* (1929). Some considered him a sort of French Kipling.⁷⁵

Bruneau’s quotation comes from *Tu seras marin*, published in 1938, by which time Chack, convinced Anglophobe, had been seduced by the extreme right and joined Jacques Doriot’s *Parti Populaire Français*. In 1940 he became attached to the *Commissariat à l’information* and, with the German invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941, created and directed the *Comité d’action antibolchévique*. It was in this capacity that he appeared in anti-communist programs on Radio Paris alongside people such as Jacques Doriot, the writer Ramon Fernandez and Colonel Labonne, commandant of the *Légion des volontaires français contre le bolchévisme* (LVF).⁷⁶ Chack did not mince his words, promoting the anti-Bolshevik struggle as a kind of

⁷⁴ Bruneau, “La Royale et le roi,” 108.

⁷⁵ Henri Amouroux, *La grande histoire des Français après l’occupation: IX les règlements de comptes, Septembre 1944-Janvier 1945* (Paris: Robert Lafont, 1991), 223.

⁷⁶ Cl. Lévy, “L’Organisation de la propagande,” *Revue d’histoire de la Deuxième Guerre mondiale*, 64 (October 1966): 14.

public service. Citing Marshal Foch, in August 1941 he declared that “we must attack the heart of the sickness.” “We must,” he said on 19 July 1941, “fight the barbarian Asiatic hordes thrown into battle by the Jews of London and Moscow.” On 20 March 1942: “In the case of a Russian victory, the catastrophe that will come down on our heads will be comparable to the fall of Byzantium.”⁷⁷

Reporting on his trial for treason in December 1944, *Time* wrote: “Before the Paris Court of Justice stood white-haired Paul Chack, 68, Captain of the French Navy, once-honored veteran of World War I, author of patriotic children's books—and paid Vichy propagandist... Slowly, Presiding Judge Jean Pailhé read from editorials written by Chack for the *Paris Aujourd'hui*... ‘The Jewish gang behind the White House. . . . The English, who, Bible in hand, seek to destroy Europe. . . . Allied airmen who are nothing but flying assassins. . . .’” Witnesses testified that “Chack had received 68,000 francs a month from the Vichy Government, had founded a French ‘Aryan Club.’”⁷⁸ The Public Prosecutor, M. Vassard, called upon the jury to signal the highest punishment due for a French officer guilty of treason: to die before a French firing squad. As if to make the point that nothing was quite straightforward in wartime France, upon hearing the verdict condemning him to death, Chack put the emblem of a Commander of the *Légion d'honneur* to his lips before handing it to his lawyer.⁷⁹ In 2002 a re-edition of the fourth volume in a series of Chack’s works praised the work of *Tu seras marin* in attracting recruits to the pre-war navy. “Underpinned by his pride and sailor’s faith, this is precise, clear, elegant, instructive without being pedantic, neatly divided into numerous stories that are both linked and yet

⁷⁷ Pierre Mermet and Yves Maxime Danan, “Les thèmes de propagande après le 22 juin 1941,” *Revue d'histoire de la Deuxième Guerre mondiale* 64 (October 1966): 53.

⁷⁸ *Time* 45:1 (January 1945): 29.

⁷⁹ Amouroux, *La grande histoire des Français après l'occupation: IX les règlements de comptes*, 223.

independent, in short passionate, convincing...”⁸⁰ It doesn't mention that he was shot for treason in 1945.

It is worth reiterating Diane Rubenstein's point, confirmed by Bruneau, that *Action française* in the 1930s was a recognized institution and one which had an intellectual influence in conservative circles that were not always or even anti-republican. In the navy, Maurrassian sympathies may most often have been expressed in a generalized angst about the wider ills of society, fears of decadence, fears of communism, desire for social stability and leadership, all wrapped up in a mixture of nostalgia for some perceived maritime golden age and national pride. For Bruneau, while it is impossible to say definitively who in the navy supported *Action française*, there was nonetheless a very real dissemination of Maurrassian culture in the navy which “no doubt played a role in the support of officers for the National Revolution, whose reactionary aspects promised fulfillment of their dreams of a return to a golden age.” At the same time Maurrassian thought allowed naval officers to foster an image of themselves as an elite in internal exile, “the only ones to remain pure in a corrupted France.”⁸¹

Of course none of this necessarily implies an unconditional commitment to the policy of collaboration and Philippe Masson, for one, feels that Louis de Villefosse's claims that most officers were animated by a “hate for the Republic and Democracy in all its forms” is somewhat overdrawn.⁸² Certainly there is no evidence, contrary to the claims of William L. Shirer,⁸³ to suggest that the navy felt any attraction to the radicalized right-wing intellectual movement represented by the weekly review *Je Suis Partout*. Run by Maurras' former secretary Pierre

⁸⁰ Back cover of Paul Chack, *Marins à la bataille tome 4 Mer du Nord, 1914-1918* (Paris: Le gerfaut, 2002).

⁸¹ Bruneau, “La Royale et le roi...,” 114-115.

⁸² Philippe Masson, “La ‘belle marine’ de 1939”, in *Histoire Militaire de la France, Vol. III: De 1871 à 1940* ed. Guy Pedroncini, (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1992), 457.

⁸³ William L. Shirer, *The Collapse of the Third Republic: An Inquiry in to the Fall of France in 1940* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1969), 229. Shirer cites Weber (*Action française: Royalism and Reaction in Twentieth Century France* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1962), 508) who is specifically referring to the army.

Gaxotte, this included contributions from Robert Brasillach and Lucien Rebatet, both of whom had written for *L'Action française*, and formed part of a group that moved away from Maurras towards a growing fascination with Nazism.⁸⁴ Still, as Tony Judt put it: “What had been thought before 1940 could now be said, what had previously been said could now be done.”⁸⁵

Furthermore as the 1930s wore on, *l'Action française* itself became increasingly outspoken and overtly anti-Semitic. On the 13 February 1936 Léon Blum was dragged from his car on the Boulevard Saint-Germain and savagely beaten by royalist onlookers of the funeral cortege of right-wing historian Jacques Bainville. Many were widely believed to have been members of the *Action française* paramilitary *Camelots du Roi*. Maurras was indicted, convicted of incitement to murder and sentenced to four months in prison.⁸⁶ The year before he had opined on the front page of *l'Action française*: “Léon Daudet was altogether moderate, the other day, when he demanded the arrest of Léon Blum for his obviously subversive activities against French defense...The man should be shot, but in the back.”⁸⁷ When the Popular Front won the election in 1936, the headline in *l'Action française* ran: “France Under the Jew.”⁸⁸

Odious though it appears at the distance of eighty years, it is perhaps instructive to see how *Action française* was seen from the outside at the time. To the Socialist *Vorwärts* in Berlin, the movement was “beyond dispute the best led fighting organization in France, not excepting the working class itself”, and its members “energetic brutal and fanatical.” Its mouthpiece *l'Action française* was among “the French non-Socialist papers...incontestably the most interesting. It offers the most bizarre mixture of intelligence and vulgarity, science and

⁸⁴ Julian Jackson *France: The Dark Years, 1940-1944* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 79.

⁸⁵ Quoted in Frederic Spotts, *The Shameful Peace: How French Intellectuals Survived the Nazi Occupation* (New Haven CT, Yale University Press, 2008), 25.

⁸⁶ Brown, *The Embrace of Unreason*, 230; Shirer *The Collapse of the Third Republic*, 286.

⁸⁷ *l'Action française* 99 (9 April 1935): 1.

⁸⁸ *l'Action française* 157 (5 June 1936): 1.

stupidity.”⁸⁹ In Britain, meanwhile, D.W. Brogan wrote in *The Spectator* after the assault on Blum: “M. Maurras is now seventy, and for thirty years has been one of the most potent forces in moulding the mind of France. A whole generation has been marked by his thought, positively or negatively.” As for the supposed perpetrators of the attack: “[Maurras’] flat is guarded by *Camelots du roi*, who do their spell of duty with a zeal that is touching”; on 6 February 1934 these were, “if not the most numerous, the most skillful assailants of the police.” Brogan admits, however, that “even the tolerant French have found some of the attacks in the Action Française intolerably brutal.”⁹⁰

The New York Times coverage of the 1936 Maurras trial also seemed quite sympathetic to the septuagenarian. Maurras admitted that he had published the names of 140 Deputies and Senators who, he said, “should be struck down on the day their mad acts involved France in war.” The case for the State, said *The New York Times*, “contends that Mr. Maurras’s list was directly responsible for the assault on Mr. Blum by *misguided persons who took Mr. Maurras’s provocation literally.*” The defense, meanwhile, “pleaded that Mr. Maurras acted with patriotic motives and brought many witnesses who highly praised Mr. Maurras’s articles as having awakened French realization of the dangers into which politicians were leading the country.”⁹¹

Towards a Greater Synthesis

With the collapse of the naval treaty system in the mid-1930s France got the navy she wanted. What that navy looked like reflected the post-Great War synthesis of the Big Ship/Little Ship dialectic that had been on-going since the time of the *Jeune École* and most recently reinvigorated with the loss of the *Léon Gambetta* in 1915. Of that year Admiral Castex

⁸⁹ Quoted in Weber, *Action française*, 88.

⁹⁰ D.W. Brogan, “Charles Maurras and the Action Française,” *The Spectator* (21 February 1936): 11-12.

⁹¹ *The New York Times* (15 March 1936): N3 (my italics) .

estimated that the navy seemed to divide itself in to two parts, each entirely foreign to the other. On the one hand there was the fleet engaged in anti-submarine warfare, the fleet of destroyers, patrol boats, trawlers and aircraft that revealed itself to be active, enterprising and useful; on the other hand were the battleships, holed up in port behind steel nets, idle, useless and ripe for scrapping. Admiral Habert was even more direct. For him, the battleship-dominated fleet, scarcely fifty years old in conception, was defunct. According to Martin Motte, the Great War seemed to have demonstrated the primacy of *matériel* over traditional Mahanian theory: as far as naval strategy was concerned the airplane and the submarine meant that it was time to go back to the drawing board.⁹²

For *Capitaine de Frégate* Baret, also writing in the *Revue Maritime*, this was a question of a confrontation between historical and *matériel* schools of thought. In sociological terms Motte translates this into a clash between the traditional *Grand Corps* and the newcomers of the industrial age, a difference perpetuated by educational background and professional career paths divided between the *École de Guerre navale* and the specialized schools for technical officers. Baret, for one, rails against such distinctions: “Should there, then, be two categories of officers? An intolerable, even odious idea. It is, however, expressed in works of [naval] doctrine; in order to find it there one needs merely to be equipped with the ability to read.”⁹³

Castex, of course, did not agree with the analysis of the role of battle fleets in the Great War and set out to demolish the “legend” that had grown up around them.⁹⁴ He did, however, recognize that battleships no longer commanded the sea *per se*, although they remained the dominant force upon its surface. The invention of new weapons required that new defenses were

⁹² Motte, “L’après grande guerre dans la *Revue Maritime*,” 122-123.

⁹³ C.F. Baret, “Histoire et matériel,” *Revue maritime* (1920): 202.

⁹⁴ C.F. Raoul Castex, “Synthèse de la guerre sous-marine,” *Revue maritime* (1920): 480.

developed to combat them, which in practical terms meant specialized vessels to deal with threats from above or below the sea. The big question was what proportion of available resources to devote to each. The perception of the task of a navy in wartime moved away from the central idea of a fleet action to achieve command of the sea towards a more broad spectrum assault upon and defense of maritime communications. As this did not rule out the possibility of a fleet action, however, the battleship retained a place in the overall conception of what should make up a navy. This combination of orthodoxy and modernity was not singular to Castex, as Motte points out, but can be seen in the thoughts of Admiral Darrieus and *Capitaine de Corvette* Richard, hailed as a French Corbett.⁹⁵

It was also consistent with the strategic vision of François Darlan. What Admiral Darlan envisioned was an effective, balanced and homogenous fleet that recognized the necessity of reconciling the competing requirements of cost, speed, armor and armament. The battleship should remain the heart of the fleet, a logical conclusion given that the most likely adversaries, Germany and Italy, were building battleships. Although Darlan was not blind to the potential of airpower at sea, he considered it to be at too early a stage of development to risk undermining the balance of the fleet by embracing wholeheartedly untested technology. All of this reflected the newly emerging orthodoxy that was the product of post-war debates as well as the specific tasks assigned to the French navy in case of war: to protect Mediterranean links with North Africa and the transoceanic trade routes.⁹⁶

The reconciliation of ideas was itself reflected in the changing face of naval personnel. Through the use of radio and teleprinters the navy was at the cutting edge of communications, much in advance of the other service branches and recruitment reflected its new technical

⁹⁵ Motte, 'L'après grande guerre dans la *Revue Maritime*,' 138-39.

⁹⁶ Coutau-Bégarie and Huan, *Darlan*, 87-89.

requirements. The traditional maritime regions provided fewer officer recruits – 30 per cent between 1935 and 1937, compared with 43 per cent in 1910 – while those from military or maritime backgrounds fell from 44 to 27 per cent. Many were now the sons of bureaucrats, engineers or members of the white collar managerial classes.⁹⁷ By 1939 the navy had become middle class in composition, if not necessarily in outlook.

Perhaps significantly, none of the admirals who rose to prominence under Vichy served on board battleships during the First World War. Abrial served on a patrol boat until 1917 when he transferred to anti-submarine duties. Robert, Platon, Auphan, Marquis, Bléhaut and Decoux all served on destroyers or submarines or both. Derrien, Michelier and Darlan served ashore. Esteva served on the cruiser *Jeanne d'Arc* during the Dardanelles campaign. De Laborde was involved in naval aviation. Significantly also, however, anyone who attended the *École navale* before 1913 was trained on board the *Borda*, a sailing ship built in 1853, also the last commissioned French naval vessel to be armed with muzzle-loading canon. Thus modernity and nostalgia for a golden age were married in the generation of officers arising between the wars. This nostalgia for a disappearing world, suggests Jean-Baptiste Bruneau, was far from being restricted to the personnel of the fighting navy. The very year that the battleship *Dunkerque* was launched, the Musée de l'Orangerie in Paris held a retrospective exhibition in praise of the navy under sail entitled *À la Gloire de la marine à Voile*. Such widespread nostalgia, he suggests, also explains the popularity of the works of Paul Chack, which describe a kind of naval war that no longer existed and whose passing he regretted.⁹⁸

Bruneau continues: “That the period during which France acquired the most homogenous and modern fleet in her entire history should also be that where nostalgic distortions appeared in

⁹⁷ Masson, “La ‘belle marine’ de 1939,” 457.

⁹⁸ Bruneau, “La Royale et le roi...,” 113.

the shrillest fashion surely is not pure coincidence. All this unfolded as if these distortions found their source in this technical development, as if by way of compensation the very acceptance of the modern world involved an inflated valuation of its opposite, which was invoked more and more just as technical progress placed it beyond reach.”⁹⁹ That the navy was imbued of a kind of Maurrassian culture, Bruneau concludes, no doubt was one reason why so many naval officers supported Pétain’s National Revolution with its reactionary promises of a return to a golden age.

The Triumph of Conservative Technocracy

If there was a meeting of minds between old and new in the navy, something similar was happening more widely in French society in the 1920s and 1930s even as the political extremes of traditional politics became increasingly polarized. This, too, was not unconnected with industrialization and modernization, although in fact even before the upheavals of industrialization the ongoing search for a better way to order society had turned towards science for solutions. Henri de Saint-Simon suggested that had the “men who brought about the revolution” considered who was fittest to govern the country “[they] would have reached the conclusion that the scientists, artists and leaders of industrial enterprises are the men who should be entrusted with administrative power, that is to say, with the responsibility for managing the national interests; and that the functions of government should be limited to maintaining public order.”¹⁰⁰ Over time and with the active encouragement of graduates of the *École Polytechnique*, originally established in 1794 to train a scientific elite, an idealized version of such people developed under the generalized rubric of “engineer.” One of the signal qualities of

⁹⁹ Ibid, 114.

¹⁰⁰ Keith Taylor ed., *Henri Saint-Simon (1760-1825): Selected Writings on Science, Industry and Social Organization* (London: Holmes & Meier, 1975), 102.

the “engineer” was “professionalism” which, says Nimrod Amzalak, “postulated complete neutrality on any matter not pertaining directly to technical efficiency.”¹⁰¹

By the 1920s, Amzalak suggests, the organized power of French engineers “envisioned an extension of their professional ethos into the realm of politics.” Drawing as they did upon representatives of a broad ideological spectrum, it was their “professionalism” that allowed the creation of a “value-free zone where efficient management replaces both collective traditions and personal ambitions as the prime mover of professional activity.”¹⁰² Predicting an era when technology would dominate society, in December 1929 Jean Luchaire, sometime “Young Turk” of the Radical Party, suggested in *Notre Temps* that at such a time it was only natural that “the direction of the state will be in the hands of delegates appointed by the technicians according to criteria of competence.”¹⁰³ From the neo-Socialist Left, Marcel Déat in his 1930 work *Perspectives Socialistes* came to similar conclusions, as did a plethora of journals dealing with the relation between scientific management and politics.

The technocratic tendencies of non-conformist politicians of all political shades found an affinity around a central core of ideas. A starting point was that the French political system did not work and that professional politicians should be replaced in both legislative and executive roles by non-political technical experts. The executive should be strengthened at the expense of the legislature. A sense of “nation” should be fostered by expanding the role of technicians as an intermediary conduit between classes. The economy should be rationalized. Anyone opposing these ideas should be considered enemies. Especially Communists.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹ Nimrod Amzalak, *Fascists and Honourable Men: Contingency and Choice in French Politics, 1918-1945* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 58.

¹⁰² Ibid, 64.

¹⁰³ Ibid, 85.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid p 95

It was a set of ideas that managed to bridge the generation gap. *Notre Temps* had been established in 1927 by Jean Luchaire, calling for the creation of a bloc of those belonging to the younger generations and aiming to assume control of the Radical Party and shape it to their views. These views separated them from the generation that had fought the war. Luchaire, who had spent the war in Florence, was clear that the political struggle between conservative André Tardieu and left-leaning Radical Edouard Daladier, both veterans, was not the struggle of the younger generation. Guy Crouzet, a contributor to *Notre Temps*, wrote in 1930 that “[we] could believe in 1919 that the veterans would regenerate the world, we were ready to take them as leaders and as guides: in 1930 it is too late.”¹⁰⁵ Luchaire believed in technocracy, however, and veterans associations put forward demands for reforms that would ensure that the French political system and its personnel would be supervised by experts and professionals.¹⁰⁶

In 1934, by now leader of the *Parti Socialiste de France* (PSF), Marcel Déat initiated the *Comité de Plan*, aiming to mobilize support from such diverse sources as the CGT union and Colonel de la Roque’s *Croix de Feu* with a manifesto produced in 1935 that argued the complementarity of capitalism and socialism and urged that power of government be placed in the hands of qualified technicians. Another “planist” initiative that sought to unify diverse elements of left and right was the *Plan du 9 juillet*.

Many of the tendencies that groups in the 1920s and 1930s represented were fused together in the agenda of the X-Crise group that emanated initially from graduates of the *École Polytechnique*. By 1933 X-Crise, besides its “centrist” founders, included neo-liberals like Jacques Rueff and Henri Michel, as well as Marxists such as Louis Vallon and Jules Moch.

¹⁰⁵ Robert Wohl, *The Generation of 1914* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), 35.

¹⁰⁶ Amzalak, *Fascists and Honourable Men*, 82.

Speakers at its functions included well known luminaries of the technocratic tendency such as Georges Vallois, Marcel Déat, René Belin of the CGT and Ernest Mercier, founder of the *Redressement Français*, which in the 1920s had promoted “a new political culture based on authority, responsibility, collaboration and productivity.”¹⁰⁷ One of X-Crise’s founders, Jean Coutrot, suggested that the transfer of all economic responsibilities to professional specialists might be achieved by a provisory dictatorship, similar to the model provided by ancient Rome. After the shattering events of the 6 February 1934 the non-conformists of every hue were united in their opposition to the political status quo.

When the Matignon Accords, by ignoring the role of middle-management cadres, emphasized the bipartite relationship between employer and worker, a number of movements developed that tended to assert the position of the engineer as a neutral arbiter between labor and capital; as the bearer of non-ideological solutions to industrial problems, the engineer promised to transcend class conflict. It is scarcely surprising then that this milieu provided a receptive audience for the various currents of thinking — whether planism, the personalism of Emmanuel Mounier,¹⁰⁸ or social Catholicism — that sought to define a “third way” in the 1930s. Furthermore, for Jackie Clarke: “Three publications by prominent engineers can also be seen as indicators of the post-1936 preoccupation with the social role of the engineer: the first was Coutrot’s double-volume *Leçons de juin 1936/L’humanisme économique*; the second, a revised edition of Georges Lamirand’s *Le rôle social de l’ingénieur*; and the third, Raoul Dautry’s *Métier d’homme*. That Dautry’s book was part of the *Présences* collection edited by Daniel-Rops (author of *Le monde sans âme*) and carried a preface by Paul Valéry should be seen as further

¹⁰⁷ Amzalak, *Fascists and Honourable Men*, 78.

¹⁰⁸ See Philip Nord, *France’s New Deal: From the Thirties to the Postwar Era* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 36 ff.

evidence that the preoccupations of technicians went to the heart of intellectual concerns in the 1930s.”¹⁰⁹

Clear on what they were against, while they were deciding what they were for, however, Amzalak argues that the Parisian corridors of power were quietly being taken over by “professionals”: “engineers and technical experts issued from both the prestigious technical *Grands Écoles* and the various *Écoles des Arts et Métiers*...None of them were politicians.” When in 1935 Pierre Laval assumed full executive powers he instituted a series of reforms based on the recommendations of a think-tank composed of economists and engineers, the most prominent of whom, men like Jean Coutrot, Raoul Dautry and Jacques Branger, were associated with X-Crise. Under the Popular Front government another swathe of X-Crise men were absorbed into government through the new Ministry of National Economy headed by Charles Spinasse, who had himself given a presentation at one of the group’s meetings. Jean Coutrot was appointed to head the *Centre national de l’organisation scientifique du travail* (COST), created under the auspices of the new *Ministère de l’économie nationale* to promote the rationalization of the French economy. Coutrot was the founder of the interdisciplinary think tank the *Centre d’études des problèmes humains* (CEPH) and as such had called for universal rationalization, not merely rationalization of production, identifying the CEPH as a natural extension of the work undertaken by the engineer economists of X-Crise. COST personnel were drawn from X-Crise, many of them professional engineers.

In 1938 Daladier’s government brought with it another wave of ‘professional’ appointments, first in Paul Reynaud’s Ministry of Finance, later in Raoul Dautry’s Ministry of Armament. The latter contained representatives of almost every significant grouping of

¹⁰⁹ Jackie Clarke, “Engineering a New Order in the 1930s: The Case of Jean Coutrot,” *French Historical Studies* 24:1 (Winter 2001): 70-71.

engineers and technocrats from the previous two decades, not surprisingly since Dautry had himself been associated with most of them. Paul Reynaud's government in 1940 saw a peak in recruitment of professionals to a variety of ministries. Reynaud, says Philip Nord, too "had a predilection for experts, though experts, it should be said, of a none too reliable political orientation."¹¹⁰ According to Amzalak, moreover, it "was no longer just the staff of the Ministries that was selected according to 'professional' criteria but the actual ministers." Thus the Ministry of Information was headed by a journalist, Jean Prouvost. *Inspecteur de finances* Yves Bouthillier took over at Finance. Judge Frémicourt had the Ministry of Justice. General Colson took the Ministry of War. And at the Ministry of Naval Affairs was Admiral Darlan.¹¹¹

The technocratic leanings of the late Third Republic, although leading to some successes – Raoul Dautry's tenure at the Ministry of Armament being the outstanding exemplar – also had its troubling side. In Nord's analysis: "...this was a conservative *redressement* that dictated to labor more than embracing it, that pushed hard for the most traditional family values, that effected its will through command and decree law."¹¹² It cannot come as too much of a surprise to discover that many of the people mentioned above ended up working for the Vichy government. Eminent among these was Admiral Darlan, who took over the premiership in February 1941 after Laval's fall from grace. According to Debbie Lackerstein, "[with] Darlan came a definite shift in the power balance at Vichy, away from the somewhat diverse and 'amateur' traditionalists surrounding Pétain and in favour of the technocrats...Darlan and the technocrats increased centralisation and state control in many spheres: in the various projects of the National Revolution and, more ominously, in the administration of justice and public

¹¹⁰ Nord, *France's New Deal*, 47.

¹¹¹ Amzalak, *Fascists and Honourable Men*, 128.

¹¹² Nord, *France's New Deal*, 49.

opinion.”¹¹³ Or, as Laval’s son in law put it: “Being an officer, he understood how to give orders, but also had a tendency to come down hard on what he considered acts of disobedience, even by civilians. He believed internal politics to be a simple matter of administrative management that could be turned over to trustworthy people.”¹¹⁴

Conclusion

It should be clear by now, however, that responsibility for the character of the Vichy government cannot solely be laid at the doorstep of the French Navy. Even before the Fall of France, so-called “experts” had insinuated themselves into every area of government and their “ethos had become the guideline for the appointment of the most senior officials of the state.” While Eugen Weber spoke of an interwar clash between humanists and engineers, traditionalists and modernizers, it seems more accurate now to suggest that the diverse political currents represented by socialists, Catholics, nonconformists and technocrats intersected and exchanged ideas and personnel, and that professional engineers and experts won the trust of both traditionalists and modernizers, while with each crisis in France a once marginal anti-liberalism moved closer to the corridors of power.¹¹⁵ Self-declared fascists, however, were never more than a small minority among those who responded to this call for “youth, ardor, dignity, and unity, to this rejection of determinism and materialism, this affirmation of the primacy of the spiritual.”¹¹⁶

¹¹³ Debbie Lackerstein, *National Regeneration in Vichy France : Ideas and Policies, 1930–1944* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2012), 21.

¹¹⁴ René de Chambrun, *Pierre Laval: Traitor or Patriot* (New York: Charles Shribner’s Sons, 1984), 67.

¹¹⁵ Nord, *France’s New Deal*, 42; Amzalak *Fascists and Honourable Men*, 128; Eugen Weber, *The Hollow Years: France in the 1930s* (London, 1995), 54 (quoted in Clarke “Engineering a New Order in the 1930s...,” 63-86.

¹¹⁶ Zeev Sternhell, *Neither Right Nor Left: Fascist Ideology in France* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 272.

Nonetheless, even though between 1922 and 1940 the legislature had voted more money for the navy than at any other time under the Third Republic, “[even] middle-of-the-road officers with no apparent axe to grind began to question the viability of fundamental Republican institutions.” Partly this was because in “the eyes of royalist naval officers, the Republic rested on the vacillating and superficial qualities of French society such as public opinion and the shifting political alliances of the middle and lower classes. In their minds, these were far short of the reliance on blood ties and the Catholic Church which they saw as the foundations of French civilization.”¹¹⁷ Partly also it was because the very nature of their profession placed them at the center of a modern, industrialized milieu in society that was looking for modern, industrialized and technical solutions to society’s problems, solutions that in the military context of the navy were likely to take on a hierarchical and authoritarian complexion.

In 1891 then General Lyautey, who in the late 1920’s joined Étienne Mercier’s *Redressement français*, published an essay in *Revue des deux mondes* entitled *Du rôle social de l’officier*. In this essay, which later had a pivotal influence upon the *École des Cadres*, established in 1940 to train the sons of the French elite according to the principles of the National Revolution of Vichy, Lyautey argued that in an age of social unrest, “it is the army officers who are best placed to restore confidence in the social order, for their authority has not been tainted in any way and is based on immediate and intimate relations with their subordinates.”¹¹⁸ Unfortunately in 1940, with most of the French army imprisoned behind German barbed wire, this role fell to the French navy.

¹¹⁷ Hood, “The French Navy and Parliament between the Wars,” 309, 402-403.

¹¹⁸ Amzalak, *Fascists and Honourable Men*, 48.

CHAPTER THREE

From Victory to Defeat

Introduction

The Vichy regime that the French navy began to help shape in 1940 was conservative, authoritarian, and dedicated to the regeneration of France within the framework of a German-dominated Europe. It was also inward-looking and xenophobic, exemplified on the one hand by the measures taken against foreign immigrants almost as soon as Pétain had established his government at Vichy, and on the other hand by a visceral Anglophobia that perhaps found its most virulent exponent in the shape of Admiral François Darlan. The single aspect that united moderate conservatives, collaborationists, outright fascists, and the navy's high command, however, was a violent antipathy towards the radical Left.

None of these characteristics were invented by the navy, nor were they unique to it, but they all coincided with its conservative and nationalist world view. Extreme anxiety about the threat of Communism led to French strategic appreciations during the Phony War that brought conflict with Britain and distracted from the principal objective, that of the defeat of Nazi Germany. It was during the period leading up to the outbreak of war that Darlan rose to prominence in the navy and with the outbreak of war it was the navy that bears much responsibility for the confusion that distinguished allied war planning up until the German invasion of France. In particular the British found baffling the cavalier attitude adopted by the French at the prospect of a possible war with the Soviet Union. That this latter was consistent with the French navy's search for ways to attack Nazi Germany peripherally via the Mediterranean or through Scandinavia made British objections appear to Darlan obstructionist and self-serving.

The political shift to the right in France was a phenomenon given impetus by the reaction against the Popular Front Government of Léon Blum. Blum had come to power just two months after the German reoccupation of the demilitarized Rhineland on 7 March 1936 and his election prompted a tidal wave of strikes. The caretaker Sarraut government stumbled on until June, making the Blum government's first task the negotiation of the Matignon Accords to resolve workers' issues, thereby adding credence to the claims of the right-wing press, including *l'Action française* and *Le Figaro* that "in a scheme devised by the Comintern, Blum had been assigned the role of Kerensky."¹ With his government mired in economic problems and with its credibility undermined by the ineffectual response to the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in July 1936, Blum was replaced in June 1937. A second attempt to establish a Popular Front ministry in 1938 failed and in April of that year Édouard Daladier became Prime Minister.

As early as late 1938, foreign policy was beginning to play an increasingly significant role in the political shift to the right of Daladier's own Radical Party, the second largest in the Chamber, and therefore vital to the formation of any political coalition. This became clearer in the course of the Radicals' annual congress in October 1938, when, presenting a report on foreign affairs, Senator Aimé Berthod, a close associate of Georges Bonnet, who had objected to the Radicals' participation in the Popular Front, in effect endorsed a French retreat from Eastern Europe and a redirection of the focus of the nation's energies towards the Mediterranean and the Empire.² Coincidentally, this position was not far from that taken by Darlan. In addition the Germanophobia of the Right was dissolved by the experience of Blum's Popular Front and the Spanish Civil War, reinforcing a right-wing pacifism amidst fears that war would bring with it

¹ Frederick Brown, *The Embrace of Unreason: France 1914-1940* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014), 232.

² Talbot C. Imlay, "Paul Reynaud and France's Response to Nazi Germany, 1938-1940," *French Historical Studies* 26:3 (Summer 2003): 521.

social revolution. As Daladier himself put it “Germany would be defeated in the war, but the only gainers would be the Bolsheviks as there would be social revolution in every country of Europe.”³ Anti-Communist sentiment was further fueled in France by the signing of the Nazi-Soviet Pact on 23 August 1939. Anti-Communism not only informed French strategic planning and domestic policy during the Phony War, but survived defeat to become one of the key elements of Vichy.

Between 1937 and 1940, Darlan also solidified his position at the helm of the French navy. With the outbreak of war this fact took on additional significance as Darlan became a cabinet member and the navy became actively engaged in the formulation of strategy and foreign policy. Two things that emerged from this were a confirmation of the navy’s animosity to the Left and an incipient distrust of the British that blossomed under Vichy. Not surprisingly these were two of the signature characteristics of the Vichy regime.

Relations with the British

In 1940, according to Philippe Burrin, the mass of French people were as well disposed towards the English as they were ill-disposed towards the Germans. In the navy, however:

[The] *entente cordiale* and the war alliance had not eliminated antipathies of long standing, which had been revived by the disappointments of the post-war years. Irritation was felt at England’s failure to understand France’s thirst for security and the fact that, instead of being supportive, it played France and Germany off against each other in the name of a short-sighted balancing policy. For many French people, England was an ally by necessity rather than affection.

³ Anthony Adamthwaite, *Grandeur and Misery: France's bid for power in Europe, 1914-1940* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 1994), 210.

Revealingly, in the cinema and in satirical cartoons in the press, “the British were never presented to their advantage.”⁴

Beginning with the Washington Conference in 1922, from the French perspective British policy between the two World Wars seemed to be directed specifically to restricting the size of the French Navy. The tone in Washington was set early on when at the inaugural session the British and Americans were placed at the top table while the French premier Aristide Briand and France’s delegation found themselves seated with the representatives of the British Dominions. Although this was quickly rectified, the French viewed the slight “as symbolic of their mistreatment at the conference.”⁵ One reporter on the scene drew this very conclusion:

We noticed that when Briand sought his chair on the side that formed the top of the square, he did not find it there. The Americans and British filled all the top-side tables; and we thought we noticed something a little less than gratification on the countenance of the dark and heavy Frenchman when he found his seat around the corner, on the side. In all later sessions we observed there had been a new shuffling of the seats, and France sat at the head table. The incident was small, but it went to the heart of all the things that happened about France during the subsequent weeks.⁶

All this being the case, it was unfortunate that the chief French naval expert at the conference, Vice-Admiral Ferdinand de Bon, should arrive at Washington armed with what Joel Blatt described as “memories of past grandeur and atavistic Anglophobia.”⁷ The latter, of course, was far from being a novel emotion for French naval officers. In 1815 *lieutenant de vaisseau* M. le

⁴ Philippe Burrin, *France Under the Germans: Collaboration and Compromise* (New York: The New Press, 1996), 42-43.

⁵ Joel Blatt, “France and the Washington Conference” in *The Washington Conference, 1921-1922: Naval Rivalry, East Asian Stability and the Road to Pearl Harbor* ed. Erik Goldstein and John Maurer (New York: Routledge, 2012), 200; Joel Blatt, “The Parity That Meant Superiority: French Naval Policy towards Italy at the Washington Conference, 1921-22, and Interwar French Foreign Policy,” *French Historical Studies* 12:2 (Autumn, 1981): 235, n. 28.

⁶ Mark Sullivan, “The Conference, First and Last: Its moods and its achievements,” in *The World’s Work* 43 (November 1921 – April 1922): 551.

⁷ Blatt, “The Parity That Meant Superiority,” 232.

chevalier de Larouvraye completed the title page of his work on the art of sea warfare with the exhortation, drawn from Cato the Elder's damnation of Carthage, "*Delenda est Britannia.*"⁸

Although in reality, in Joel Blatt's formula, "the Washington treaty actually freed France to solidify its superiority over Italy,"⁹ which was her main strategic concern at the time, it nonetheless invited fierce criticism from the navy. Despite the fact that the final British rejection of any limit on light ships or submarines permitted France to build as many of these vessels as she wanted and to realize the naval program of the naval General Staff, Admiral Degouy suggested that France had fallen victim to an Anglo-American plot, foreshadowing future naval rancor against *les Anglo-Saxons*. Vice-Admiral Favereau said that after a victorious war the government had no right to permit such a humiliation to be inflicted on the nation. Monarchist Charles Maurras said: "The king of France would have had Briand shot on his return from Washington" and referred to the agreement as "Trafalgar II."¹⁰ Conservatives like Raymond Poincaré also criticized French policy at Washington, resenting French exclusion from the decision-making process. Many were outraged by parity with Italy and worried that concession of the principle of parity would establish a precedent for the future. The impression that Washington had been a disaster for France, originally spread as part of the political campaign against Briand - the sole representative of *L'Action française* in the Assembly, Léon Daudet, had helped bring an abrupt end to Briand's premiership in January 1922¹¹ - became widely accepted by public opinion.¹² Writing nearly four decades after the event, Admiral Paul Auphan observed that "France was deeply humiliated by the ratios of the Washington Treaty...the blow to French

⁸ Lieutenant de vaisseau Charles-Louis-Victor de La Rouvraye, *Traité sur l'art des combats de mer* (Paris: Bachelier, 1815).

⁹ Blatt, "The Parity That Meant Superiority," 224.

¹⁰ Blatt, "France and the Washington Conference," 206.

¹¹ Brown, *The Embrace of Unreason: France 1914-1940*, 218-219.

¹² Blatt "The Parity That Meant Superiority...", 243.

naval pride – a blow for which they held the British responsible – caused ill-feeling that lingered on until 1938 and Munich, with its ominous shadow of World War II.”¹³

On 10 February 1927 President Coolidge and Secretary of State Kellogg issued invitations to the signatories of the Five Powers Treaty to attend a conference at Geneva, outside the League of Nations framework, with the intention of negotiating a fresh naval limitation treaty.¹⁴ By August 27 the conference had “collapsed disastrously amid mutual Anglo-American recriminations.”¹⁵ By April 1929 the US was becoming more conciliatory and after painstaking negotiations in October invitations were issued to the five powers to meet at a naval conference in London during the third week of January 1930. The effort made there to persuade the French to consent to some kind of general program of naval reduction was, however, a “flat failure.”¹⁶ In the end the only concrete agreement was a three power treaty between the US, Britain and Japan. “The differences in the naval requirements of France and Italy,” Ramsey MacDonald informed the House of Commons on the 10 April 1930, “have proved to be intricate and have not so far been resolved.”

Admiral Darlan, a participant in the conference, came away disenchanted. Writing to his wife on the 4 April 1930, he intimated that “[e]verything suggests that the English are going to reject the proposals for a political agreement put forward by Aristide [Briand]. I’m delighted since for a worthless trifle we should have had to give up a certain amount of tonnage, which we

¹³ Rear Admiral Paul Auphan and Jacques Mordal, *The French Navy in World War II* (Annapolis MD: United States Naval Institute Press, 1959), 8-9.

¹⁴ Ernest Andrade, Jr., “The Cruiser Controversy in Naval Limitations Negotiations, 1922-1936,” *Military Affairs* 48:3 (July 1984): 113.

¹⁵ David Carlton, “The Anglo-French Compromise on Arms Limitation, 1928,” *Journal of British Studies* 8:2 (May, 1969): 142.

¹⁶ Conyers Read, “More Light on the London Naval Treaty of 1930,” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 93:4 (September 9, 1949): 304.

didn't want to do. All this makes me hope that we may soon put an end to this dismal farce."¹⁷ In his private papers he was more damning: "We have given birth to a monster."¹⁸ The final statement of the French delegation reiterated the desire for some kind of Mediterranean pact: "She [France] remains, as she has repeatedly declared herself to be, ready to consider favourably any form of agreement for a mutual guarantee of security the effect of which would be to transform the absolute requirements of each Power into relative requirements."¹⁹

The second London Naval Conference, which opened on 9 December 1935, was no more successful. After the withdrawal of Japan, the four remaining powers signed a new agreement on 25 March 1936. It contained no provision for the direct quantitative limitation of naval armaments. Each Power had therefore the right to build as many or as few ships as it desired so long as they did not exceed 35,000 tons as stipulated at Washington.²⁰ Relations between France and Britain had not been improved when on the 4 June 1935 Ribbentrop, Hitler's newly appointed plenipotentiary, had arrived in London with a team of naval experts. On 18 June, anniversary of the Battle of Waterloo, after French protests an Anglo-German Naval agreement was signed establishing a ratio of 100: 35 between the fleets of the British Commonwealth and the German navy. French Prime Minister Pierre Laval directed a note to the British Foreign Office via Charles Corbin, the French Ambassador in London. He wrote: "The French government must observe, above all, that the repercussions of the envisioned accord would not

¹⁷ Hervé Coutau-Bégarie and Claude Huan, *Darlan* (Paris: Fayard, 1989), 95.

¹⁸ Alain Darlan, *L'amiral Darlan parle* (Paris: Amiot-Dumont, 1953), 36.

¹⁹ "The Five-Power Naval Conference. II," *Bulletin of International News* 6:17 (February 27, 1930): 13.

²⁰ Norman H. Davies, "The New Naval Agreement," *Foreign Affairs* 14:4 (July 1936): 579-580.

be limited to the naval armaments of Great Britain and Germany. We are obliged, therefore, to raise serious reservations about the eventual conclusion of this accord.”²¹

In this atmosphere of distrust, when war broke out, many in France agreed wholeheartedly with German propaganda that portrayed the British as cruel, selfish, hypocritical, off-handed and without even the virtue of courage to redeem them, their whole history amounting to a litany of wars won at the expense of other people’s blood. Stories circulated that the first British casualties of the war had rather un-heroically fallen victim to indigestion. The right-wing weekly *Je suis partout* consistently emphasized the threat posed by the BEF, not to the Wehrmacht, but to the womenfolk of patriotic Frenchmen serving on the front lines. At the other end of the political spectrum the Communist *L’Humanité*, now published clandestinely, routinely underlined the idea that Britain only waged war with French soldiers. Daladier’s government was portrayed as being in the pockets of British bankers. After his desertion from the army, the head of the French Communist Party Maurice Thorez railed in interviews against British Imperialism, but didn’t mention Hitler once.²² This did not auger well for Anglo-French cooperation in the conduct of the war.

The Struggle Against Communism

Not everyone approved of Daladier. According to Alistair Horne, “writing in all the bitterness of 1940, Vincent Sheean describes him as ‘a dirty man with a cigarette stuck to his lower lip, stinking of absinthe, talking with a rough Marseillaise accent...’” In his diary, Harold

²¹ Reynolds M. Salerno, “Multilateral diplomacy and strategy: the Anglo-German Naval Agreement and the Mediterranean Crisis, 1935-1936,” *Journal of Strategic Studies* 17:2 (1994): 53.

²² Henri Amouroux, *Le peuple du désastre: La grande histoire des Français sous l’occupation: 1939-1940* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1976), 212-215.

Nicolson described Daladier as “a drunken peasant.”²³ For his part, Admiral Darlan wrote: “The *Président du Conseil* is an energetic and well-intentioned man.”²⁴ No doubt meeting with Darlan’s approval was the fact that early on the Daladier government’s antipathy towards Communists and foreigners, feelings that would continue to find expression under the Vichy regime, began to have concrete repercussions. Even before the outbreak of war, 25 August saw the introduction of a ban on the Communist press and an interdiction of all Party meetings and associated organizations.²⁵ On 27 September 1939 Daladier’s government banned the French Communist Party and between 5 and 10 October thirty-four of its Deputies were imprisoned.²⁶ According to British Intelligence sources, by March 1940, 2,778 Communist town councilors and 300 town councils had been suspended by the Third Republic; 443 officials and employees had had some administrative action taken against them; 159 newspapers had been suppressed; 620 trade unions and 675 political groups had been dissolved; and 3,400 arrests had been made.²⁷

The extension of the powers of central government was wide-ranging. In the provinces Prefects were given the authority to suspend and appoint mayors and municipal councilors whenever it was considered that national security was at stake. Even before war broke out, Lord Hankey, future minister without portfolio in the Chamberlain War Cabinet, observed to the British Foreign Secretary that Daladier had amassed “almost dictatorial powers.”²⁸ In the industrialized north of France, the banning of the Communist Party brought with it a thoroughgoing purge of municipal councils. Internment camps were set up for Communists,

²³ Alistair Horne, *To Lose a Battle* (London: Penguin, 1990), 221.

²⁴ Hervé Coutau-Bégarie and Claude Huan, *Lettres et notes de l'Amiral Darlan*, (Paris: Economica, 1992), 109.

²⁵ Amouroux, *Le people du désastre*, 141.

²⁶ Horne, *To Lose a Battle*, 157.

²⁷ John F. Sweets, *Choices in Vichy France: The French Under Nazi Occupation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 107.

²⁸ Richard Overy, *1939: Countdown to War* (New York: Viking Penguin, 2010), 31.

aliens and refugees. In France as a whole an estimated fifteen thousand immigrants from the Third Reich were arrested in the first days of the war, and by the end of 1939 more than eight thousand were still being held in camps that were referred to euphemistically as *centres d'hébergements*, or “lodging centers.” Some of the larger camps, such as Le Vernet in the Pyrenees, or Les Milles south of Aix-en-Provence found their origins in the aftermath of the Spanish Civil War. Others, such as Meslay, a hundred miles west of Paris, were brand new.²⁹ Arthur Koestler, one of the better known inmates of Le Vernet, in some respects compared it unfavorably to his experience in Dachau.³⁰

In the camp at Gurs (Pyrénées-Atlantiques), reserved for women and children, a report of the Swiss *Basler Nachrichten* of 14 February 1941 indicated that, even without any major epidemics, half the population would be wiped out within two years.³¹ According to one historian, “the ‘abnormality’ of war after September 1939 proved to be crucial in bringing about the ‘normality’ of the Vichy government’s policies after June 1940.”³² It is interesting to observe that already in December 1939, Darlan noted privately that what France needed was a government that governed, with a smaller cabinet possessed of full executive powers, not just until the end of hostilities, but for as long as it took for the country to recover its equilibrium.³³ Anti-Communism became virtually institutionalized under the Vichy regime with the establishment of the Bureau of Anti-National Affairs (*Bureau des Menées Antinationales*, or BMA), part of the military counter-espionage organization of the army that became operational

²⁹ Tom Shachtman, *The Phony War, 1939-1940* (New York: Harper & Row, 1982), 95.

³⁰ Susan Zuccotti, *The Holocaust, The French, And the Jews* (New York: Basic Books, 1993): 32-36.

³¹ Saul Friedländer, *Nazi Germany and the Jews, 1939-1945: The Years of Extermination* (New York: Harper Collins, 2007), 93.

³² Nico Wouters, “Municipal Government during the Occupation (1940-5): A Comparative Model of Belgium, the Netherlands and France,” *European History Quarterly* 36:2 (2006): 224.

³³ Coutau-Bégarie and Huan, *Lettres et notes de l'Amiral Darlan*, 121.

in November 1940 and was responsible for fighting Communist activities in organizations working for national defense, the army, and the navy.³⁴

One person who protested against what he perceived to be a policy of repression was the former leader of the Popular Front coalition Léon Blum. For Blum, not only was this an abnegation of any sense of justice, but was also bad policy. It would force the Communists underground, he suggested, and provoke them to militancy. Writing in *The Spectator* on 5 April 1940, Blum also sought to play down the threat of Soviet Communism: “For my part I do not believe in the Bolshevisation of Germany, for the contagious character of a germ depends upon its virulence, and Stalin’s Communism seems to have lost, even in Russia, its main power of infection.”³⁵ Yet, as far as the prospect of war with the Soviet Union was concerned, Blum admitted that in France this “consummation was, and still is, regarded as desirable by certain political groups, but is looked on as undesirable even dangerous by others.” For him, if it were possible to avoid war with the Soviets, so much the better: “If not – war let it be.”

For others, the anti-Communist policy didn’t go far enough. Jean Ybarnegaray, a right wing deputy who would later join Reynaud’s government, and whose prejudices tended towards the Anglophobic and anti-Soviet rather than the outright pro-Fascist, demanded of the Interior Minister Albert Sarraut on 14 December 1939 to know why, with two thousand Communists in prison, none of the leaders had been arrested. Pierre-Étienne Flandin, another right winger who later served Vichy, echoed the same concern.³⁶ The navy had similar reservations: Darlan’s Chief of Staff later observed that “[as] odd as it may seem today, the pact between Stalin and

³⁴ Simon Kitson, *Hunt for Nazi Spies: Fighting Espionage in Vichy France* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 47.

³⁵ “The Allies and Russia,” *The Spectator* (5 April 1940): 8-9.

³⁶ Amouroux, *Le peuple du désastre*, 147.

Hitler was welcomed with relief. If French sailors had to fight, they would prefer not to have the Communists as allies.”³⁷

Daladier accrued political advantage from his anti-Communist campaign on a number of levels. First of all it helped him to acquire the support of a nationalist right that evinced considerably more interest in the struggle against Stalinists than it did in the actual war against Hitler. It also raised his popularity among the jingoists of the general population who still smarted from the perceived betrayal that the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact represented for them. In Parliament, anti-Communism served as a shield against criticism from politicians on a range of subjects. Gradually it began to take on the aura of an alternative war, in absence of developments of the one that had been declared with Germany.³⁸ This goes some way towards explaining why the catastrophe in Poland, which by the 8 September had been knocked off the front page of the right-wing *Le Petit Parisien*, provoked scarcely any serious commentary; why the stalemate on the Rhine excited little enthusiasm, the losses there meriting the same number of column inches as the three people drowned when a barge hit a bridge in Paris; and yet the plight of Finland became a national *cause célèbre* once the Soviet Union invaded on the 30 November.³⁹ Furthermore, Robert Coulondre, Director of the Cabinet of the Minister for Foreign Affairs, confided to the American Ambassador Bullitt that Daladier had decided to use the wave of emotion against the activities of the Soviet Union that the conflict produced “to crush the Communist agents of the Soviet Union in France.”⁴⁰

³⁷ Auphan and Mordal, *The French Navy in World War II*, 21.

³⁸ Amouroux, *Le peuple du désastre*, 150.

³⁹ *Ibid*, 185, 201, 217.

⁴⁰ *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS)*, 1940, vol. I (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1940), 590.

The influence of the American ambassador in this direction seems to have been considerable. John C. Cairns observed that “Daladier was probably comfortable with no foreigner as he was with Ambassador William C. Bullitt. Bullitt courted him, encouraged him, entertained him, and made him believe Franklin Roosevelt cared about him, would send him aircraft, and possibly more. Bullitt's anti-Soviet opinions were unbridled; he had ‘no use for Chamberlain and almost none for Churchill.’”⁴¹ According to Paul Reynaud “Bullitt’s policy at this time and later was governed by a personal antipathy against the Soviet Union, which he inherited from his term of office at Moscow.”⁴² Bullitt fostered unrealistic expectations in Daladier of the level of support he might expect from the United States and was therefore perhaps to some degree responsible for the anti-Soviet position that France was assuming.

Darlan was another conservative who was alive to the threats of Bolshevism. As early as December 1939 Admiral Darlan was seeing the development of a communist inspired subversion of the war effort in the country’s interior, working in parallel with German propaganda to undermine the nation’s morale through the use of strike action and outright sabotage.⁴³ That the Luftwaffe was dropping tracts featuring extracts of Molotov’s speeches over the eastern suburbs of Paris may have reinforced his suspicions.⁴⁴ Such accusations were largely groundless, however, and the only proven act of sabotage took place at the Farmann aircraft factory.⁴⁵ Nonetheless, the hysteria attending France’s “Red Scare” had a deleterious effect on Franco-British efforts to prosecute a coordinated war effort. In particular when France, led by the

⁴¹ John C. Cairns, “Reflections on France, Britain and the Winter War Prodrôme, 1939-40,” *Historical Reflections / Réflexions Historiques* 22:1 (Winter 1996): 228.

⁴² Paul Reynaud, *In the Thick of the Fight, 1930-1945* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1955), 186.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 120.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 117.

⁴⁵ Julian Jackson, *The Fall of France: The Nazi Invasion of 1940* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 155.

French navy, with Germany undefeated, began to air the possibility of war with the Soviet Union.

The Phony War and the USSR

On 9 December 1918 former British Prime Minister Herbert Asquith had proclaimed: “With all deference to our soldiers this war has been won by sea power.”⁴⁶ The weapon that Britain had used had been the naval blockade and it was this weapon that Britain again deployed against Germany in 1939. French doubts about the efficacy of the blockade were made explicit by the *Conseil supérieur de la défense nationale* (CSDN) which in a report in March 1940 stated that Germany “is trying by every means to defeat the Anglo-French blockade and, moreover, [is doing so] with some success.”⁴⁷ In this view the CSDN found itself increasingly supported by the French Navy, and particularly Admiral Darlan, who was losing faith both in the blockade itself and in the principle of a long-war strategy. Reich Foreign Minister Ribbentrop would have agreed. In a meeting with Roosevelt’s representative Sumner Welles on 1 March 1940, Ribbentrop suggested that “[the] British blockade was a delusion. Germany’s food supplies were assured within her own Lebensraum. Moreover, beyond that, Germany had access to a large portion of Europe, the whole of Russia, and, by way of Russia, to wide areas of the world.”⁴⁸ According to Admiral Darlan’s Chief of Staff, the “French Admiralty was of the opinion from the first that a naval blockade of Germany would not be sufficient to bring about a decision” and that in consequence, seeking some field for positive action, “the General Staffs decided that there

⁴⁶ Colin S. Gray, *The Leverage of Sea Power: The Strategic Advantage of Navies in War* (New York: The Free Press, 1992), 211.

⁴⁷ Imlay, “A Reassessment..,” 346.

⁴⁸ *Documents on German Foreign Policy* (DGFP), series D, vol. VIII (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1954), 825.

were three weak spots in the enemy's make-up which could be attacked."⁴⁹ Those three were identified as petroleum, iron ore, and Germany's internal waterways.

Hostility to Communism in general informed the attitude of the Right and of many in the navy towards the Soviet Union. The Soviet invasion of Finland in November 1939 promised the opportunity to conduct operations that were consistent with the aims of a long war strategy without inviting the exigencies of a long war. This was important for France, since in January 1940 the Bank of France would warn that the country's gold reserves had fallen by a half since September 1939, partly as a result of the necessity of buying foreign war materiel – especially US aircraft – to make up for the French industrial shortfall. In February 1940 the Finance Minister Paul Reynaud passed on a note from the Governor of the Bank of France to the then Premier Daladier, together with the warning that at current spending rates France would be financially exhausted in little over a year.⁵⁰

If in the Allied camp it was France who was taking the lead over the Finnish issue, within France itself it was the navy which led the way, adopting Finland's cause as a means of furthering its own agenda. Having lost confidence in the blockade, by the end of 1939 the naval staff had concluded that "time is working against us" and that therefore some more direct military action was required.⁵¹ Late in December General Gamelin consulted with Admiral Darlan regarding the best method of affording assistance to the Finns. In his response, however, Darlan largely ignored Finland, focusing instead upon the need to interrupt the developing German-Soviet alliance, to disrupt the supply of essential raw materials to Germany, and to force Germany to disperse her forces by opening new theaters in the conflict. Two weeks later Darlan

⁴⁹ Auphan and Mordal, *The French Navy in World War II*, 40.

⁵⁰ Talbot C. Imlay, "Paul Reynaud and France's Response to Nazi Germany, 1938-1940," *French Historical Studies* 26: 3 (Summer 2003): 512-513.

⁵¹ Imlay, "A Reassessment...", 352.

distributed a series of reports whose common theme was the necessity for revising Allied strategy, namely by abandoning the long war strategy in favor of something more muscular.

On 24 December the very thing seemed to present itself in the form of a memorandum prepared by the Finnish military attaché for the *Conseil supérieur de la défense nationale* (CSDN), the body attached to the French general staff that was charged with overseeing France's economic war effort. The memorandum insisted on the vital necessity of interrupting Russian maritime activity between Murmansk and Petsamo in Finland. Daladier called Darlan by telephone asking him to develop plans for a combined Anglo-Franco-Polish invasion of Petsamo.⁵² This was somewhat more than the memorandum had recommended. Accordingly the French Admiralty formulated a more limited project for intervention, partly by means of mine-laying operations in the area by Polish submarines and a Polish-crewed auxiliary cruiser, a ruse that suggests not everyone was quite as sanguine as Darlan at the prospect of war with the Soviet Union.⁵³ The French Admiralty plan was passed on to the French naval mission in London for the purposes of consultation with the British Admiralty.⁵⁴

On 13 January Daladier convened a meeting of the French Chiefs of Staff and instructed them, as a matter of urgency, to make a study of the possibilities of action against not just Petsamo, but also Murmansk. Indeed how could the Allies intervene in Scandinavia at large? The next day Admiral Darlan presented General Gamelin with a set of two alternatives. The first was somewhat covert, and involved action against the Soviet Union without a declaration of war,

⁵² Coutau-Bégarie and Huan, *Darlan*, 195.

⁵³ Geirr Haarr, *No Room for Mistakes: British and Allied Submarines in European Waters 1939-1940* (Philadelphia, PA: Casemate Publishers, 2015), 300. On 18 November 1939 an Anglo-Polish naval agreement had been signed to make provision for the Polish submarines and destroyers that had escaped to Britain in the wake of the German invasion of Poland. Polish vessels were to remain under free Polish sovereignty, with Polish officers and crews in Polish uniforms, but would act under the authority of the British Admiralty.

⁵⁴ Capitaine de Frégate Caroff, *La Compagne de Norvège 1940* (Paris: Service Historique de la Marine, 1986), 6.

with the intention of assisting the Finns to retake Petsamo. The second was more expansive and involved open war with the USSR and intervention to interdict “Germano-Russian” shipping between Murmansk and Archangel.

Attached to the French Admiralty note of 15 January on the potential for operations in the Arctic Ocean was another that explored plans for the acquisition of Swedish iron ore, or at least for preventing it from falling into German hands. The first option envisaged the capture of the Narvik-Lulea rail heads as well as the occupation of Bergen and Trondheim in order to pre-empt any German riposte. Such action, it recognized, would be in flagrant violation of Norwegian and Swedish neutral rights, although this didn’t seem to be a source of too much concern. Failing that, the alternative was to intercept German traffic at sea, a prospect which seemed somewhat to underwhelm the French naval high command, mainly perhaps because they realistically lacked the means to do it. An air of desperation clings to the suggestion that ships sailing from Lulea could be intercepted without infringing Swedish neutrality if aircraft could be based in Finland...if Finland were at war with Germany.⁵⁵

The French Admiralty plans were passed by General Gamelin to Daladier on 16 January 1940, accompanied by a note from the Commander-in-Chief, giving his views regarding potential operations in Scandinavia. Gamelin’s commentary appeared to envisage the occupation of the whole of Scandinavia, mentioning essential objectives in Finland, Sweden, and Norway, as well as Murmansk in the Soviet Union. Perhaps his intention was to deflect the Premier from contemplating any such undertaking; certainly he went on to draw attention to the attendant risks. Such operations, Gamelin suggested, might push Sweden and Norway in to the arms of Germany, perhaps thereby giving access to both the USSR and Germany to the ports on the West

⁵⁵ Ibid, 8-9.

coast of Norway, somewhat defeating the original objective. It would, furthermore, alienate neutral (US) opinion, and deprive the Allies of any prospect of assisting the Finns. Better, in the opinion of the Army General Staff, to let British pressure on the Norwegians provoke some precipitate action by Germany which would allow for legitimate Allied intervention.

That this, in fact, happened without any visible advantage accruing to the Allies perhaps speaks volumes for the lack of realism displayed in inter-Allied strategic planning.

On 17 January Darlan, with Gamelin's approval, addressed a note to the head of the naval mission in London, Admiral Odend'hal, urging immediate naval action against Soviet supply lines between Petsamo and Murmansk, action that he considered might be decisive at least in the short term. On 23 January the French Admiralty produced a paper suggesting that in the current circumstances (in the absence of anything happening), the blockade was likely to prove ineffective against Germany. Accepting that a frontal assault was out of the question, therefore, it proposed some kind of peripheral attack. Two possibilities presented themselves: either an occupation of the oil fields of the Caucasus, which by paralyzing Russia, would prevent Germany from fully exploiting her resources. Or: seize the Swedish iron ore fields.⁵⁶ During a meeting at the French War Ministry, Admiral Le Luc confidently declared on 24 January that the British and French navies were in good condition to undertake some kind of operation at Petsamo with ease, and without delay.⁵⁷

These conclusions reflected those expressed in a strategic appreciation that Darlan had produced on 22 January. In his estimation, Russia was simply an opponent that had yet to declare itself, while the neutral countries surrounding Germany represented the best possible

⁵⁶ Caroff, *La Compagne de Norvège 1940*, 10.

⁵⁷ Coutau-Bégarie and Huan, *Darlan*, 197.

Siegfried Line available, given the Allies' "legalistic mentality."⁵⁸ Russia could be reached either via Finland (having retaken Petsamo), or by way of Turkey, with which an alliance already existed. A landing in Northern Finland would put the Allies in a good position to keep an eye on (*contrôler*) the Swedish ore fields, while helping the Finns to repel the Russians. Thus by forcing the Russians to retreat from the Baltic, it would oblige the Germans to divert forces to the East. Sweden and Norway could then be gathered into the Allied camp. Furthermore an attack on Russia through the Caucasus would completely paralyze its efforts to transport fuel to the Germans, as well as inhibiting the export of certain other raw materials. Of course, Darlan conceded, this part of the plan would require the acquiescence of Turkey and Italy. Furthermore, Darlan reasoned, action taken against the Soviet Union might also serve to rally Romania and Greece to the Allied cause.

Actually Darlan's intentions, expressed in a note of 22 January, were even more ambitious than this. Darlan suggested that the secret and long-term objective of any Finnish operation should be the acquisition of Swedish iron ore, but that above and beyond that such action might encourage both Turkey and the Scandinavian countries to join the Allied cause. If, on the other hand, the Allies failed to attack anywhere, they risked seeing the neutral countries being emasculated by Germany and the Soviet Union. Furthermore, the Allies themselves would be reduced to submitting to a kind of siege warfare rendered even longer by the failure of the blockade against Germany and the increasing toll being taken of Allied merchant shipping.⁵⁹

Given Darlan's awareness of the available resources, such grandiose ambitions appear frankly delusional. His fears about the repercussions of continued and complete inactivity on all fronts, however, were completely coherent. In particular Darlan's fears about merchant shipping

⁵⁸ Coutau-Bégarie and Huan, *Lettres et notes de l'Amiral Darlan*, 143.

⁵⁹ Coutau-Bégarie and Huan, *Darlan*, 196.

losses were borne out by the figures. On 16 December 1939, the British Admiralty reported that “[the] average weekly increment of British ships and tonnage over fourteen weeks has been approximately five ships and 24,000 gross tons. Compared with this the average weekly loss of British ships and tonnage for the same period has been approximately seven ships and 30,000 tons.”⁶⁰ By 12 November, the French merchant fleet alone had suffered losses amounting to a total of 48,000 tons of shipping.⁶¹

So victory, when it came, wrote Darlan, would be all the more ruinous because of the delay in its arrival. The only solution was to attack wherever the opportunity presented itself, namely Finland, the Caucasus and the Black Sea, and to begin hostilities deliberately with the USSR.⁶² In this last, Darlan was by no means considered eccentric. On 30 January the outgoing French Ambassador to Moscow, Paul-Emile Naggiar, observed to American Ambassador Steinhardt that “he had advocated to his Government a complete rupture of diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union and that it was his personal opinion that Great Britain and France should declare war on the Soviet Union since he was convinced that they would eventually have to do so and that no purpose was being served by giving Germany the benefit of vitally essential imports from neutral countries via the Soviet Union in the meantime.”⁶³ Perhaps not coincidentally, given the similarity to Darlan’s views, Naggiar was also an Admiral. Sufficient weight was given by the Russians to potential Anglo-French threats to the Baku oil fields, moreover, that on 9 March Steinhardt reported an extensive movement of Soviet troops and tanks from Moscow to the Caspian Sea area.⁶⁴

⁶⁰ CAB/66/4/13, 16 December 1939.

⁶¹ CAB/66/3/29, 18 November 1939.

⁶² Coutau-Bégarie and Huan, *Lettres et notes de l'Amiral Darlan*, 144.

⁶³ FRUS 1940, vol. I, 590, 2 February 1940.

⁶⁴ FRUS 1940, vol. I, 592, 9 March 1940.

On 23 January 1940, Darlan composed a fresh memorandum regarding the conduct of the war which was passed to Daladier on 24 January and to General Gamelin two days later. He noted that many of the best French vessels were operating in the Atlantic in response to the pressing demands of the Royal Navy, and would in all likelihood remain there until the new British ships under construction had been completed. Should Italy join the war on the side of Germany, he continued, the naval situation for the Allies would become somewhat delicate. Therefore, Darlan emphasized, any operations in the Near East would require the tacit consent of the Italians and a large diplomatic effort should be undertaken in order to secure this. Nonetheless, Darlan viewed as the best options for action the alternatives he had outlined before: attacks on the periphery via either Scandinavia or the Caucasus. In fact, in his opinion, the two operations should be linked and accompanied by a reinforcement of the blockade measures already being directed against the Reich.

As far as any operation in support of the Finns was concerned, Darlan outlined the necessary objectives and then offered alternative means of their achievement, depending on whether or not the Allies were prepared to enter into hostilities with the USSR. He elaborated on the proposals he had presented earlier in the month. First of all, the Allies should stop all Russian navigation whose end was the re-supply of their forces at Petsamo, although this would necessarily involve a confrontation with the Soviet Navy. Petsamo and Murmansk should be bombed from the air. On land, a force should disembark at Petsamo itself, with the aim of disorganizing Soviet forces there and cutting them off from their Russian bases.

If the Allies did not wish to go to war with the Soviet Union, the only possible means of taking the offensive in the area would be by means of the Polish warships in British ports, of which there were two submarines and three destroyers, with the addition of a few auxiliary

cruisers, which could be lent either to the Poles or to the Finns themselves. Bombers could also be deployed to northern Finland. This, Darlan suggested, would be sufficient to cause difficulties for the Soviet supply effort, but would be unlikely to achieve any decisive results. The implication seems to be that Darlan considered such an undertaking to be a bit pointless. It is likely, then, that he favored the alternative, which involved direct conflict with the USSR.

In this case, the admiral wrote, in addition to the available Finnish and Polish forces, an Allied naval force of similar strength to the Soviet presence should be constituted, augmented by a number of mine sweepers and anti-submarine vessels, to act in support of an Allied Expeditionary Corps. There was, however, another problem. Whichever option was selected, Darlan suggested, the Allies would require an advance base of operations on the coast of northern Norway.

In a second annex to the memorandum, Darlan outlined the forces he deemed necessary for action in the Caucasus, action which he felt would have most effect if conducted concurrently with the campaign in Norway, action which also invited the opening of hostilities with the USSR. He argued that the Allies should easily be able to supply a naval force capable of counterbalancing Russian forces in the Black Sea and prohibiting use of the sea lanes to the enemy. Such a force should be based at Constantinople and at Sinop on the Black Sea; in fact the French Admiralty had already expressed an interest in the latter to General Weygand. The fly in the ointment here, as far as Darlan was concerned, was the large number of Russian submarines in the Black Sea. On balance, he suggested, it would be better to keep any Expeditionary Corps in the region supplied by overland means, rather than by sea.⁶⁵

⁶⁵ Coutau-Bégarie and Huan, *Lettres et notes de l'Amiral Darlan*, 150-151.

Much of this became entirely academic when Finland made peace on Soviet terms in March 1940. In political terms, the cessation of hostilities between the USSR and Finland provoked a crisis in France. The day after the Moscow Treaty was signed the French Senate discussed it in a secret sitting, and only gave Daladier 236 votes on the Order of the Day. There were 60 abstentions. On 19 March, the day after Hitler met Mussolini at the Brenner Pass and the very day that Chamberlain's cabinet met to discuss Daladier's propositions, the French Chamber of Deputies also discussed, also in secret, Finland's defeat.

It was not to be a good moment for the French Premier. He had been harassed by parliament over his policies since the previous November. On 12 March, trying to recover some political ground before the announcement of the Russo-Finnish treaty, Daladier had given details to the Chamber of Deputies of what had been done for Finland. If the Finns appealed for assistance, he said, 15,000 troops were ready to leave the next day. He gave an account of perceived Scandinavian obstructionism, and singled out the former socialist premier for a blast of his ire: "It's your friends the Swedish Socialists," he said pointedly, "who have refused passage to our troops." "A stupefying sitting," noted Marcel Déat, whose sins against the Republic would prove to be somewhat greater than the hapless Premier: "Daladier makes madly imprudent revelations; 50,000 men ready to embark from Channel ports, reads out confidential Finnish diplomatic documents, appeals to Swedish railway workers against their government, tells about the possible pulling up of rails in the event they should try to go through without Sweden's approval, etc." As Daladier left the Chamber, apparently ready to resign, the Minister of Public Works, Anatole de Monzie, gestured that the prime minister had had too much to drink. "Daladier is alcoholic," Maurice Pelletier said in private, "- officially we put it out that he was

‘tired,’ [but] at the rostrum he was tight.”⁶⁶ The official record in the *Journal officiel* was censored, but the diplomats and press reporters in the gallery made certain that word got out.

After a mauling at the hands of the Senate, five days later Daladier confronted the secret session of the Chamber. The accusations hurled at him represented the culmination of personal or partisan grievances accumulated over the previous months, or longer. Gaston Bergery charged that any country guaranteed by Britain and France faced extinction within three months. Opponents of the war with Germany accused the Government of being soft on Communism. Pierre-Etienne Flandin made the point: “Our people is logical. It likes clarity, and I defy you to go before any popular audience at all, workers or peasants, to explain why on the one hand you make war on Germany, and on the other you don't make war on Russia.” Where the Government was not directly to blame, it was the British.

Right-wing nationalist Louis Marin, one of those hostile to Hitler, tabled a motion which asked “that the war should be prosecuted with increasing energy.” The President of the Radical Socialists Albert Chichery tabled a motion of confidence which won 239 votes; only one deputy voted against the government, but 300 abstained. Daladier felt compelled to resign on the 21 March. The Chamber's vote, he wrote to President Lebrun, had denied the government the authority necessary to fulfill its “wartime mission.” At 5 p.m. on the same day, Lebrun invited Paul Reynaud to form a new administration.⁶⁷ Darlan and the navy, for their part, came away unscathed having both underlined their anti-Communist credentials with their proposals and avoided failure by having their plans thwarted at a political level before their weaknesses were more dramatically exposed by Russian guns.

⁶⁶ Cairns, “Reflections on France, Britain and the Winter War Prodrôme, 1939-40,” 213.

⁶⁷ Ibid, 216; Reynaud, *In the Thick of the Fight*, 258-259.

The Phony War and the Mediterranean

Pressure for aggressive action in the Mediterranean, which also risked embroiling the Soviet Union, again found its origins in the French Admiralty, and specifically in the person of Admiral Darlan. Daladier broached the subject of a potential Balkans assault at the second meeting of the Supreme War Council in Hove on 22 September 1939. In the presence of both Darlan and Gamelin, Daladier indeed proposed that the possibility of a second front should be the first item on the agenda.

The purpose of these deliberations was to address French concerns regarding a possible thrust by Germany southwards towards the Mediterranean. Daladier proposed two possible alternatives: either a preemptive landing in Salonika; or a deployment of Allied troops in Turkey. At this point the British government was keen to maintain Italian neutrality and Chamberlain demurred on that basis, but he also represented the practical difficulties of maintaining a force in the Eastern Mediterranean. Daladier's suggestion that it would take but twenty days to move such a force from France was actually at odds with the prewar appreciations of the French army staff's 4eme Bureau, responsible for transportation. These suggested that it would take fifty ships conducting two trips each and 45 days to move and concentrate a force just in Yugoslavia.⁶⁸ As recently as 9 September, Darlan had indicated to Gamelin that the available shipping capacity for such a venture was extremely limited and that the deployment of a nine division expeditionary force could take up to a year.

Two days later Darlan underlined his view that for any such undertaking to be feasible, it would have to be a joint Anglo-French operation.⁶⁹ In a memorandum prepared for General

⁶⁸ Robert J. Young, "French Military Intelligence and the Franco-Italian Alliance, 1933-39," *Historical Journal* xxviii (1985): 161.

⁶⁹ Coutau-Bégarie and Huan *Darlan*, 186.

Gamelin, Darlan reiterated his view that France had insufficient vessels at her disposal to transport even the 86th Infantry Division in a single convoy. Escorts would have to be provided by the Royal Navy. In a sentence that seemed to foreshadow a growing irritation with his British counterparts, Darlan wrote that he had approached the Admiralty on the subject and that they had proved to be little disposed to provide that level of assistance in the Eastern Mediterranean, or even seriously to study its implications, without direct instructions from the British War Cabinet.

In any case, the decision was made by the Supreme War Council not to decide anything, but to hand the matter over to the military for analysis. Thus what George Melton, perhaps overgenerously, refers to as “Darlan’s Balkan strategy” was put on the back burner for the moment.⁷⁰ For Darlan it was another victory for British obstructionism and timidity.

The German Invasion of the West

On 8 October 1939, writing from London, Marie de Montoussé had written a piece on the state of British diplomacy for *Le Figaro*. A new area of concern was beginning to vex British officials, she wrote: Scandinavia. All the more so since at least two of the countries concerned, Norway and Sweden, were essentially maritime. “Assailed from the West, contained to the South-East, committed in the East; will the Germans turn their efforts towards the North?” Montoussé asked. And she quickly got to the core of the issue: “We know with what interest, with what covetousness, Germany gazes upon the iron ore mines of Sweden...”⁷¹ It should be noted, however, that this was an expression of British rather than French concerns at this point. On the whole, *Le Figaro*, consistent both with its own conservative viewpoint and with the currents of French public opinion, was far more concerned with whatever designs the Soviet

⁷⁰ George E. Melton, *Darlan: Admiral and Statesman of France, 1881-1942* (Newport CT: Praeger, 1998), 62.

⁷¹ “La diplomatie britannique depuis le début de la guerre,” *Le Figaro* 281 (8 October 1939): C3.

Union might have on the countries of Scandinavia, especially after the outbreak of war with Finland.

Even when that issue became a dead letter, however, Anglo-French negotiations about what to do in Scandinavia continued, eventually foundering (much to Churchill's dismay) on a British insistence on linking operations in Norway with a scheme codenamed *Royal Marine*, favored by Churchill, to release fluvial mines into the River Rhine. At the meeting of the War Cabinet on the 1 April, the Prime Minister intimated that he had received word through Georges Mandel, then French Minister for the Colonies, that the French *Comité de Guerre* had failed the day before to endorse the resolution of the Supreme War Council regarding *Royal Marine* and that a request had been received from the French Ambassador for an interview later in the day. A "gloomy and apologetic" M. Corbin had read Chamberlain a note which contained the conclusions of the committee and which "proposed a postponement for three months of the execution of the Operation. Apparently the delay of three months would enable the French to disperse their factories."⁷²

On 8 April a representative of the Danish Chiefs of Staff handed a note to the Norwegian Minister in Copenhagen which read: "Early this morning, two battle cruisers, an armoured cruiser, three destroyers, as well as a great number of torpedo boats and armed transport ships passed the Green Belt, following a northward course."⁷³ In the early morning of 9 April successful landings took place at Trondheim, Bergen and Narvik. By midday, Oslo was virtually in German hands.⁷⁴ Darlan learnt of German convoy movements in a Reuter's report of 8

⁷² CAB/65/6/23, 01 April 1940.

⁷³ François Kersaudy, *Norway 1940* (Lincoln NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 60.

⁷⁴ David Brown, ed., *Naval Operations of the Campaign in Norway, April-June 1940* (London: Frank Cass, 2000), 18-19.

April.⁷⁵ The next day a *New York Times* headline declared: “London Hears of Invasion From *The New York Times*.”⁷⁶

François Kersaudy chronicled the course taken by Anglo-French deliberations over strategy on 9 April: “[At] 6.30 a.m., top priority given to Bergen and Trondheim, with a progressive drift towards Narvik in the course of the morning; confirmation of Narvik’s new-found predominance during the afternoon, under insistent pressure from the French; ‘definitive’ shelving of Trondheim in the evening, with the surprise appearance in the late-evening conclusions of the Military Coordination Committee of the small ports of Namsos and Aandalsnes...some 500 miles south of Narvik.”⁷⁷ Although aware of the gravity of the situation, Churchill remained up-beat. Writing to the First Sea Lord on 10 April, he offered the opinion that “Narvik must be fought for. Although we have been completely outwitted, there is no reason to suppose that prolonged and serious fighting in this area will not impose a greater drain on the enemy than on ourselves.”⁷⁸ The campaign lasted two months. Six days after its conclusion on 8 June the German army was in Paris.

In his memoirs, Paul Reynaud suggested that it might be inferred from Vichy propaganda that “France’s ally was guilty of treachery towards her,” adding: “This is an absurdity...”⁷⁹ Nonetheless, in a letter to his wife on 31 May, Darlan observed caustically: “It seems that when it is a question of getting to the sea, the creeping British grow wings.”⁸⁰ Those wings eventually brought the British Expeditionary Force to the beaches of Dunkirk.

⁷⁵ According to Reynaud, *In the Thick of the Fight*, 269; According to Coutau-Bégarie and Huan, *Darlan*, 203) Darlan was informed of the Reuter report by Reynaud .

⁷⁶ *The New York Times* (9 April 1940): 2.

⁷⁷ Kersaudy, *Norway 1940*, 86.

⁷⁸ Churchill, *The Gathering Storm*, 600.

⁷⁹ Reynaud, *In the Thick of the Fight*, 371.

⁸⁰ Coutau-Bégarie and Huan, *Darlan*, 221.

Already on 6 June, German Naval Intelligence was reporting that the “Military Attaché in Madrid reports from a reliable Spanish source on the possibility that when German troops arrive outside Paris President Lebrun will resign and be replaced by Marshal Pétain. At the same time it is planned to offer a separate peace to avoid further sacrifices.”⁸¹

On 16 June Reynaud resigned the French premiership. At midday on 17 June Pétain, now Prime Minister, announced to the French people on the radio: “It is with a heavy heart that I say to you today that it is necessary to cease fighting. I have this evening approached the enemy to ask if he is ready to try to find, between soldiers, with the struggle over and in honour, the means to put an end to the hostilities.”⁸²

The Undefeated Navy

The navy, for its part, seemed to have done its bit. On a positive note, the Hamburg-America liner *Halle* (5,889 tons) scuttled herself off Dakar, West Africa, on 16 October 1939 to avoid capture by the French cruiser *Duquay-Trouin*.⁸³ In fact, the French Navy seemed to embark upon its wartime experience with a series of *actions d'éclat*. On 18 September an aircraft flying from the *Béarn* reportedly sank a U-boat off the coast of Albania.⁸⁴ On 2 October the *Amiral Mouchez* claimed another sunk in the English Channel off Le Havre. On 22 November an official communiqué announced a double victory for the 1,500 ton heavy destroyer *Sirocco*. The first, on 15 November, gained the ship an official citation and the second, on 20 November, another. On 25 November it was reported that the *Indomptable* had attacked a U-boat one

⁸¹ *War Diary: German Naval Staff Operations Division* (GNSOD) part A, vol. 10 (Washington, D.C.: Office of Naval Intelligence, 1948-1955), 57.

⁸² Jackson, *The Fall of France*, 143.

⁸³ CAB 66/2/44.

⁸⁴ Coutau-Bégarie and Huan, *Lettres et notes de l'Amiral Darlan*, 110, 115, 120, 141.

hundred miles west of Cape Finisterre.⁸⁵ On 9 December the sloop *Commandant Duboc* claimed another U-boat at the entrance to the Straits of Gibraltar, off the coast of Morocco.⁸⁶ Elsewhere another was claimed by the destroyer *Adroit*. On 21 December, writing for *Le Figaro*, Lucien Romer estimated that two thirds of the U-boat fleet had been destroyed since the outbreak of war, “or at least more than half.” Romer was optimistic: “The exploits of the French heavy destroyer *Sirocco*...raise the question of how long Germany can sustain the submarine war.”⁸⁷ In January 1940 a third U-boat was attributed to the *Sirocco*, making her the most admired vessel in the French fleet.⁸⁸ On 19 January 1940, the *Lorientaise* reported sinking a U-boat in the Bay of Biscay.⁸⁹ The *Fantasque* claimed to have sunk U53 on 21 February 1940. Three days later the destroyer *Simoun* claimed one more. Speaking to the press on 7 March, Navy Minister Campinchi announced that *Simoun*'s victory brought to twelve the number of U-boats sunk by the French navy.⁹⁰ Writing on 23 January 1940, Darlan noted that, from the perspective of the Allies, the submarine war seemed to have been stabilized.⁹¹

Regrettably, all of this apparent success turned out to be completely illusory. German Naval Intelligence remarked in a report on 12 January: “Radio monitoring intercepted convoy movements, also various submarine warnings and submarine attack reports in the Channel, though there are none of our boats there at present.”⁹² In fact the only Axis submarine that the French Navy ever actually sank between 1939 and 1940 was the Italian submarine *Provana*,

⁸⁵ CAB/66/3/45, 2 December 1939.

⁸⁶ Amouroux, *Le peuple du désastre*, 248.

⁸⁷ “Notes sur la guerre,” *Le Figaro* 355 (21 December 1939): 1

⁸⁸ Henri Darrius and Jean Quéguiner, *Historique de la Marine française (1922-1942)* (Saint-Malo: Editions L'ancre de marine, 1996), 88.

⁸⁹ Auphan and Mordal, *The French Navy in World War II*, 31.

⁹⁰ “Les français ont coulé 12 sous-marins allemands,” *Le Figaro* 68 (8 March 1940): 1.

⁹¹ Coutau-Bégarie and Huan, *Lettres et notes de l'Amiral Darlan*, 146.

⁹² GNSOD part A, vol. 5, 58, 12 January 1940.

which went down in the Mediterranean on 16 June 1940.⁹³ The *Provana* was rammed by the sloop *La Curieuse* and sank having been cut in half. Such was the damage to the bow of *La Curieuse*, however, that she had to suffer the indignity of making her way back to Oran in reverse gear. At least this time the fate of the target was not in doubt.⁹⁴ Of 785 German submarines lost in the course of the war, only eighteen were destroyed in the first ten months of the conflict, and those by the Royal Navy.⁹⁵

More concrete achievements, if that is the word, were recorded during the Norwegian campaign and the Battle of France. At Namsos the first three battalions of French chasseurs-alpins arrived in four troopships escorted by Admiral Derrien aboard the cruiser *Emile Bertin*, accompanied by four French heavy destroyers on 19 April 1940. They were joined by the British cruiser *Cairo* which led the convoy on its passage through the fjords. Under aerial attack the *Emile Bertin* was damaged by a bomb that fortunately failed to explode, although she was forced to return to Scapa. Entering Namsen Fjord the convoy continued to come under intermittent bomber attack until dark fell. The troopships were tied up by 10 p.m. By 2.30 a.m. they cast off again to avoid the unwanted attention of the Luftwaffe, led again by the *Cairo* and accompanied by the French destroyer *Chevalier Paul* and the British destroyer *Nubian*.

The same morning the steamer *Ville d'Alger* departed Scapa Flow for Namsos accompanied by two French heavy destroyers, joined by the British cruisers *Calcutta* and *Birmingham*. By the time they arrived off the Norwegian coast, however, word was received that Namsos had been flattened during the day and that it was in any case too late to begin the

⁹³ Robert O. Paxton, "Darlan, un amiral entre deux blocs: Réflexions sur une biographie récente," *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d'histoire* 36 (October - December 1992), 3-19. Paxton maintains that the *Provana* was in fact the only enemy vessel sunk by the French Navy at all, although this was not quite the case.

⁹⁴ Darrieus and Quéguiner, *Historique de la marine française*, 92.

⁹⁵ Amouroux, *Le peuple du désastre*, 249, 249 n 13.

unloading operation that night. Nonetheless, the next day the convoy pressed on to Namsos in poor visibility occasioned by violent snow squalls. The dock facilities proving inadequate, *Ville d'Alger* was forced to anchor off-shore. Meantime *Calcutta* and the French destroyer *Bison* had run aground and had to be assisted by the British destroyer *Maori*. In a continuing snow storm the British sloop *Auckland* began to disembark the French chasseurs alpins from the *Ville d'Alger* while a British motor launch began towing stores to shore in open boats. Released from her previous duty, *Maori* took off another 400 French troops. *Auckland* returned at 02.30 a.m. but it was adjudged too late to continue operations and half an hour later *Ville d'Alger* weighed anchor for the return journey in company with the freshly refloated *Bison*.

Overall the operation was a complete fiasco. The *Ville d'Alger* departed with 345 troops including 10 officers, all the brigade's mules, light trucks, transmitters and anti-aircraft guns. The skis which had been landed arrived without the necessary attachments and were entirely useless. Bombing raids in the morning destroyed the best part of the French supplies and decimated the staff of the French commander, General Audet. Yet if it was a disaster, it was not through lack of trying and certainly not through lack of cooperation. As far as the wider implications for the campaign in southern Norway were concerned, however, the writing was already on the wall. The order to withdraw from Namsos came on 28 April 1940.

The transports that had landed the troops a week earlier, less the *Ville d'Oran* which had been damaged by bombs, returned under the command of Admiral Cadart to pick them up again. Overall command of the squadron was in the hands of Admiral Cunningham, with the French warships under the command of Admiral Derrien, who had transferred his flag to the cruiser *Montcalm*, named, by a twist of fate, for the French general who had succumbed to British

musket fire outside Quebec during the Seven Years' War. On the night of 2 May a total of 4,205 British and French troops were embarked on to the transports at Namsos.

Returning to Scapa in two groups, the second formation came under air attack over a period of seven hours in what were, from a bomber pilot's perspective, ideal conditions. Just after 10 a.m. the *Bison* was struck forward of the bridge superstructure and a few seconds later was rocked by a violent explosion before disappearing in a cloud of smoke. Witnesses observed debris climbing to over a thousand feet before the ship broke in two forward of the first funnel. According to the Home Fleet narrative, "Commander R.C.Boyle, R.N., of the *Grenade* very gallantly secured the stern of his ship to the sinking *Bison*, despite burning oil and exploding ammunition and was responsible for saving the lives of many of the *Bison*'s ship's company by this act."⁹⁶

The second part of the force arrived back at Scapa on 5 May 1940, having suffered another loss, the British destroyer *Afridi*. Vice-Admiral J.H.D. Cunningham was fulsome in his praise for his French counterparts:

The manner in which the transports *El d' Jezair* and *El Kantara*, under the command of Contre-amiral Cadart, were manoeuvred at high speed to conform to the movements of the escorting vessels during the air attacks is worthy of the highest praise; they also hotly engaged all aircraft sighted and thereby contributed their quota to the general defence of the convoy. The loyal and understanding co-operation afforded to me by Contre-amiral Derrien and his squadron greatly lightened my task and contributed materially to the success of the operation...⁹⁷

Over the course of the evacuation of Dunkirk, according to Darlan's journal, 512 French units participated,⁹⁸ evacuating approximately 50,000 of the 123,000 French troops thus delivered and incurring losses of two heavy destroyers, five destroyers, thirty armed trawlers, five tugs, three

⁹⁶ Brown, ed., *Naval Operations of the Campaign in Norway*, 96; Caroff, *La Compagne de Norvège 1940*, 96.

⁹⁷ Brown, ed., *Naval Operations of the Campaign in Norway*, 96-97.

⁹⁸ *Ibid*, 222 n38.

oil tankers, twelve cargo ships, one passenger liner and “several other small vessels of which no trace has ever been found.”⁹⁹ Despite subsequent recriminations, on the night of 4 June over 21,000 French troops were evacuated in British vessels.¹⁰⁰ Six British destroyers had been sunk by then and nineteen others damaged. Of 45 so-called “personnel vessels” deployed, nine were sunk and eight so seriously damaged that they had to be withdrawn.¹⁰¹ On 4 June, General Spears received word via the French Naval Attaché in London and the Minister of Marine Campinchi that Admiral Abrial, commanding the French defense at Dunkirk, “considers the work of the British was magnificent tonight.”¹⁰² Admiral Auphan, then Captain Auphan, who liaised for a period with the Royal Navy command in Dover, also recalled “the personal bravery of the British crews.”¹⁰³ Overcoming his own particular inclinations – US Ambassador Bullitt reported that the French admiral had told him after Norway that the British Fleet had “proved to be as great a disappointment as the French Army”¹⁰⁴ - Darlan sent a telegram of thanks to the British Admiralty. Even in private, however, he admitted that he hadn’t dared hope to evacuate even half the number who eventually departed Dunkirk. All in all, he thought, it could have been a lot worse.¹⁰⁵

In France, the day after the conclusion of “Operation Dynamo,” as the Dunkirk evacuation was known officially, the Germans began a fresh assault against the remnants of the allied fighting forces, breaking through in several places and threatening the ports of Cherbourg, Brest and Nantes. On 8 June 1940 a Government decree placed the Channel and Atlantic ports

⁹⁹ Auphan and Mordal, *The French Navy in World War II*, 82.

¹⁰⁰ Winston S. Churchill, *Their Finest Hour* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1949), 115.

¹⁰¹ S.W. Roskill, *The War at Sea, 1939-1945: vol. I; The Defensive* (London: Her Majesty’s Stationary Office, 1954), 228.

¹⁰² Sir Edward Spears, *Assignment to Catastrophe, Vol. II: The Fall of France, June 1940* (London: Heinemann, 1954), 32-33.

¹⁰³ Auphan and Mordal, *The French Navy in World War II*, 74.

¹⁰⁴ Colin Smith, *England’s Last War Against France: Fighting Vichy, 1940-1942* (London: Phoenix, 2009), 45.

¹⁰⁵ Coutau-Bégarie and Huan, *Darlan*, 222- 223.

under the authority of Darlan, as Commander in Chief of the Naval Forces, who soon equipped them with a senior ranking “Delegate of the Admiralty” to organize defense and the continued functioning of the harbors. A Canadian Division began disembarking in France on 11 June, even as the British began evacuating Le Havre transferring 9,000 men directly to Cherbourg, their departure covered by French naval forces organized by Admiral Platon,. Italy declared war the same day. The British 51st Division was forced to surrender outside St. Valéry. On 15 June the decision was taken to evacuate the remainder of the BEF. Again stout French defense of their coastal towns made possible a maritime retreat. 40,000 British troops and 20,000 men of the Polish division were taken off at St. Nazaire.¹⁰⁶ 30,630 men were evacuated from Cherbourg, the Germans entering the port as the last boats departed. Another 21,474 were evacuated from Saint-Malo, 32,584 from Brest and over 60,000 from Brest. Other small groups were evacuated from Bordeaux, Le Verdon, Bayonne and St Jean de Luz. General Alan Brooke, commander for a week of a newly reconstituted second BEF, departed St. Nazaire at midnight on 18 June. Officially the evacuation ended on 25 June by order of the French Government in order to conform with the terms of the Armistice, but in fact it continued unofficially until 14 August. Of a total of 191,870 evacuated, 144,171 were British, 18,246 were French, 24,352 Polish, 4,938 Czech and 163 Belgian.¹⁰⁷

According to Anthony Heckstall-Smith, this “would never have been possible but for Darlan’s order to defend the ports to the last, even after they had been declared open cities by the

¹⁰⁶ Darrieus and Quéguiner, *Historique de la marine française*, 109.

¹⁰⁷ Philip Warner, *The Battle of France: Six Weeks That Changed the World* (Mechanicsburg PA: Stackpole Books, 2011), 221-222.

Government.”¹⁰⁸ The more traditional narrative of deteriorating Anglo-French relations was described by Philip Warner:

There was a foretaste of Britain’s relationship with the future Vichy French government on 12 June when the news came through to Britain that the 51st Highland Division had reached St. Valéry but had no prospect of being evacuated. It had been ordered by the French to surrender, but its commander had refused. French troops at St. Valéry were already hanging out white flags.¹⁰⁹

The illusion among the Allies that the submarine threat had been mastered may well have been nurtured in part as a result of the policies of the Reich. Fostering hopes that France could be detached from the alliance and Britain left isolated, even before hostilities broke out instructions were issued to the German Navy on 31 August 1939 as a result of OKW Order No.1 that it should “carry out war against merchant shipping, concentrating on Great Britain.”¹¹⁰ On 3 September these orders were refined and submarines operating in the Atlantic were informed that war against merchant shipping should be conducted ‘at present in compliance with prize regulations.’¹¹¹ Any naval operations against the French should be purely defensive in character. In the early morning of 6 September, further instructions were dispatched to U-boats in the Atlantic: “Merchantmen identified as being French are not to be stopped. Incidents with France are to be avoided at all cost (sic).”¹¹²

Overall the institution of the convoy system had a beneficial effect on the rate of loss of Allied shipping. 120,000 tons were lost in the first half of September 1939 and 54,000 tons in the second. This total of 174,000 tons for the month fell in October to 138,000 tons. In November the total fell again to 47,000 tons, over the course of two months never passing but

¹⁰⁸ Anthony Heckstall-Smith, *The Fleet That Faced Both Ways* (London: Anthony Blond Ltd., 1963), 21. All French cities of over 20,000 inhabitants were declared “open” on the 18 June 1940 (FRUS 1940, vol. I, 262).

¹⁰⁹ Warner, *The Battle of France*, 191.

¹¹⁰ Walter Warlimont, *Inside Hitler’s Headquarters, 1939-1945* (New York: Praeger, 1964), 31; GNSOD part A, vol. 1, 18.

¹¹¹ GNSOD part A, vol. 1, 26.

¹¹² GNSOD part A, vol. 1, 35.

1.7 per cent of all available shipping. Ships that sailed alone proved immensely more vulnerable than those escorted in convoy. French ships at first seemed practically immune from attack. Over the same period only nine French vessels were sunk, amounting to 60,000 tons, a figure inflated by the loss of the tanker *Émile Miguet* on the 12 October.¹¹³ Darlan obviously was not aware of the Führer's prohibition favoring French shipping, so it must have been gratifying to observe what appeared to be an almost flawless performance by his navy. The critical thing about the appearance of success as far as Darlan's future influence at Vichy was concerned, however, was that it lent weight to his claim of the 1 December 1940 that "[the] Navy was never beaten."¹¹⁴

Mers-el-Kébir

Proof, were it needed, of the general confusion that reigned as France fell was provided by German Naval Intelligence. Shortly after the War Cabinet discussed the future of the French Fleet on 24 June, the German Staff Operational Division recorded in the war diary that the "French Navy Department informed all warships and merchantmen at 22.00 of the cessation of hostilities against Germany and Italy at 00.35 on 25 June." If that seemed definitive, the diary continued: "The attitude of the individual French forces in French colonial harbors is not yet clear. Many of them are undoubtedly resolved to carry out the orders of the Pétain Government. A radiogram from a French vessel in the Casablanca area bears witness to a different attitude. It reads: 'Treachery along the whole line. I am making for a British port.'" On 27 June it was recorded that "[the] attitude of the French Navy is still not clear."¹¹⁵

¹¹³ Coutau-Bégarie and Huan, *Darlan*, 180.

¹¹⁴ Coutau-Bégarie and Huan, *Lettres et notes de l'Amiral Darlan*, 253.

¹¹⁵ GNSOD part A, vol. 10, June 1940, 204, 226.

Similarly conflicting signals were emanating from Admiral A.B. Cunningham in Alexandria. On the one hand, he observed of his French counterpart Admiral Gensoul: “At one time I thought the Admiral would stand firm, but he faded out.” By contrast: “The younger officers and men are all for fighting on. In fact there is one complete destroyer’s crew who want to go on as they are under the British flag.”¹¹⁶ According to a Russian report recorded on 25 June, all French ships in Turkish waters had hoisted the British flag.¹¹⁷

On 24 June Darlan signaled the terms of the armistice to the fleet in “clear” but took the opportunity to send a coded addendum before the provisions of the agreement prohibited such actions. Demobilized warships, he said, must remain French, under French colors, with French crews in French ports, whether Metropolitan or colonial. Preparations should be made to scuttle ships in the event that “enemy or foreign” forces attempt to seize them. Should the Armistice Commission seek to adjust the terms, ships should make for the United States or be scuttled. In any case they should not be handed over intact to the enemy. Ships in foreign ports should not be used in operations against the Germans or Italians without a direct order from the Commander-in-Chief.¹¹⁸

If that was pretty clear, in a separate coded message that evening, Darlan expressed himself with the kind of ambiguity that perplexed the British and Germans alike:

During the war, which has ended so tragically for our country, the Commanders and crews of the naval forces and merchant marine have constantly stood tests of courage, strength and patriotism. Thanks to them the Navy can declare that it is not defeated. I express my appreciation to it. I salute the dead of this war who fell at sea and whose sacrifices will pave the way to less troubled times. We honor their memory and work with the same passion for the restoration of the mother country, in which the traditions of the Navy must play a large part.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁶ *The Cunningham Papers* vol. I: *The Mediterranean Fleet, 1939-1942* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999), 82.

¹¹⁷ GNSOD part A, vol. 10, June 1940, 211.

¹¹⁸ Coutau-Bégarie and Huan *Lettres et Notes de l'Amiral Darlan*, 212-213.

¹¹⁹ GNSOD part A, vol. 10, June 1940, 211.

At 10.30 that evening the War Cabinet convened again to consider a Naval Staff appreciation regarding the French Fleet summarized by the First Sea Lord. Pound evinced a certain lack of enthusiasm for the task at hand. He said that “as soon as we made any attempt to take over or sink units of the French Fleet, the crews of the remaining ships would probably become actively hostile, thus reducing our chances of securing more than a small part of the Fleet. In addition the Germans would at once take more stringent measures to get possession of the remaining ships.” The most important units to be eliminated, he continued, were the battle cruisers *Dunkerque* and *Strasbourg* which, together with two other capital ships, some twenty-one destroyers and an unknown number of submarines, were reported to be in a new harbor not far from Oran. They were under the protection of six-inch shore batteries. The British forces available to deal with the *Force de Raid*, as this French squadron was termed, consisted of *Hood*, *Resolution* and *Ark Royal*. This was the first clear reference to Mers-el-Kébir.¹²⁰ Pound suggested that the loss of *Hood* and *Resolution* had to be anticipated. Making his disapproval explicit, the First Sea Lord went on to say that the probable loss of two ships seemed a heavy price to pay for the elimination or partial elimination of the *Force de Raid*. Admiral Darlan and other French Admirals had maintained the consistent attitude that in no circumstances would the French Fleet be surrendered, and it would seem, suggested Pound, more likely that we should achieve our object by trusting in these assurances, rather than by attempting to eliminate units of the French Fleet by force. Pound did not therefore recommend the proposed operation.

The Prime Minister was more determined. He said that too much weight could not be attached to these private messages. The situation had to be faced in the light of public documents and in view of the terms of the Armistice to which the Bordeaux Government had agreed. The covert suggestion that the French authorities might scuttle their ships could not be relied on. It

¹²⁰ CAB 65/13/50, 25 June 1940.

must be remembered that the protection given by the Armistice did not necessarily apply to the peace terms, although it might be expected that the peace terms would be framed on the basis of the Armistice. Once the German occupation of French territory was complete, and the French Government were entirely at their mercy, there was nothing to prevent Germany from imposing peace terms more onerous than those to which the French had agreed for the purpose of the Armistice.

That set the tone for his address to the House of Commons on 25 June. He recalled the dispatch of the First Sea Lord, the First Lord and Lord Lloyd to Bordeaux on 16 June, before moving on to discuss the armistice:

Everything was, of course, fusing into collapse at that time, but many solemn assurances were given that the Fleet would never be allowed to fall into German hands. It was, therefore, "with grief and amazement"—to quote the words of the Government statement which we issued on Sunday—that I read Article 8 of the Armistice terms. This Article, to which the French Government have subscribed, says that the French Fleet, excepting that part left free for the safeguarding of French interests in the Colonial Empire, shall be collected in ports to be specified and there demobilised and disarmed under German or Italian control. From this text it is clear that the French war vessels under this Armistice pass into German and Italian control while fully armed. We note, of course, in the same Article the solemn declaration of the German Government that they have no intention of using them for their own purposes during the war. What is the value of that? Ask half a dozen countries what is the value of such a solemn assurance. Furthermore, the same Article 8 of the Armistice excepts from the operation of such assurances and solemn declarations those units necessary for coast surveillance and minesweeping. Under this provision it would be possible for the German Government to reserve, ostensibly for coast surveillance, any existing units of the French Fleet. Finally, the Armistice can at any time be voided on any pretext of non-observance, and the terms of Armistice explicitly provide for further German claims when any peace between Germany and France comes to be signed. Such, in very brief epitome, are the salient points in this lamentable and also memorable episode, of which, no doubt, a much fuller account will be given by history.¹²¹

¹²¹ Hansard, House of Commons Debates, 25 June 1940 vol. 362 cc301-7; <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/sittings/1940/jun/25>.

Churchill, of course, had wider considerations to entertain than did the First Sea Lord. In the public sphere feelings were turning against the French. *Mass Observation* later recorded extremely hostile comments from the general public on the “Bleeding French.”¹²² According to Marvin R. Zahniser the anger of General Spears and the British Ambassador Ronald Campbell toward the French “reflects memos and position papers circulating within the British Foreign Office. In memoranda and marginalia one finds comments demeaning the French...Perhaps the snarls of contempt for French defeatists were inevitable. So while Churchill publicly promised redemption and restoration for France, Foreign Office officials were busily scratching out France and penciling in the United States as the United Kingdom’s source of salvation and its future partner.”¹²³

On 25 June as well, Admiral Godfroy received orders “and officially requested that his squadron may be allowed to sail for Beirut today Tuesday. I have refused his request.” So signalled Cunningham from Alexandria. At 6 p.m. the British War Cabinet “were informed that the *Richelieu* had sailed from Dakar at 2:15 p.m. that afternoon.”¹²⁴ 35,000 tons of battleship in the Atlantic and no one was quite sure what side she was on. It may have sealed the fate of the French Fleet.

At 3:30 p.m. on 27 June Admiral Somerville was briefed by the First Sea Lord. It had been decided to assemble a force at Gibraltar, consisting of HM Ships *Hood*, *Valiant*, *Resolution*, *Nelson*, *Ark Royal*, *Arethusa*, *Enterprise*, *Delhi* and 10 destroyers, in addition to the 9 destroyers of the 13th Destroyer Flotilla based on Gibraltar. “The initial task of this force, to be known as

¹²² Jennifer Birkett, *Margaret Storm Jameson : A Life: A Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 210.

¹²³ Marvin R. Zahniser, *Then Came Disaster: France and the United States, 1918-1940* (Newport CT: Praeger, 2002), 132.

¹²⁴ CAB 65/13/51, 25 June 1940.

Force H, would be to secure the transfer, surrender or destruction of the French warships at Oran and Mers-el-Kebir, so as to ensure that these ships did not fall into German or Italian hands.”¹²⁵

In French mythology what occurred was a massacre, somewhat akin to Pearl Harbor. But not only did negotiations continue for hours, but the British First Sea Lord anticipated heavy losses. Force H was ordered to be assembled on 27 June. German Naval Intelligence recorded its presence West of Gibraltar on 29 June. According to Gensoul’s own account of events, the *Force de Raid* was ready to be cleared for action on 2 July. *Foxhound* arrived to open negotiations on 3 July.

This is entirely contrary to the common understanding of events in France. Typically it is held that the Royal Navy attacked undermanned, un-fueled vessels in the process of disarming according to the terms of the armistice. According to Gensoul, however: “All the vessels were ready to cast off and fight at 14.00, the first deadline of the ultimatum.” Furthermore “All ship’s companies were complete, as demobilization was not to begin until 3 July.” As of the 2 July all vessels were refueled and ready to leave within six hours.¹²⁶

Summerville was unenthusiastic about his task. Writing to his wife on 4 July he said: “...Expect you heard about this battle at Oran. Before we left Gib. I *begged* the Admiralty not to go to the lengths of opening fire on the French as I felt sure it would be disastrous. Besides the idea of slaughtering our former allies (or being slaughtered by them) was most repugnant. However HM Govt. said they were determined I should sink the French ships if necessary, so I had no alternative.”¹²⁷

¹²⁵ *The Somerville Papers*, ed. D. Simpson (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1996), 86.

¹²⁶ AN AJ 41 1890-1909.

¹²⁷ *The Somerville Papers*, 108. Italics in original.

The Rise of Darlan

Darlan succeeded Admiral Durand-Viel as Chief of the Naval Staff in January 1937. For Reynolds M. Salerno, “[by] acquiring more authority over the *Marine* than any other naval chief before him, Darlan entirely reconceived French naval strategy in 1937-40 and endeavoured to incorporate his strategy into the making of French foreign policy. In this realm, Darlan exhibited a much more realistic understanding of the priorities of the British Navy and adopted a much more aggressive posture *vis-a-vis* Italy than his predecessor.” Darlan, “who had long held Britain in contempt for the post-war naval treaties’ stipulation of Franco-Italian naval parity” and who was infuriated by the British attitude during the Spanish Civil War was destined to see that relationship deteriorate further.¹²⁸

On 27 August 1939, in anticipation of the outbreak of hostilities, Admiral Darlan exchanged his title as Naval Chief of Staff for the more bellicose Commander-in-Chief of French Maritime Forces, a soubriquet that brought with it far more extensive powers. On the 6th September he left the French Admiralty buildings in the Rue Royale in central Paris to take up residence in the Navy’s operational headquarters at Maintenon, situated seventy miles from the capital, in the grounds of the ancient château of the Duc de Noailles. There were a number of practical reasons for this displacement. It represented an important hub for underground telephone and telegraph cables that facilitated communication with the naval theaters of the Channel, Atlantic and Mediterranean. These links were less vulnerable than those of the capital, which Darlan for one assumed would be the object of systematic air attack in the event of war.¹²⁹ Rail links rendered it straightforward to return to Paris, should such an eventuality be necessary,

¹²⁸ Reynolds M. Salerno, “The French Navy and the Appeasement of Italy, 1937-9,” *The English Historical Review* 112:445 (Feb., 1997): 74-76.

¹²⁹ Coutau-Bégarie and Huan, *Lettres et notes de l'Amiral Darlan*, 127-129.

and as Darlan was a member of the War Cabinet, this would certainly be the case. The camp also disposed of an airfield. The most pressing consideration seems to have been political, however. Vincennes had been considered, but was rejected on the grounds that it was “too close to the capital with all its intrigues, indiscretions, and political interference.”¹³⁰

It was according to the secret decree that had defined the role of Commander-in-Chief of French Maritime Forces on 7 September 1938 that Darlan became a member of the French War Cabinet. He was given sole responsibility for the higher conduct of naval operations in all theaters, as well as for coastal defense, including anti-aircraft in areas abutting the sea. He was also responsible for coordination of activities with any eventual allies.¹³¹ Darlan deployed the new power at his disposal with aplomb, preventing his predecessor as Naval Chief of Staff Admiral Durand-Viel from securing any appointment in the newly mobilized Navy. Darlan also managed to secure the removal of Admiral Raoul Castex from his position as Admiral Nord, based at Dunkerque.

Castex was the foremost French naval theorist of his time whose alleged views had so taxed the British at the Washington Conference. After the First World War, he had complained that “we live in a confusion of ideas, in an undeniable doctrinal crisis, in a constant controversy over the lessons to be drawn from the last conflict...”¹³² Part of Castex’s solution to what he perceived to be France’s strategic dilemma was to rationalize its imperial holdings: “Such are the decisions necessary to redress a colonial situation whose strategic vices leap to the eyes...Let us accept these amputations, these necessary surgical interventions. If we do not, they will happen

¹³⁰ Auphan and Mordal, *The French Navy in World War II*, 24.

¹³¹ Coutau-Bégarie and Huan, *Darlan*, 175.

¹³² Quoted in the Introduction to the abridged version of Raoul Castex, *Strategic Theories*, edited and translated by Eugenia C. Kiesling (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1994), xvi.

in any case, in an infinitely more brutal fashion without anesthesia or compensation.”¹³³

Securing the Empire, however, was precisely what most animated Darlan. “France,” he observed “is an Empire whose diverse elements are separated by the sea... That is why, for twenty years, we in the Navy have striven, as our forebears before us and as our descendants will tomorrow, to assure the safety and glory of Imperial France.”¹³⁴ Much to the British First Sea Lord’s horror, this sensibility was reflected during the Chiefs of Staff meeting in Portsmouth on the 8th August 1939, when Darlan suggested, given Spain’s likely sympathies in the event of a war with the Axis, a preemptive attack on Spanish Morocco.¹³⁵ Darlan simply did not have the strategic vision of a Castex, and there is no evidence that he had ever read *Strategic Theories*.¹³⁶ His attitude towards Castex was one of professional hostility.

This hostility came to a head with the outbreak of war. On 6 October 1939, in his capacity as Admiral Nord, Castex addressed a personal letter to Darlan in which, beyond matters of a purely naval nature, he was severely critical of the level of land forces deployed to protect the northeast of France. The Empire, he noted, was absorbing too much of the country’s strength and the northern flank was dangerously exposed. In a reply on 11 October, Darlan swept aside his subordinate’s fears and concluded with a scarcely veiled threat to the effect that if the northern defenses proved insufficient, the Admiral Nord would find himself surplus to requirements. Castex nonetheless reoriented his defenses to face the eastern border rather than the sea, much to Darlan’s chagrin, who plainly considered this an affront to his authority as

¹³³ Raoul Castex, *Strategic Theories*, ed. Eugenia C. Kiesling (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1994), 307

¹³⁴ Quoted in Alain Darlan, *L’Amiral Darlan Parle...*, 43.

¹³⁵ M.A.Reussner, *Les conversations franco-britanniques d’État-Major (1935-1939)* (Paris: Service Historique de la Marine, 1969), 243.

¹³⁶ Philippe Masson, *La Marine française et la guerre: 1939-1945* (Paris: Tallandier, 1991), 49.

Commander-in-Chief of French Maritime Forces. He invited Castex to take his place in the ranks of reserve officers.¹³⁷

As for the Navy Minister in late 1939, César Campinchi, the guidelines describing the role of the Commander-in-Chief in wartime reduced him to a cipher, a “provider” as Darlan put it, referring to the minister’s ongoing responsibility for the operation of naval yards and ship maintenance.¹³⁸ Actually, when it was convenient, Darlan would appropriate these responsibilities too, as when he took it upon himself to order heavy diesel engines from Switzerland under his own signature in September 1939.¹³⁹ Rarely informed on operational issues, which were Darlan’s preserve, Campinchi allegedly had to scan the press to find out what was going on. The minister almost never put in an appearance at Maintenon, where his presence was deemed unnecessary; although he did visit on 13 October, but only to accompany the President of the Republic.¹⁴⁰ Campinchi had no naval background, as he was the first to admit. In a speech made the following February, the minister confessed: “I knew nothing about the Navy.” He prompted smiles from his audience when he added: “I am not the only minister of whom this was true...but perhaps the only one who admits it.”¹⁴¹

Campinchi’s situation was baffling to British First Lord of the Admiralty Winston Churchill when he visited Maintenon on 3 November 1939, accompanied by the First Sea Lord Dudley Pound. “I said that the First Sea Lord and I were one,” he later wrote. “Darlan said he recognized this, but in France it was different.”¹⁴² Campinchi arrived in time for lunch, during which Darlan belabored the limits to which the civilian minister was restricted by the French

¹³⁷ Coutau-Bégarie and Huan, *Darlan*, 187-189.

¹³⁸ *Ibid*, 174.

¹³⁹ *Ibid*, 179.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 191.

¹⁴¹ *Le Petit Parisien* 22987 (6 February 1940): 1.

¹⁴² Winston S. Churchill, *The Gathering Storm* (Boston: Houghton and Mifflin Co., 1948), 499.

system to Duncan Sandys, Churchill's son-in-law. Churchill formed a high opinion of Campinchi, with whom he dined at the Ritz that evening, but agreed with Pound that Admiral Darlan, "jealous of his position, was fighting on quite a different front from ours."¹⁴³ Certainly, as we have seen, Darlan did not hesitate to relieve any officer with whom he did not see eye to eye. In September 1939 the commander of the heavy destroyer *Léopard* and two other officers were relieved for displaying an insufficiently warlike disposition.¹⁴⁴ In October 1939 Vice Admiral Muselier, naval commander in Marseille, was put on the retired list "as a result of disagreements with Admiral Darlan."¹⁴⁵ The disagreement revolved around Muselier's circumvention of the chain of command to distribute information to those ineligible to receive it, not least regarding the sinking of the minelayer *Pluton*, which blew up in Casablanca, killing 215 and taking with her several auxiliary vessels.¹⁴⁶ Muselier disputed the findings of the official Board of Enquiry. Later he commanded the Free French Naval Forces.

Conclusion

If in retrospect the attitude of French navy commanders towards the Soviet Union appear eccentric, not to say reckless, it was informed by common French conservative anxiety about the threat of Communism both domestically and from abroad. With defeat, the navy brought with it a consciousness, as it saw it, of the feckless conduct of the war by the parliamentary representatives of the Republic and their equally feckless British counterparts. This left it with a broad distrust of the Republic's politicians and opened the way for the exploration of more authoritarian solutions to the problems that now confronted France. One French admiral noted that "[if] a number of naval officers 'leaned towards the right', it can no doubt be attributed to

¹⁴³ Ibid, 500.

¹⁴⁴ Coutau-Bégarie and Huan, *Lettres et notes de l'Amiral Darlan*, 114.

¹⁴⁵ Auphan and Mordal, *The French Navy in World War II*, 154.

¹⁴⁶ Coutau-Bégarie and Huan, *Lettres et notes de l'Amiral Darlan*, 110, 136.

the numerous financial scandals of the time and a minister who characterized the flag as ‘squalid arse-wipe.’”¹⁴⁷ It is unclear to which unfortunate minister the admiral refers.

Actions taken against the French navy by the British naturally colored attitudes to the erstwhile ally and this fact, combined with fears of Communist insurrection in the wake of military collapse, helped to shape policies towards the Germans in what appeared to be a Europe on the brink of Nazi domination. Conversely, the attitude of the Germans towards the French navy was considerably modified in its favor once evidence had been provided that it was prepared to defend itself. Anti-British sentiments and proven anti-Communist credentials both contributed to the potential for congenial relations with the victorious enemy. The navy’s “undefeated” claims also bolstered its popular reputation. Darlan’s position in the navy was unassailable and already the experience of the war had allowed the navy to flex its muscles in the formulation of policy. The scene was set for Vichy.

¹⁴⁷ Alex Wassilieff, *Un Pavillon sans tache: de l’armistice au sabordage la vérité* (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1986), 22.

CHAPTER FOUR

Collaboration

French sailor Andre Jaffre still shakes with emotion as he recalls the moment in July 1940 that the enemy opened fire on his battleship, the *Bretagne*. “A shell exploded underneath, where there were munitions and a fuel store. I saw a friend who'd had his head blown off. His blood dripped off me. I wanted to be sick.

[Another of the crew of *Bretagne*, Léon] Le Roux is one of many who will never forgive the British.

“What do you want the French to think?” he asks. “It's a betrayal yes, but not only a betrayal, it was murder. A crime. Yes, a real crime.”¹

As recently as 2015 the daughter of a sailor killed on board the *Dunkerque* applied through the French courts for a state pension according to the law of July 2004 that made eligible for such benefits the orphans of those who were “victims of acts of barbarism” or “executed by the enemy” between 1940 and 1945. The lawyer for the plaintiff, Sophie Maral, argued that “the sailors of Mers-el-Kébir were defenseless. They were taken by surprise. It was certainly a question of execution.”²

If, seventy years after the fact, these are the emotions aroused by the events resulting in the deaths of 1,297 French sailors, it is not difficult to imagine how high feelings were running in

¹ Phil Craig, “Mass murder or a stroke of genius that saved Britain? As closer ties with France are planned, the ‘betrayal’ they still can't forgive,” *Daily Mail* 5 February 2010 (<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1248615/Mass-murder-stroke-genius-saved-Britain-As-closer-ties-France-planned-betrayal-forgive.html#ixzz4116PFp6U>).

² Benoît Hopquin, “Les marins de Mers el-Kébir ont-ils été «exécutés par l'ennemi»?” *Le Monde*, 24 June 2005 (http://www.lemonde.fr/police-justice/article/2015/06/24/les-marins-de-mers-el-kebir-ont-ils-ete-executes-par-l-ennemi_4660527_1653578.html#amUOSw7J9fhHZCTD.99).

the second half of 1940. Nor, perhaps, is it surprising that in this atmosphere many decided upon a course that would contribute materially to the war effort of the Third Reich.

Towards a Policy of State Collaboration

In a radio broadcast made on 30 October 1940, six days after his meeting with Hitler at Montoire, Pétain explained the implications of the interview to the French people. “It was of my own free will that I accepted the invitation of the Führer” said the Marshal according to a Reuters report. “I have been under no *Diktat*, no pressure from him. Collaboration between our two countries was considered. I accepted the principles of it.” Pétain returned to the theme later: “It is with honour, and to maintain French unity, a unity of ten centuries, within the framework of a constructive activity of the new European order, that I enter today the path of collaboration.”³ Although the meeting no doubt came as a surprise to most of his listeners, according to Robert O. Paxton it was “the culmination of months of French entreaty.”⁴ If, as Ian Ousby points out, it “was an ominous, though unremarked, sign of the way things would go under the Occupation that one of the first German words to gain currency in French should have been *diktat*”⁵, nonetheless “Hitler’s attitude changed as a result of events in France’s African Empire.”⁶

Pétain may not have put it quite that way, but in the substance he was correct: “Such an interview was only possible...thanks to the heroism of our sailors, the energy of our Colonial leaders, and the loyalty of the native populations France has rallied.” Events at Mers-el-Kébir meant not only that, as de Gaulle put it, “the attitude adopted towards us by the authorities in the French Empire and by the naval and military elements guarding it changed for the most part from

³ *The Times* 48761 (31 October 1940), 4.

⁴ Robert O. Paxton, *Vichy France: Old Guard and New Order, 1940-1944* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 74-75

⁵ Ian Ousby, *Occupation: The Ordeal of France, 1940-1944* (London: St. Martin’s Press, 1997), 85.

⁶ Julian Jackson, *France: The Dark Years, 1940-1944* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 172.

hesitation to opposition,”⁷ but that the attitude of the Germans towards France was slightly modified as well. This was reinforced after the failure of the Anglo-Gaullist attack on Dakar in September 1940: on 24 September, for example, Vichy was authorized to rearm the air force in North Africa.

In his report of 19 November 1940, however, newly appointed German Ambassador in Paris Otto Abetz suggested that such concessions should not be made without cost to the vanquished. He recommended a list of eight demands that could be made, ranging from overt action against “dissidents” in the French colonies with a view in the long term towards opening hostilities with Britain, to tracking down Gaullist and British agents in Metropolitan France and purging the police of anti-German elements.⁸ In fact at a meeting in the German Embassy in Paris on 29 November 1940 with Abetz and a high ranking representative of the German High Command, Walter Warlimont, Laval and French military commanders presented a plan that “envisaged first increasing the defensive capacity of the empire and, next, the reconquest of the dissident territories,” although the French “dismissed the hypothesis of a direct attack against any British territory.”⁹ Warlimont was surprised to be meeting Laval, the French deputy prime minister, but claimed that “it soon became clear that he and Darlan were the driving force.”¹⁰

Not surprisingly, Abetz was horrified when Laval, the “dominant figure of the government during the first five months of the regime,”¹¹ was removed from office by Pétain. This came about because of the failure of the Montoire meeting with Hitler to produce anything concrete beyond an agreement on 16 November 1940 to release French prisoners-of-war with

⁷ Charles de Gaulle, *The Complete War Memoires of Charles de Gaulle* (New York: Carroll & Graf, 1998), 93.

⁸ Otto Abetz, *Pétain et les allemands: Mémoire d'Abetz sur les rapports Franco-Allemands* (Paris: Guacher, 1948), 38-39.

⁹ Philippe Burrin, *France Under the Germans: Collaboration and Compromise* (New York: The New Press, 1996), 103.

¹⁰ Walter Warlimont, *Inside Hitler's Headquarters, 1939-1945* (New York: Praeger, 1964), 123.

¹¹ Jackson, *France: The Dark Years*, 145.

more than four children. The chairman of the economic sub-section of the Armistice Commission at Wiesbaden, Richard Hemmen, went so far as to exclaim that Montoire was “a political event which has nothing to do with what we are doing here.” And indeed things got materially worse in France with a huge influx of deportees from the annexed portions of Alsace and Lorraine and economic demands from the Germans escalating rapidly. The failure poisoned the relationship between Pétain and Laval, whose adherence to the National Revolution was in any case superficial and whose hopes for collaboration were pinned on a longer term strategy. On 26 November Laval, upon German request, surrendered French capital holdings in the Bor copper mines in Yugoslavia. Three days later he handed over the gold stocks that had been entrusted to France by the Bank of Belgium. The objection to Laval, says Julian Jackson, was however, not so much that he sought collaboration, but that he gained nothing by it. It came then as a complete surprise to him when he was sacked on 13 December, to be replaced in the first instance by a triumvirate of Pierre Flandin, Admiral Darlan and General Huntziger.¹² Otto Abetz, at a meeting with Pétain and Darlan on 17 December 1940, described the “action of 13 December” as “a crime against France.”¹³ If he was concerned about the future direction of French policy, he needn’t have worried.

Partly in an effort to smooth ruffled German feathers Darlan was dispatched to meet Hitler, armed with a letter from Pétain repeating the earnest desire of the Marshal to continue down the path of collaboration. They met in the Führer’s train outside Beauvais on Christmas Day 1940. Having been harangued by Hitler, Darlan emphasized that ever since he had entered public office he had been a supporter of “a policy of Franco-German entente.” Failure by the

¹² Ibid, 174-175.

¹³ Warlimont, *Inside Hitler’s Headquarters*, 49.

French Government to pursue a policy of collaboration would, indeed, “be against the interests of the country.”¹⁴

Writing on 30 January 1941, Darlan again justified the principle of collaboration, mainly emphasizing the point that France was in any case at the mercy of Germany. What shape that collaboration should take consisted of economic and political cooperation, and military defense of the Empire, without allowing the stationing of Axis troops in Africa.¹⁵ Probably in early February of the same year, Darlan noted that collaboration did not necessarily imply engagement in the war between Britain and Germany; and to abandon it would mean “disorder, misery, revolution...For my part, my mind is made up: I’m for collaboration.”¹⁶ On 9 February 1941 he effectively took charge of the French Government.

Naval Construction

Article VIII of the Franco-German Armistice agreement stated that:

‘The French war fleet is to collect in ports to be designated more particularly, and under German and/or Italian control to demobilize and lay up—with the exception of those units released to the French Government for protection of French interests in its colonial empire.

The peacetime stations of ships should control the designation of ports.

The German Government solemnly declares to the French Government that it does not intend to use the French War Fleet which is in harbors under German control for its purposes in war, with the exception of units necessary for the purposes of guarding the coast and sweeping mines.

It further solemnly and expressly declares that it does not intend to bring up any demands respecting the French War Fleet at the conclusion of a peace.

All warships outside France are to be recalled to France with the exception of that portion of the French War Fleet which shall be designated to represent French interests in the colonial empire.

¹⁴ Darlan’s report, published in Alain Darlan, *L’amiral Darlan parle* (Paris: Amiot-Dumont, 1953), 265.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 270.

¹⁶ Service Historique de la Marine (SHM), Papiers Darlan, 142 GG2 V quoted in Bernard Costagliola, “Darlan ou le mirage de la collaboration,” *Revue d’histoire maritime* 14 (2011): 146.

Even these relatively benign demands were further mitigated after Mers-el-Kébir and Dakar. Yet it need not have been so. In a note dated 17 June 1940 the German Admiralty had demanded not only the surrender of the entire French fleet, including auxiliary vessels and ships under construction, but all French naval installations as well.¹⁷ As it turned out the naval shipyards at Brest, Lorient and Cherbourg, as well as private yards such as Penhoët at St. Nazaire were already in the hands of the German Army. At the time of the signing of the Armistice on 25 June 1940, 12 of 15 shipyards (or 61 of 74 slipways) found themselves in the Occupied Zone. 85 percent of French ship-building capacity was in the hands of the Germans.¹⁸

Upon his arrival at Brest, the German admiral commanding in Brittany, Admiral von Arnauld de la Perrière, requested and received from the former port director the assistance and cooperation of whatever French naval personnel remained there in order to return the base to a working condition for the benefit of the Kriegsmarine. Under the command of *capitaine de vaisseau* Le Normand what became known as the *unité Marine Brest* (UMB) numbered some 857 effectives by December 1941. Already by 28 October 1940 French naval officers were considered indispensable to the good running of the facility by the German naval staff stationed in France.¹⁹ By February 1944, fifteen months after the German Occupation of the previously Unoccupied Zone, no fewer than 93 officers, about 3,000 seamen, 800 engineers and technicians and 25,000 arsenal workers were continuing to work at the installations at Brest, Cherbourg, Lorient and Toulon.

¹⁷ Lars Hellwinkel, "Les arsenaux de la Marine française à la Libération : l'impact de l'épuration et ses conséquences pour les personnels" in *Les arsenaux de la Marine française à la Libération : l'impact de l'épuration et ses conséquences pour les personnels*, ed. Marc Bergère (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2008), 271-282.

¹⁸ Claude Huan "La construction navale française, 1940-1942"; (http://www.institutstrategie.fr/pub_Mo1%20HUAN%20TEXTE_CONSTR.%2040-42.html)

¹⁹ Hellwinkel, "Les arsenaux de la Marine française à la Libération," 271.

Darlan's directive to the arsenal directors of 30 September 1940 on how they should behave towards the German occupiers is consistent with the general views he expressed on collaboration. "It seems wholly futile to me to resist German demands...the only realistic solution is to accept German requests in principle and try to obtain as substantial a quid pro quo as possible. Aside from any intrinsic value they may have, such compensations will help justify the government's attitude to the workforce and ensure the continuation of normal activity in the ship yards."²⁰

Such a plain statement of intent is slightly at odds with Claude Huan's contention that the limited fruits of Franco-German cooperation stand as a testament to Vichy's policy of inertia as a form of bureaucratic resistance. However, it is true that negotiations with the occupying authorities were drawn out, long-winded, and generated a mountain of paperwork, at times occasioning outbursts of Teutonic exasperation.

After 28 June 1940 orders were issued to all the naval shipyards to continue with work that was already underway, amounting to 134 various auxiliary vessels and 20 warships, mostly destroyers or submarines, all of which was considered by the Germans to be war booty. In July Darlan, then Minister responsible for both the navy and the merchant marine, decided to resume construction of merchant vessels, while work on warships was to continue to the point where they could clear the slipways. Even if the aim of this activity was to limit unemployment in the Occupied Zone, the beneficiary of any activity was likely to be Germany. In the face of the quantity of German orders an Industrial Exchange Service was established in Paris which in August 1940 was re-christened more appropriately the German Order Service (*Service des commandes allemandes*, SCA).

²⁰ Service Historique de la Marine (SHM), TT A 107.

The situation was complex. Naval shipyards were being menaced with reprisals if they refused to take up the construction of warships for the Germans which was expressly forbidden under the terms of the Armistice. They also faced problems of supply and payment. On 4 October 1940 Vice Admiral Walter Kinzel, Director General for Naval Shipyards in France, felt compelled to threaten the appointment of German overseeing *commissaires* if the yards failed to take up working at a proper rhythm. Darlan responded with an objection to Kinzel's menaces on 17 October. He had no principled objection to providing war materiel to Nazi Germany, but was mainly concerned to see that control of French yards did not fall entirely in to German hands. Failing to see that negotiation could only ever lead to a situation where the French would end up doing Germany's bidding on a more or less voluntary basis, this obsession with sovereignty was a fundamental flaw in Vichy policy and reflected the kind of logic that ultimately underwrote the *aryanization* of Jewish property.

Nonetheless Darlan launched another effort to organizing negotiations through the Armistice Commissions in Wiesbaden in mid-November 1940. Oddly a sticking point with the Germans was not dissimilar from the problems that had arisen with the British Admiralty before the war, insofar as the French desired some all-encompassing resolution, while the Germans evinced a willingness to deal with individual issues on a case by case basis. That dealing with an ally would be analogous to dealing with an occupier was delusional, however. Darlan tried to sweeten his proposal with the secret issue of appropriate, if provisional, French Government licenses allowing for the construction of vessels ordered by Germany, while simultaneously presenting his conditions for progress. These included providing for the supply of 5,000 tons of raw materials by the Germans per month, the release of specialist technicians from captivity, the

method of payment and French oversight of sub-contracting in the Free Zone. In addition 30 percent of construction capacity was to be reserved for French requirements.

In reality, after the December dismissal of Laval, “Hitler promptly abandoned all pretence at diplomacy and once more adopted towards France the attitude of the victor.”²¹ In March 1941 Jacques Benoist-Méchin produced a memorandum detailing the current state of Franco-German relations, reiterating in the preamble that the sole policy of Vichy was to achieve the recovery of France within the framework of a New European Order. It was essential to continue this policy and, according to Benoist-Méchin, thanks to Admiral Darlan, the Reich seemed more open to the possibility of reopening negotiations. Benoist-Méchin draws a broad outline of German orders for industrial materiel made in France, including the entire French output of warships, aircraft construction and aero-engines with a value of some 17 billion francs. The problems, as he saw it, were the social and psychological effects of asking hundreds of thousands of French workers, in effect, to work for the Wehrmacht.²²

On 4 April 1941 Abetz forwarded a set of proposals made with the approval of Darlan to Ribbentrop in Berlin. Produced by Pucheu, Lehideux and Marion, in the words of Paxton “some of the young technocrats and activists in Darlan’s cabinet” the most interesting section as far as the Germans were likely to be concerned touched on foreign policy and referred to France as “Europe’s Atlantic bridgehead.” It concluded with the pleasing diplomatic salutation: “We beg the Führer to have confidence in us.”²³

²¹ Warlimont, *Inside Hitler’s Headquarters*, 124.

²² Archives Nationales (AN) 2AG/656.

²³ Abetz, *Pétain et les Allemands*, 84; Robert O. Paxton, *Vichy France: Old Guard and New Order 1940-1944* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 113.

More effective than the blandishments of French technocrats in attracting Hitler's attention were strategic developments in the Mediterranean and the Near East. On 3 April 1941 Rashid Ali seized power in Iraq, proclaimed the National Defense Government, and sent a note to the British ambassador warning against intervening in Iraq's internal affairs. Just in case, a force was dispatched to Basra to deny British troops landing rights there. By this time Rommel was in the process of retaking Cyrenaica and within days Axis offensives had opened in Greece and Yugoslavia.²⁴ Vichy, with airbases in Syria, now had something the Germans wanted. On 21 April Hitler studied with Ribbentrop the options for supplying assistance to Iraq, concluding that the only way to do it was through Syria. On 26 April the Führer decided to send air support to Iraq.²⁵ The same day he announced to Abetz that he would receive Darlan in the first fortnight of May.²⁶

After a series of preliminary discussions in Paris, Darlan duly presented himself at Berchtesgaden on 11 May 1941 in dress uniform, sabre and medals. The outcome of the talks that took place over the next two days was presented to the Council of Ministers in a report of 14 May 1941. Hitler, said Darlan, had no designs on French possessions, especially in Syria, Morocco and French West Africa, although he had suggested that some minor adjustments might be made to accommodate the Italians. In fact, he continued, the Führer had decided "to give to France an honorable place in the European Federation." As far as Darlan was concerned the meeting represented the "last opportunity for a rapprochement with Germany." Failure to take advantage of the opportunity would have catastrophic consequences. "Even admitting that some

²⁴ Douglas Porch, *The Path to Victory: The Mediterranean Theater in World War II* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2004), 573-4, 224, 139.

²⁵ Hervé Coutau-Bégarie and Claude Huan, *Darlan* (Paris: Fayard, 1989), 395.

²⁶ Burrin, *France Under the Germans*, 119.

exterior intervention might extract England from the abyss into which she is foundering, all the French will be dead or enslaved by the time such intervention takes effect.”²⁷

On 21 May negotiations began in Paris that concluded with the signature of three protocols. The German delegation was led by General Warlimont, while on the French side Darlan was accompanied by General Hunziger and Benoist-Méchin. In fact after the first day, Darlan returned to Vichy, not returning until the evening session of 27 May. The first protocol merely confirmed verbal agreements regarding Syria and Iraq that had been in place since 6 May. The second conceded the use of the French naval base at Bizerte in Tunisia for providing supplies to the Afrika Korps. The third allowed for the German use of naval and air facilities at Dakar on the Atlantic coast of Senegal.

It can have been no coincidence that Franco-German naval discussions were resumed in Berlin at the end of May. A letter from the German Armistice Commission suggested that it was open to beginning discussions regarding the placing of French orders in the Occupied Zone.²⁸ The following day the French sub-commission for Armaments produced a memorandum presenting the problems associated with the fulfillment of German orders. This represented a reasonable summary of French arguments over the course of a year of talks. The first concern regarded the potential for a belligerent British response and the need for increased protection for French factories from aerial attack. This included the somewhat unrealistic hope that the Germans would allow French needs for ammunition to override those of Germany. In any case it was suggested that French and German orders be fulfilled simultaneously in the same factories to avoid incidents of the kind of social tension envisaged by Benoist-Méchin. At the same time the memorandum envisaged German concessions in the economic field, French access to essential

²⁷ AN 2AG/656.

²⁸ AN AJ 41 707 27, May 1941.

machinery in the Occupied Zone, and the release of French POWs, especially those of particular technical expertise in the first instance. A dilemma presented itself, however: should the French insist that Germany provide in advance the raw materials necessary to fulfill German orders, or begin work using available French stock which the Germans would replace at a later date. It will become apparent that France was scarcely in a position to insist upon anything.

Nonetheless, it was considered unthinkable as a matter of principle that German orders be carried out in State-owned concerns. Unless, of course, French orders were carried out simultaneously, in which case the situation might be reviewed. In fact it was recognized that certain tasks, such as the charging of certain types of ammunition, could only be carried out in naval facilities. One way around this dilemma was to have a French military procurement service place orders on behalf of the Germans which, while increasing French responsibility for ensuring supply, might have the merit of reducing direct German oversight in French facilities. There was also, oddly given the circumstances, a certain concern over the possibility of industrial espionage.²⁹

On 31 May 1941 the French Delegation to the Armistice Commission in Wiesbaden produced a note for their German counterparts envisaging a distribution of slipway use between the Loire and St. Nazaire to be set at 30 for the Germans and 12 for the French. The material output of this distribution, they emphasized however, depended on the supply of raw materials, release of essential personnel and adequate defense from aerial attack. Despite these reservations they foresaw the completion of the existing construction program between the end of 1942 and the middle of 1944.³⁰ Giving a flavor of the tenor of negotiations, the Admiral Commanding German Naval Forces in France responded on 20 June with a counterproposal placing all French

²⁹ AN AJ 41 707, 28 May 1941

³⁰ AN AJ 41 707, 31 May 1941.

yards between the Loire and St. Nazaire at the disposal of the Germans. In addition, irrespective of French requirements, all French personnel would be available to the German Navy in case of urgent repairs.³¹ In a note of 6 August the French Delegation continued to demand to gain use of French slipways once they became available, while ceding the principle of overall priority for the repair of German warships.³² In practical terms this meant that at the Penhöt yard at St. Nazaire alone, of 3,133 workers engaged in productive work, 2,294 were working for the Germans.³³ Even so, some in the German Navy were beginning to express impatience. *Korvettenkapitän* Tirpitz, echoing Göring's later remarks at St. Florentin, suggested that the French seemed to have forgotten just who had lost the war.³⁴

At a meeting convened at the invitation of the German Armistice Commission on the 19 August 1941, in response to German complaints that delays were occurring because, while the French Government had ceased paying for construction, they had yet to allow the Germans to do so, it was announced that Vichy would extend credit to shipyards on the German account through the State-owned *Crédit National*. The French Delegation also agreed that the French Government should receive no payment for those vessels requisitioned by the Germans as booty of war.³⁵ These last were not inconsiderable. Already on 9 July 1940 the French Delegation had been informed that the Kriegsmarine had seized 24 minesweepers in Rochefort.³⁶ During the first two years of the Occupation, 77 French vessels were requisitioned for service with the Germans.³⁷

³¹ AN AJ 41 707, 20 June 1941.

³² AN AJ 41 707, 6 August 1941.

³³ AN AJ 41 707, 5 August 1941.

³⁴ AN AJ 41 707, 19 July 1941.

³⁵ AN AJ 41 707, 20 August 1941.

³⁶ AN AJ 412 1890, 09 July 1940.

³⁷ Huan "La construction navale française, 1940-1942"; http://www.institutstrategie.fr/pub_Mo1%20HUAN%20TEXTE_CONSTR.%2040-42.html

Four days after the meeting, Darlan informed the French Delegation that the government was now ready to issue the appropriate licenses for German construction in the Occupied Zone and to allow sub-contractors in the Free Zone to collaborate effectively in the fulfillment of those orders. On 29 August the French Delegation issued another note to their German counterparts signally Vichy's agreement to German payment for orders in Occupied France.³⁸ The French continued to make counter-demands, but the reality of the situation was expressed in a meeting on 12 February 1941. Vice-Admiral Michelier, French representative on the naval sub-committee of the Armistice Commission, raised the question of supply of electric accumulators and periscopes for French submarines. In response *Kapitän zur See* Wever politely informed him that the needs of U-Boats trumped the requirements of the French Fleet. "We shall," he continued "put at your disposal anything we are not using."³⁹

There is certainly evidence of French prevarication as far as cooperation on naval construction was concerned and Claude Huan, for one, maintains that in two years only 30,000 tons of shipping was actually launched of an initial program of 250,000 tons. In his report on the state of French military collaboration of 2 April 1942, Abetz, usually at pains to describe the success of collaboration, only mentions the delivery down the Rhône of fast patrol boats for use in the Mediterranean.⁴⁰ That even this modest contribution was recognized by the Vichy Government to go beyond what was either required by the conditions of the Armistice or in fact strictly legal was reflected in a note of 6 February 1942 to the German Armistice Commission at Wiesbaden from the French delegation. The French expressed their dismay at the habit of crews to test their anti-aircraft defenses while still in French territorial waters, thereby drawing

³⁸ AN AJ 41 707, 29 August 1941.

³⁹ AN AJ 41 1890-1909, 12 February 1941.

⁴⁰ Abetz, *Pétain et les allemands*, 143; AN AJ 41 1890-1909, 24 November 1941 .

attention to the military character of vessels officially designated “dredgers”. In addition, while passing through towns and locks the crews issued signals that left no room for doubt regarding their nationality, while the very size of the crews implied that the vessels had a purpose not traditionally understood to be civilian. “This attitude can scarcely have failed to attract the attention of the population along the river courses and to have provoked suspicion and commentary.”⁴¹ Discretion, urged *contre-amiral* Chomel, President of the naval sub-committee, was essential.

What, for the Germans, was far more critical than the delivery of brand new French vessels was the maintenance and refitting of those vessels they already had engaged in the Battle of the Atlantic. In December 1940 the Director of Naval Construction at Brest reported to Vichy that almost all 6,349 of the workers in the French arsenal were working for the benefit of the Kriegsmarine, adding that there appeared to be plenty of work for all of them for several months. The first Atlantic U-boat base was brought into operation at Lorient in July 1940.⁴² The first major German warship to enter a French port was the heavy cruiser *Admiral Hipper* which entered Brest on 27 December 1940 having received slight damage during an attack on the British troop convoy W.S. 5A, southbound for the Middle East some 700 miles west of Finisterre.⁴³ When the two heavy cruisers *Gneisenau* and *Scharnhorst* came to Brest in March 1941, much of the repair work carried out on them was performed in French facilities.

According to Churchill, by the time the *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau* arrived at Brest they had sunk or captured 22 ships amounting to 115,000 tons of shipping. In addition the *Hipper* had fallen upon a convoy sailing from Sierra Leone, destroying seven of nineteen ships off the

⁴¹ AN AJ 41 1890-1909, 6 February 1942.

⁴² S.W. Roskill, *The War at Sea, 1939-194*; Volume I: *The Defensive* (London: Her Majesty’s Stationary Office, 1954), 346.

⁴³ *Ibid*, 291.

Azores.⁴⁴ Heavy bombing raids between 27 March 1941 and 2 July 1941 managed to immobilize for a time both the *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau* and the heavy cruiser *Prinz Eugen*, which had joined them in Brest in May after the destruction of *Bismarck*, at the cost of 34 aircraft.⁴⁵ There were no reports of sabotage in the port and German crews went ashore freely. On 11 February 1942 the three ships set off from Brest, successfully evading detection in the Channel and reaching home ports. An editorial in the *Times* on 14 February opined that “[German] Vice Admiral Ciliax has succeeded where the Duke of Medina Sidonia failed: with trifling losses he has sailed a hostile fleet from an Atlantic port, up the English Channel, and through the straits of Dover to safe anchorage in a North Sea port. Nothing more mortifying to the pride of sea-power has happened in home waters since the seventeenth century.”⁴⁶ Speaking in Parliament on 17 February Churchill said: “The only questions which are open are, first: Why was their movement not detected shortly after daylight, and secondly, Was the contact and liaison between the Coastal Command and the Admiralty, and also between the other R.A.F. Commands and the Admiralty, as close as it should have been? At the suggestion of the Admiralty and of the Air Ministry, I have directed that an Inquiry shall be held into these points. The Inquiry will be secret.”⁴⁷ Darlan, meanwhile, passed his congratulations on to Grand Admiral Raeder on the successful escape of his capital ships.⁴⁸

By September 1942 the German Command was telling its various units to avoid making trivial orders as French installations were already overloaded with work for the German Navy. In the same month the Vichy Central Directorate for Naval Industries reported that almost all of the 16,000 workers in the naval arsenals were working for the Germans, to the extent that

⁴⁴ Winston S. Churchill, *The Grand Alliance* (New York: Bantam Books, 1962), 102.

⁴⁵ Roskill, *The War at Sea, 1939-1945*, 487.

⁴⁶ *The Times* 49160 (14 February 1942): 5.

⁴⁷ Hansard, House of Commons Debates, 17 February 1942, vol. 377 cc1658-74.

⁴⁸ AN AJ 41 1890-1909, 26 February 1942.

German workers were being repatriated. 337 French specialists worked in the U-Boat pens at Lorient. In July 1943 French workers were engaged on repair work or construction on 17 German vessels in Cherbourg, including the German torpedo boats based there.⁴⁹

Not that there was universal approbation for such collaboration. An *Aide Memoire* from Vichy on 15 March 1941 recorded how a facility at Saint-Nicholas outside Brest had received an order for charging shells for the Germans and that “[although] the personnel responsible for this work had received all the necessary explanations, at first they refused to carry it out.” After pressure from both German and French authorities five *agents techniques* of 16 and 129 of 275 workers began work. 11 *agents techniques* and 146 workers were fired. Two *agents techniques* and eight workers were put in prison by the German Authorities.⁵⁰

This may not have been a lesson as well learned as the French Government had hoped. A report of the *Croix des Côtes-du-Nord* of 28 October 1941 gave details of a visit to Brittany by Darlan, including to Saint-Malo where he had a villa. At the Prefecture of St. Brieuç he gave a speech on 15 October: “All of our efforts are directed at getting home as many prisoners as possible, especially farm workers needed in the fields. All this requires negotiations with what is, don’t forget, a victorious and occupying power. We have suffered a great defeat, the greatest in our history and we must try to limit the cost. But this policy can only bear fruit if we don’t turn our backs upon our former adversaries. That is what has been referred to, sometimes in a bad way, as *collaboration* is all about.”⁵¹

There was a *quid pro quo* for all this activity, but it was not the return of the 800,000 farm workers held prisoner in Germany that Pétain brought up in the meeting with Göring at

⁴⁹ Lars Hellwinkel, “Les arsenaux de la Marine française à la Libération,” 273.

⁵⁰ AN 2AG/656, 15 March 1941.

⁵¹ AN F/1a/3657.

Saint-Florentin on 1 December 1941.⁵² As Jean Guéhenno recorded on 25 July 1941: “And every day in Paris, recently, you could meet French sailors who were prisoners in Germany and were now being sent to Marseilles or Toulon so that they could ship out for ‘a repeat performance’ – but against the English.”⁵³

Admiral Michelier brought up the subject of naval prisoners at Wiesbaden on 24 June 1941.⁵⁴ By 28 November 1941, the French Admiralty noted that the Germans had taken the decision to release all French naval prisoners.⁵⁵ On 1 December 1941, the day Pétain and Darlan met Göring and less than a week before the US entry into the war, the Admiralty at Vichy reported to the French Armistice Delegation that the first twelve released sailors of this new program had arrived in Macon.⁵⁶ A handwritten note on an Admiralty message of 27 December 1941 recorded that 633 were released in the second week, 2, 286 in the third, 439 in the fourth and 16 in the fifth.⁵⁷ As William L. Langer put it: “Darlan had managed to induce the Germans to release all naval prisoners, and he now had under him a force of some sixty-six thousand.”⁵⁸

The Truth about the British Naval Blockade

On 31 July 1940, according to Robert Aron, Britain extended the naval blockade of enemy territory to include France, thus prohibiting further trade between Metropolitan France and her overseas possessions, including North Africa. “This naval blockade,” he continued, “thus joined the demarcation line in condemning the country to want and in strangling the

⁵² Abetz, *Pétain et les allemands*, 121.

⁵³ Jean Guéhenno, *Diary of the Dark Years, 1940-1944: Collaboration, Resistance, and Daily Life in Occupied Paris* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 102.

⁵⁴ AN AJ 41 1890-1909, 24 June 1941.

⁵⁵ AN AJ 41 1890-1909, 28 November 1941.

⁵⁶ AN AJ 41 1890-1909, 1 December 1941.

⁵⁷ AN AJ 41 1890-1909, 27 December 1941.

⁵⁸ William L. Langer, *Our Vichy Gamble* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1947), 167.

colonies.”⁵⁹ In reality, as early as 3 September 1940 Churchill had produced a memorandum which offered the opinion that “[the] weapon of blockade has been blunted, and rendered, as far as Germany is concerned, less effectual, on account of their land conquests and power to rob captive or intimidated peoples for their own benefit. There remain no very important special commodities the denial of which will hamper their war effort.”⁶⁰

This was a view that seemed to be reflected by the French experience at sea. American *chargé d'affaires* Murphy reported to the Secretary of State a conversation another of the embassy staff had had with Darlan on 14 December 1941: “They are being all right for the moment,” the Admiral said, referring to the British, “in letting supplies come through from North African colonies to Metropolitan France though they stop occasional ships.” This did not mean that there was no room for friction and the admission came accompanied by a warning: “If they insist, however, on a complete blockade, we may attack Gibraltar and with Spanish and German help the Rock wouldn’t hold out long.”⁶¹

Ironically Darlan’s replacement of Laval may have aggravated the situation as far as the blockade was concerned. The day before this conversation the Germans had insisted that contacts with the British in Madrid be broken off. Between September 1940 and February 1941 negotiations had been taking place there between the respective ambassadors, Robert de la Baume and then François Piétri on the French side and Sir Samuel Hoare on the British, designed as far as Vichy was concerned with loosening the blockade and undermining British support for De Gaulle. Whether these talks, about which the Germans had been abundantly informed by Fernand de Brinon in Paris, had any effect upon the actual relaxation of the

⁵⁹ Robert Aron, *The Vichy Regime, 1940-1944* (New York,: Macmillan, 1958), 196.

⁶⁰ Churchill, *Their Finest Hour*, 458.

⁶¹ FRUS 1940, vol. II, 491.

blockade in September 1940 or not, their abrogation was followed by a hardening of attitudes on both sides.⁶² According to the *New York Times* on 9 March 1941 Fernand de Brinon, by now official Vichy representative in Paris, was said by Paris radio to have announced that the French fleet would “‘engage in battle’ with British warships if necessary to break the starvation grip of the British blockade.”⁶³ Admiral Leahy’s recollection was even blunter: “Darlan’s representative in Paris was reported to have told the press that if the British did not ease their blockade pressure, the Admiral would use the government propaganda machine to tell the French people that Churchill was responsible for their starving and that the Navy would convoy French merchantmen and sink any British ship that interfered.”⁶⁴ Such bellicosity was, however, disowned by a spokesman for Pétain: “M. de Brinon’s statement apparently has been distorted or exaggerated.”⁶⁵

One thing that was true, however, was that the French were starting to suffer from a lack of food. In 1942 a report was published by Dr. Ramon F. Minoli of the Medical Service of Argentina’s Department of Immigration, who returned from Paris in November 1941 after spending three years in France. It was entitled “Food Rationing and Mortality in Paris, 1940-1941.” Anecdotal evidence of want is inescapable in almost any history of France during the war. Robert Gildea quotes Georges Mazeaud, a glovemaker in the Saint-Lazare district of Paris who wrote during the first winter of the Occupation: “We are hungry, my children, grandchildren, my wife, and I. I never thought that at the age of sixty-six I could write that, but there it is. The food supply in Paris is entirely inadequate, and many are undernourished.”⁶⁶

⁶² Paxton *Vichy France*, 88-80, 115.

⁶³ *The New York Times* (10 March 1941): 4.

⁶⁴ William D. Leahy, *I Was There* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1950), 20.

⁶⁵ *The New York Times* (10 March 1941): 4.

⁶⁶ Robert Gildea, *Marianne in Chains: Daily Life in the Heart of France During the German Occupation* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2002), 90.

Richard Vinen quotes a suicide note left by a mother of two who hanged herself in the Gard in April 1942: “I am tired of standing in line outside the market.”⁶⁷ As early as 28 June 1940, Adrienne Monnier recorded in her diary that her friend and former lover Sylvia Beech, owner of the book store *Shakespeare & Co.* in Paris, “[went] to Nortier’s (she had been told that there would be butter). No butter...No meat. Almost nothing on the market.” Two days later she noted: “Nothing at the market, no meat. Still no butter or potatoes.”⁶⁸ In the Unoccupied Zone, John Sweets records how “[at] six o’clock one morning in March 1941, approximately 100 people were waiting in line outside the butcher shop at No. 45, boulevard Lafayette in Clermont-Ferrand. Monsieur Licheron, the owner, opened his door at six-thirty, and by seven o’clock all of his meat was gone and most of his customers had to be turned away empty-handed.”⁶⁹ Simone de Beauvoir found that beef a friend had sent her from Anjou had to be soaked in vinegar and boiled for hours; a joint of pork had white maggots in it, but she and Sartre cooked it anyway. A cartoon by André François showed a queue at a building site where work had not progressed beyond the ground floor. The man at the head of the queue whispers to a neighbor: “Apparently there’s going to be a *charcuterie* in the building.”⁷⁰ On 17 September 1941 Jean Guéhenno wrote: “I went on a trip to Brittany for a change of air and to try to get food supplies, for life here has become increasingly wretched.”⁷¹

Dr. Minoli’s analysis of the situation is more clinical. He quotes a survey by H. Gounelle and R. Mande, of the *Institut des Recherches d’Hygiene* carried out in May, June, and July of 1941 which concluded that the average adult in Paris suffered from a “total calorific

⁶⁷ Richard Vinen, *The Unfree French: Life Under the Occupation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 215.

⁶⁸ Quoted in Charles Glass, *Americans in Paris: Life and Death Under Nazi Occupation* (London: Penguin, 2009), 90.

⁶⁹ John F. Sweets, *Choices in Vichy France: The French Under Nazi Occupation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 16.

⁷⁰ Ian Ousby, *Occupation: The Ordeal of France, 1940-1944* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1998), 127, 124n.

⁷¹ Guéhenno, *Diary of the Dark Years, 1940-1944*, 112.

insufficiency of about a thousand calories daily.” They also suffered from calcium deficiency and an insufficient amount of Vitamin A. Comparing the figures of the first six months of 1941 with the corresponding figures for 1939, Minoli found that mortality from tuberculosis had increased by 10 per cent. “In children under one year of age, the increase was 15 per cent. In children from one to nine years, the increase was 28 per cent. The deaths from pulmonary tuberculosis increased 20.4 per cent, and from other types of tuberculosis increased 30.4 per cent.” In five dispensaries examined, the number of those testing positive increased by 270 per cent in the first half of 1941 compared with the average numbers for 1938 and 1939. General mortality in Paris, ignoring the fact that the population had decreased, had increased by 7.5 per cent for the period of 1 October 1940 to 31 August 1941 over the average number for the corresponding eleven months of the preceding four years. For people over 60 the rate of mortality had increased by 21 per cent.⁷²

Problems were compounded by wage increases that failed to keep pace with the rise in prices. July 1942 Otto Abetz had figures that showed that while prices had increased by 70 per cent since the beginning of the war, wages had risen by only 30 per cent.⁷³ In addition France suffered from a breakdown of its distribution system and relied heavily on imports of certain staples such as vegetable oils.⁷⁴ According to Richard Vinen: ‘The difficulties of transport, disputes between local authorities and the general confusion caused by rigid bureaucratic systems meant that much food simply rotted. Goods that before the war had been moved out of

⁷² Ramon F. Minoli, “Food Rationing and Mortality in Paris, 1940-1941,” *The Milbank Memorial Fund Quarterly* 20:3 (July 1942): 213-220.

⁷³ Paxton, *Vichy France*, 376.

⁷⁴ *Ibid*, 360.

the port of Le Havre in a week or two could now be blocked there for anything up to six months.⁷⁵

As far as the matter of imports was concerned, the one person who was keenly aware of the deficiencies was Darlan's deputy Chief of Staff Admiral Paul Auphan who in July 1940 was given responsibility for the merchant marine, operating out of four or five rooms in the hôtel du Helder in Vichy. The problems faced by Auphan were, by his own account, formidable. Officials had arrived from Bordeaux without archives or secretarial support. There was no list of the major commercial vessels available or the ports where they were currently berthed. The central administration of the merchant marine had been dispersed across France and there was at first no radio communications available at all. Bureaucrats who had been mobilized were in POW camps. The official Ministry building in the place Fontenoy in Paris had been requisitioned by the German army. The various companies that owned merchant vessels had also been dispersed throughout the provinces and it was difficult to contact them and impossible to know if they still had contact with their ships.⁷⁶

Negotiations for the recommencement of commercial navigation were complicated by the fact that anything to do with traffic in the Mediterranean was referred by the German Armistice Commission to the Italian Armistice Commission in Turin, within whose purview the area fell. French relations with the Italians were routinely poisonous. On 28 October 1940, in a memorandum to the Army Minister, Darlan wrote: "Although relations of the Navy with the German Armistice Commission, above all recently, have become clear – the *verboten*s being rare and comprehensible from the victor's point of view – the Italians, whose success no French

⁷⁵ Vinen, *The Unfree French*, 221.

⁷⁶ Amiral Paul Auphan, *La lutte pour la vie (1940-1942): la marine au service des français* (Paris: Éditions Self, 1947), 21.

sailor will ever recognize, are odious, meddling, vexatious, and excessive in their demands, in which one seeks in vain for any military interest at all.”⁷⁷ This attitude was confirmed in a conversation in November 1940 between former British ambassador Sir Ronald Campbell and former Polish *chargé d'affaires* at Vichy, M. Frankowski: “M. Frankowski asserts (I am sure he is right) that the French, who were not beaten in arms by Italy, still retain their old dislike and contempt of the Italians, and are much more likely to resist Italian than they are German demands. This, he says, applies even to Laval, notwithstanding his former Italian leanings.”⁷⁸

Nevertheless on 8 July 1940 a partial renewal of traffic with Algeria and Tunisia was authorized under certain strict conditions. All crossings foreseen for a month had to be submitted to the Armistice Commissions at least fifteen days in advance, with details of dates, times and ports of departure. Routes were to be fixed by the Italo-German Command to prevent any accidental conflict with Axis forces. All French ships were to submit to inspection before departure and upon arrival. French ships were permitted to scuttle themselves rather than fall into British hands.⁷⁹ On 19 July 1940 fishing and coastal traffic were authorized along the Atlantic coast, although German delegates suggested that it might be wise to avoid publicity on this point.⁸⁰ By the end of July Vice-Admiral Michelier was requesting permission for ships to sail from Dakar to Casablanca.⁸¹

In order to keep an eye on what the French were up to the German Armistice Commission required that the French Admiralty hand over several copies of its codes and code

⁷⁷ AN AJ 41 1890-1909, 28 October 1940.

⁷⁸ CAB 66/13/17, 12 November 1940.

⁷⁹ Auphan, *La lutte pour la vie*, 23-24.

⁸⁰ AN AJ 41 1890-1909, 19 July 1940.

⁸¹ AN AJ 41 1890-1909, 30 July 1940.

keys.⁸² On 3 July they had to hand over a list of all radio transmitting stations from Casablanca to Saigon, together with call signs and frequencies.⁸³ A further flavor of the restrictions under which the French continued to operate was provided at a conference in Wiesbaden between the German Minister Plenipotentiary Hemmen and Admiral Michelier on 3 August 1940, where conditions were laid down for the departure of five French refrigerated vessels. Namely that three days' notice of the departure of each vessel should be provided, along with routes and points of departure; the ships had to fly the French flag above a yellow flag, with French colors painted visibly on the sides and bridgework, surrounded by a yellow border on a black background and illuminated at night; it was forbidden to zig-zag; routes used by British convoys should be avoided and a safe distance maintained from Gibraltar; French crews should prevent under any circumstances ships or cargo falling into British hands. In addition, the ships should sail directly from Dakar to Bordeaux, individually and successively, meaning that one had to arrive at its destination before the next could cast off. There was, it was suggested, no need for escort vessels as these might provide a needless provocation to the British. Furthermore, while meat and provisions would be left to the French State, Germany reserved the right to purchase anything else.⁸⁴ This last, of course, was the key to British interest in French commercial traffic.

Not unnaturally, Auphan maintains that the sole objective of the French Navy was to provide the people of France with the means of subsistence despite the difficulties imposed on navigation by the defeat. Furthermore, in spite of his assertion that after the Armistice "without any provocation on our part, French maritime traffic was considered in principle enemy traffic by the British and was intercepted anywhere that they felt strong enough to do it without risk,"

⁸² AN AJ 41 1890-1909, 2 July 1940.

⁸³ AN AJ 41 1890-1909, 3 July 1940.

⁸⁴ AN AJ 41 1890-1909, 3 August 1940 .

by October 1940 the number of crossings between Marseille and French North Africa was comparable to that achieved in peace time.⁸⁵ In fact the British War Cabinet had decided on 18 October 1940 that “the Admiralty should no longer be debarred from applying Contraband Control Measures to escorted French convoys passing through the Straits of Gibraltar. That the authority to interfere with escorted French convoys must be used with discretion. Thus, when an escorted convoy was stopped, it should be by an overwhelming show of force, so as to avoid the risk of having actually to use force; and it was not necessary for the present to attempt to stop every convoy.”⁸⁶ In any event, on 2 November 1940 the first direct departure from Marseille to Morocco cast off, and on 23 November the first to Dakar and French West Africa. Before the year was out commercial traffic had recommenced in both directions to and from Indochina, Madagascar and the Antilles.

In response to a communication from Foreign Minister Baudouin delivered via the embassy in Madrid, the British cabinet after deliberations set forth its position regarding relations with Vichy. The Prime Minister proposed that while no complaint was made for the action already taken by them against Gibraltar, which was in retaliation for “the Dakar episode,” (of which more later) he would wish them to know that if they bombed Gibraltar again, Britain should retaliate by attacking Casablanca and sinking the ships there. Secondly, Churchill wished to point out to the French that as far as Mediterranean traffic was concerned, ships were already plying the seas between Algiers and Marseilles. Thirdly, as regarding a French request “that merchant ships proceeding to unoccupied France should be allowed to pass through the Straits of Gibraltar, we should say that we were not satisfied that merchandise arriving in unoccupied France would not reach Germany. They would, no doubt, reply that they could give guarantees

⁸⁵ Auphan, *La lutte pour la vie*, 29n, 30.

⁸⁶ CAB 65/9/35, 18 October 1940, 216.

on this point, and an argument might follow.”⁸⁷ Nonetheless on 18 October 1940 the Vice Chief of the Naval Staff reported to the cabinet that “Four French submarines and a tanker, escorted by a sloop and aircraft, had passed Gibraltar in a westerly direction the previous day. They had been shadowed by a British aircraft to ensure that their destination was Casablanca.”⁸⁸

The views of the Royal Navy were set forth in a memorandum from the Admiralty for the War Cabinet on 30 September 1940. “The policy pursued so far,” it read, “has imposed very considerable commitments on the Navy which it has only been possible to meet by weakening our forces in the important theatres of the war.” The Admiralty viewed “with considerable concern” a policy that seemed likely to bring the Royal Navy into conflict with the ships of the Vichy Government, for the simple reason that “[our] naval strength is already inadequate for fighting Germany and Italy...” It was also unfortunate that the opportunity given by Dakar to the French to bomb Gibraltar “has demonstrated not merely to ourselves but also to them that Gibraltar can easily be made untenable as a Naval Base.” To risk this eventuality “for the sake of stopping certain French West African produce passing through the Straits” was the very height of folly.⁸⁹ The harsh reality, as the First Lord of the Admiralty A.V. Alexander pointed out at a cabinet meeting on 18 November 1940, was that since the previous June “our blockade had been largely a matter of bluff.”⁹⁰

Naturally, since it was his job, the views of the Minister for Economic Warfare were more robust. While he was quite ready to agree to make concessions in regard to trade between North Africa and ports in unoccupied France, “he could not agree to a position whereby French West African trade proceeded virtually without interference.” Regarding trade from North

⁸⁷ CAB 65 15 12, 1 October 1940.

⁸⁸ CAB 65/9/35, 18 October 1940.

⁸⁹ CAB 66/12/26, 30 September 1940.

⁹⁰ CAB 65/10/10, 18 November 1940.

Africa, including the Atlantic ports of French Morocco, he thought that it would be perfectly right that we should allow certain foodstuffs to pass. However, he concluded, “[we] should...prevent alloys being shipped from Casablanca to the Mediterranean ports of France.” To enable a course of this kind to be carried out would require a Consul at Casablanca, he suggested, refraining from commenting on the likelihood of such an eventuality.⁹¹

The Prime Minister took a hard line regarding negotiations of any kind with the Vichy leadership, which he expressed in a memorandum on 14 November 1940:

The Vichy Government is under heavy pressure from Germany, and there is nothing that they would like better than to feel a nice, soft, cosy, forgiving England on their other side. This would enable them to win minor favours from Germany at our expense, and hang on as long as possible to see how the war goes. We, on the contrary, should not hesitate when our interests require it, to confront them with difficult and rough situations, and make them feel that we have teeth as well as Hitler.

It must be remembered that these men have committed acts of baseness on a scale which have earned them the lasting contempt of the world, and that they have done this without the slightest authority from the French people. Laval is certainly filled by the bitterest hatred of England...Darlan is mortally envenomed by the injury we have done to his fleet. Pétain has always been an anti-British defeatist, and is now a dotard.⁹²

John Colville recalled how at the Prime Minister’s country retreat at Chequers that month, Churchill “referred to them with loathing and said that while he could understand people being wicked he could not understand their being so contemptible.”⁹³

Even so, by January 1941 arrangements were in place, at the behest of President Roosevelt, for the relief of children in unoccupied France.⁹⁴ In a telegram to the President on 13 January Churchill reiterated his fears but continued: “We are prepared to agree at once to the

⁹¹ CAB 65/9/35/18, 18 October 1940.

⁹² CAB 66/13/28, 14 November 1940.

⁹³ John Colville, *The Fringes of Power: 10 Downing Street Diaries, 1939-1955* (New York: Norton, 1985), 283.

⁹⁴ CAB 65/17/11 29 January 1941.

dispatch of the first ship to Seville, Barcelona and Marseille as you propose.” In August 1941 Roosevelt again expressed concern over the issue, prompting the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs Anthony Eden to explain to his cabinet colleagues: “In May, however, when we learnt that the Vichy Government had concluded a barter deal in food on a very large scale with the Germans, we refused to sanction further shipments under this scheme, and we understood that the United States Government were in sympathy with our decision. Since then Admiral Darlan’s policy of collaboration has gone to much greater lengths, and we are entitled to regard the unoccupied territory as having come increasingly under the control of the Axis.”⁹⁵

Transfer of supplies to the Germans had, in fact, already been the subject of considerable correspondence from the US *chargé d'affaires* Matthews, based in Vichy. “From Paris,” he wrote on 13 September 1940, “I learn that hardly a day goes by without stories of removal of supplies of both food and raw materials for industry that would ordinarily be given full credence...it is certainly true that supplies of all kinds are being taken from France steadily and in considerable quantities...There is an eye-witness account that on one day out of 1200 animals slaughtered at Paris 1000 carcasses were shipped to Germany...Similarly large quantities of potatoes have been taken from occupied France.” This was bad enough, but even more worrying from the British point of view was news from the unoccupied zone: “From the area around Lyon, I am told that there has been constant ‘pumping’ of food and food products into the occupied zone and presumably to Germany. I have heard of a case where 12000 head of sheep at Millau (Aveyron) were taken over by the Germans. Local cattle dealers at Lyon estimate that the shortage of fresh meat in the unoccupied zone will be severe within 2 or 3 months.”⁹⁶ It got worse: “Of more importance is the statement made to me by an acquaintance connected with the

⁹⁵ CAB 66/18/29 28 August 1941.

⁹⁶ FRUS 1940, vol. II, 542.

Ministry of Agriculture that the Germans have demanded 1,000,000 head of cattle and 500,000 pigs from unoccupied France.” Contacts at the Armistice Commission confirmed the numbers regarding cattle, but said that the number of pigs was actually 1,500,000. On 16 September, Matthews reported that contacts at the Foreign Ministry informed him that “fifteen hundred carloads of potatoes have been shipped out of the Vichy area in response to German demands in the past few days.”⁹⁷

Secretary of State Cordell Hull was sensitive to the implications of this intelligence. “There is widespread opposition in the United States,” he wrote on 17 September 1940, “to the shipment of foodstuffs to unoccupied France if such shipments merely replace quantities of food products transferred from that area to Germany.”⁹⁸ The issue was still a subject of debate in January 1941. Under Secretary of State Sumner Welles recorded a conversation he had with the French Ambassador Gaston Henry-Haye on 10 January: “The Ambassador launched into a violent tirade against the lies which were being printed in the press on this subject...he felt already that he could assure me positively that the reports published were completely without foundation.”⁹⁹

It was under the pressure of these conditions that the talks took place in Madrid between September 1940 and February 1941, designed from the French point of view, according to Julian Jackson, “to alleviate the effects of the British blockade which was starving metropolitan France of French colonial produce.”¹⁰⁰ Yet in the opinion of the man responsible for colonial imports, Admiral Auphan, the impact of the blockade was exaggerated. Between 1940 and 1941 imports from North Africa increased, the import of cereals rising from 230,000 tons to 350,000 tons, that

⁹⁷ Ibid, 543.

⁹⁸ Ibid, 544.

⁹⁹ FRUS 1941, vol. II, 93.

¹⁰⁰ Jackson, *France: The Dark Years*, 176.

of phosphates from 400,000 tons to 1.2 million tons. Imports from Morocco of cereals, meat, eggs and phosphates was higher in 1942 than it had been in 1938. Imports of ground nuts (a source of vegetable oil) from Senegal fell from a pre-war figure of 550,000 tons to 400,000 tons between October 1940 and October 1941, but it should be noted that after September 1940 they were exported shelled rather than unshelled, and in bulk rather than in sacks. For the price of a thousand tons of bananas to the Germans, traffic between Marseille and the Antilles was resumed at much the same rhythm as in peace time. The Ministry of Supply formulated a plan for the import of rubber from Indochina and Madagascar and after November 1940 a ship sailed for Saigon from Marseille every ten days and for Madagascar every twelve. Between September 1940 and 8 November 1942 540 French convoys comprising 1,750 ships traversed the Straits of Gibraltar almost without incident allowing the import to Metropolitan France of 3,000,000 tons of supplies.¹⁰¹

In addition a certain level of imports was permitted to French North Africa from the United States under the provisions of an agreement that became known as the Weygand-Murphy Accord. This allowed French officials to use funds frozen in the US to buy a limited amount of non-strategic goods which would then pass un-harassed through the British blockade. The conditions under which this was allowed included a French assurance that all American imports would be consumed in North Africa, adherence to which was to be guaranteed by a series of American “consuls.” British requests for agents of their own to ensure that the French assurance was observed were denied. This was unfortunate since, as the eponymous Murphy recalled, the “British had a good many men who had made careers in Africa, who could speak Arabic, who understood the customs of native populations, and who were experienced in shipping. Such

¹⁰¹ Auphan, *La lutte pour la vie*, 61-85.

Britons could be relied upon to supervise cargo arrivals and to make certain that they would not slip by devious routes into German hands. The United States, on the contrary, had few citizens who had even visited Africa, and we found it very difficult to recruit men for the peculiar work we were arranging.”¹⁰²

British Minister of Economic Warfare Hugh Dalton recorded the practical impact of this in a report to the cabinet on 10 October 1941: “When His Majesty’s Government reluctantly agreed a few months ago to the proposals of the United States Government to send supplies to French North Africa, we hoped to obtain a ‘solid quid pro quo’ in the form of a number of American observers who, stationed in French North Africa, were to supervise the carrying out of the agreement, to provide us with useful information and to carry out pro-Ally propaganda. Up to date our experience has been very disappointing. The American observers, under Mr. Murphy, have done exceedingly little under any of these heads.”¹⁰³

One of the things that made the arrangement attractive to the US was the involvement of General Weygand, considered by Cordell Hull as “a cornerstone around which to build a policy of resistance towards Germany.”¹⁰⁴ The British, who had memories of Weygand’s resistance in 1940, were not convinced of the wisdom of this, but acquiesced. They were probably right to have doubts. In conversation with Vichy’s peripatetic envoy Professor Louis Rougier on 6 November 1940, Weygand was lukewarm about a hand-written call from Churchill to “raise the standard in North Africa”: “If they come to North Africa with four divisions, I’ll fire on them,” he said. “If they come with twenty divisions, I’ll welcome them.”¹⁰⁵ In any case in 1941 it was the Navy that had the upper hand politically and their view was less ambiguous. Murphy

¹⁰² Robert Murphy, *Diplomat Among Warriors* (New York: Doubleday, 1964), 89.

¹⁰³ CAB 66/19/10, 10 October 1941.

¹⁰⁴ Jackson, *France: The Dark Years*, 177.

¹⁰⁵ Colin Smith, *England’s Last War Against France: Fighting Vichy, 1940-1942* (London: Phoenix, 2010), 143.

accepted a bet from an admiral in North Africa “that Germany would defeat the Soviet Union in two months.”¹⁰⁶ Leahy reported in the second half of 1941 that there were rumors to the effect that “Weygand was opposing the deals that Darlan had made with the Germans, particularly as they respected further use of African bases by the Axis Powers.” According to Admiral Auphan, in November 1941 Weygand “retired.”¹⁰⁷ In a letter to the President, Leahy referred to “the removal of General Weygand from Africa in obedience to a German ‘diktat.’”¹⁰⁸ In reality Admiral Darlan had been sending poison pen letters to Pétain. On 27 July 1941 he wrote to the Marshal accusing Weygand of being “surrounded by Gaullists.”¹⁰⁹

As far as furnishing supplies to Germany was concerned, Auphan admits that by agreement 25 percent of groundnut imports and 50 percent of phosphates were handed over to the occupying authorities. None of the food imports, “despite the tittle-tattle of insidious political propaganda” availed anyone but the people of France. All the rubber acquired from Indochina and Madagascar was retained in French hands.¹¹⁰ Yet, says Robert O. Paxton, “the gigantic German requisitions of French foodstuffs, for the occupying army and for export to the Reich, were among Germany’s most important single sources of nourishment. France supplied more foodstuffs to Germany, both absolutely and relatively, than did even Poland.”¹¹¹ Writing in April 1942, by which time Laval had been recalled to office, Otto Abetz reported that to date France had provided “almost exclusively from the occupied zone and the colonies” and quite voluntarily 5 million tons of iron and steel, 225,000 tons of copper, 200,000 tons of tires, 16,200 tons of rubber, 229,000 tons of meat, 610,000 tons of flour, 41,480 tons of vegetable oil. The list

¹⁰⁶ Murphy, *Diplomat Among Warriors*, 85.

¹⁰⁷ Auphan, *La lutte pour la vie*, 78.

¹⁰⁸ Leahy, *I Was There*, 54, 59.

¹⁰⁹ AN 2AG/656 27 July 1941.

¹¹⁰ Auphan, *La lutte pour la vie*, 85, 111n.

¹¹¹ Paxton, *Vichy France*, 360.

goes on. Even given that Abetz might be tempted to exaggerate, just as Auphan might be tempted to minimize, the French contribution was impressive. A note from *Oberkommando der Wehrmacht* (OKW) of 6 November 1942 to the German Foreign Office estimated that 90 million Reichsmarks of goods were being transferred per month from France.¹¹² And with a rationing system that favored those working in heavy industry, German arms orders to the tune of 4.5 billion Reichsmarks employing 3 million Frenchmen ensured that even where food was not exported it was contributing to the German war effort.¹¹³

British intelligence tended to confirm the trend. As early as 18 November 1940 the Minister of Shipping R.H. Cross reported that “shipping movements showed a revival of French and French Colonial trade. Shipping from German-controlled ports had been released on a substantial scale and had proceeded under escort east-bound through the Straits of Gibraltar! Feeder services were being established from American ports to Martinique. Information pointed to a plan to organise escorted homeward convoys of French ships now at Buenos Aires. Traffic from North Africa for France was proceeding almost normally.”¹¹⁴

On 30 October 1941 the Foreign Secretary reported that between 5,000 and 7,000 tons of rubber had recently arrived at Casablanca from Indochina *en route* for Marseille and that there was reason to believe that a further 6,000 tons was being carried in a French ship which had sailed from Madagascar for France a few days earlier. There was also evidence that a German ship was in the same convoy carrying graphite, mica and leather.¹¹⁵ On 10 October 1941 Hugh Dalton, Minister for Economic Warfare, reported that a convoy of five ships totaling some

¹¹² <http://archives.lib.uconn.edu/islandora/object/20002%3A1336#page/1/mode/2up/search/france+1942>.

¹¹³ Abetz, *Pétain et les allemands*, 146.

¹¹⁴ CAB 65/10/10, 18 November 1940. See also Bernard Costagliola *La Marine de Vichy: Blocus et collaboration, Juin 1940-Novembre 1942* (Paris: Tallandier, 2009), esp. Ch. VIII “Le mythe du blocus.”

¹¹⁵ CAB 65/23/27, 30 October 1941.

35,000 tons left Indochina in August, had arrived at Dakar, whence two of its number had proceeded through the Straits of Gibraltar to Vichy France. A second convoy which left Saigon in September had reached Madagascar. "Though we have no hard evidence, it is virtually certain that rubber is being carried in these convoys," the minister suggested, adding that the Germans were bound to be exerting great pressure on Vichy to import essential supplies for them from the Far East now that access to the Trans-Siberian Railway was denied them. Dalton went on to explain that the port of Caronte near Marseilles had been put at the disposal of the Axis by Vichy and was being used almost exclusively for cargoes of phosphates, iron ore and manganese imported for Axis account from French North Africa and of pyrites and ores from Spain. On arrival at Caronte most of the phosphates and ores were sent directly by rail or barge to Germany and Italy. Vichy was currently plying the route between North Africa and Caronte on a regular basis with nine ships.

Vichy had also brought into service 63 of the 90 allied or neutral ships detained in French ports. Of these, 21, with a tonnage of 96,000 tons, had been handed directly over to the Axis powers. Others would continue to fly the French flag but would be used in bringing Axis cargo from French North Africa to Caronte and other ports. The minister continued: "It has now been made public that at the end of August a French ship, the SS *St. Julienne*, embarked at Nemours and unloaded at Marseilles more than 300 tons of cobalt. The Germans are very short of cobalt, which they need both for hardening steel and for operating some of their synthetic oil plants. Assurances had been given to the United States Government by the French that cobalt would not be exported from North Africa. These assurances, like many others given by Vichy, have now

been broken. This one cargo represents more than 10% of Germany's minimum annual requirements of cobalt."¹¹⁶

Addressing the House of Commons on 9 April 1941, the Prime Minister observed:

Admiral Darlan tells us that the Germans have been generous in their treatment of France. All the information which we receive both from occupied and unoccupied France, makes me very doubtful whether the mass of the French people would endorse that strange and somewhat sinister tribute. However, the generosity of the German treatment of France is a matter for Frenchmen to judge.

He continued:

But I wish to make it clear that we must maintain our blockade against Germany and those rights of contraband control at sea, which have never been disputed or denied to any belligerent, and which a year ago France was exercising to the full with us. Some time ago we were ready to enter upon economic negotiations with the French. But any chance of fruitful negotiation was nipped in the bud by the generous Germans, and imperative orders were given from Wiesbaden to the Government of Vichy to break off all contact with us. Nevertheless, we have in practice allowed very considerable quantities of food to go into France out of our sincere desire to spare the French people every hardship in our power. When, however, it comes to thousands of tons of rubber and other vital war materials which pass, as we know, directly to the German armies, we are bound, even at the risk of collisions with French warships at sea, to enforce our rights as recognised by international law.¹¹⁷

The blockade may have been something of a fiction, but supplies were certainly going to the Germans, the French people were certainly experiencing considerable shortages, and yet much French commercial traffic was continuing "almost normally." French warships were escorting French vessels, often officered and manned by naval personnel,¹¹⁸ to supply the Germans while the people of France starved. At the same time British ships were being sunk by German vessels repaired by French workers in French shipyards. This may not have been the intention, but it was the reality of collaboration.

¹¹⁶ CAB 66/19/10 10 October 1941.

¹¹⁷ Hansard, House of Commons Debates, series 5, vol. 370, 1594-1595, 9 April 1941.

¹¹⁸ SHM TT B 150.

Darlan, the Navy, and Collaboration

It was German pressure that brought Darlan into office in February 1941. And when on 11 February 1941 the *Journal Officiel* announced in Vichy that Admiral Darlan was to be the heir apparent to the top post in the Vichy government, right-wing monarchist and later convicted collaborator Charles Maurras for one reacted with enthusiasm. Writing in *L'Action Française* the following day he applauded both the admiral's personal qualities, made manifest in the organization of his splendid fleet, and the decision to apply the automatic mechanisms of military hierarchy to civilian government.¹¹⁹

On 2 March 1941 *Le Journal des débats politiques et littéraires* announced that now was the moment for a "return to authority." In this context, it went on, "no one can have been surprised to see Maréchal Pétain confer, under his own oversight, the direction of the affairs of state to the chief of our naval forces." It was a decision that met with "unanimous applause" in a country where an admiral represented a "density of thought and soberness of speech" not associated with professional politicians. An admiral embodied the qualities necessary to govern a nation in convalescence. In particular, Darlan's name was linked to the reconstitution of a navy whose pulse beat to the rhythm of the nation's heart, "the yardstick and the symbol of national prestige." Furthermore, Darlan had achieved the perfection of this enterprise despite the incoherence of previous regimes; and with the coming of war the navy had provided a single beacon of light during the dark days of continental defeat. "Even today it retains intact its spirit and morale...evoking envy from both sides in the conflict." It concludes: "In the past we had governments. Now we need leaders. We have them."¹²⁰

¹¹⁹ *L'Action Française* 37 (12 February 1941): 1.

¹²⁰ *Le Journal des débats politiques et littéraires*, 2 March 1941, 1.

Darlan's attitude to collaboration was no doubt colored in part by his attitude towards the British. After Mers-el-Kébir, Darlan's latent Anglophobia achieved overt and legendary proportions. French diplomat Jean Chauvel recalled how the admiral not only had the complete works of Paul Chack in his office – the naval historian whose political predilections got him shot after the war – but that he decorated the walls with three large oil paintings depicting episodes from the British bombardment.¹²¹ On 1 July 1940 US Ambassador William Bullitt reported to the President a conversation he had had with Darlan: “For his part he did not believe that the British government or people would have the courage to stand against serious German air bombardments and he expected a surrender after a few heavy attacks. I remarked that he seemed to regard this prospect with considerable pleasure...he did not deny this, but smiled...”¹²² In a conversation reported by the US *chargé d'affaires* Murphy to the Secretary of State on 14 December 1940, Darlan admitted: “A German victory is really better for France...than a British victory.”¹²³

In Britain, meanwhile, *The Times* reported: “The Marshal's authority has been ousted by the ambitious admiral-politician who exploits the Marshal's reputation for his own ends.”¹²⁴ Two days later the comments were repeated by the *West Australian* in a column beside reports of the sinking of HMS *Hood*.¹²⁵ An event, according to former Finance Minister Yves Bouthillier, that Darlan greeted with “an explosion of excessively visible joy.”¹²⁶ Churchill described him as

¹²¹ Jean Chauvel, *Commentaire: De Vienne à Alger (1938-1944)* (Paris: Fayard, 1971), 267.

¹²² Smith, *England's Last War Against France*, 91.

¹²³ FRUS 1940, vol. II, 490.

¹²⁴ *The Times* 48934 (24 May 1941): 3.

¹²⁵ “Darlan's Apologia” *The West Australian* (26 May 1941): 7.

¹²⁶ Yves Bouthillier, *Le Drame de Vichy I: Face à l'ennemi, face à l'allié* (Paris: Plon, 1950), 150-151.

“a bad man, with a narrow outlook and a shifty eye” who bore an “abnormal and professional resentment” against Britain.¹²⁷

Of course it took more than one man to institute a policy of collaboration. In this respect some have considerably underestimated Darlan’s influence. In September 1941 Richard de Rochemont published a profile of the new regime in France entitled “Vichy vs. France: A government of fine words and cheap intrigues draws scorn of its people.” In Rochemont’s words:

Darlan today holds all the power that is left in France in his own hands... But in France, Darlan is not even respected as a sailor. His career in the Navy has been a political one, from the day he became a cadet through family influence (his father was once Minister of Justice) to the pre-war period when as *Chef de Cabinet* to Navy Minister Georges Leygues he developed the political contacts and techniques which in time brought him command of the French Navy. He learned to polish up the plate on the big front door, and to shine the boots of influential politicians, all in the best Gilbert & Sullivan tradition. A perfect ‘Rue Royale sailor’, he went to sea only for the minimum periods required for promotion, and his commands were invariably those involving the fewest headaches and the greatest publicity.¹²⁸

De Rochemont may have underestimated Darlan, but he was right in one respect, however, and that was in the sudden proliferation of naval personnel in unexpected places:

Resented by the average Frenchman is the sudden establishment of the Navy as the senior arm in France, and the appearance of detachments of sailors in such towns as land-locked Vichy, as a praetorian guard. Retired Admirals are blossoming out in important civil jobs, and swaggering naval officers with armed orderlies have penetrated to such holy places of the Army as Sidi-bel-Abbès, to bring and see executed the Admiral’s commands...But the French don’t like it, and they don’t like Darlan.¹²⁹

The French may not have liked Darlan, but the navy did. Writing in 1943 French diplomat Léon Marchal observed: “Admiral Darlan had an extraordinary influence over his officers, who were

¹²⁷ Peter Mangold, *Britain and the Defeated French : From Occupation to Liberation, 1940-1944* (New York: I.B.Tauris, 2011), 67.

¹²⁸ *Life* 11:9 (1 September 1941): 68.

¹²⁹ *Ibid*, 69.

devoted to him to the point of fanaticism.”¹³⁰ American historian and former head of the Research and Analysis Branch of the Office of Strategic Services William L. Langer concurred, although his conclusions about the lower ranks are open to dispute: “The rank and file of the crews are reported to have been anti-German and anti-collaborationist even in 1941, but the officers were loyal to Darlan, almost to a man. They were prepared to follow his orders unquestioningly...”¹³¹

The result, for Marchal, was this:

Putting him at the head of the Government was thus a sure way of obtaining for the regime the support, without reservation, of an elite of energetic and disciplined men accustomed to issuing orders and ready to accept for themselves all sacrifices they imposed on their subordinates. The body of French Navy officers was thus used to reinforce the influence of Darlan by furnishing to the French State prefects, colonial administrators, police chiefs, and, as a last resort, diplomats and economists. Their devotion to duty replaced professional qualifications and technical competence. Other dictatorships rely on the cohesion of a single party; Darlan’s dictatorship was to have as a base the presence of naval men in certain key positions.¹³²

It is scarcely unusual, upon coming to power, for a premier to make personnel arrangements that are more to his liking and in this Darlan was no different from anyone else. Darlan brought in people with a background in business, finance and the military. With these, according to Michael Curtis, “Darlan attempted to strengthen administrative control in a number of ways: by national control over municipal police forces, by setting up regional prefects and by centralising control over information and youth organisations.”¹³³ Yet Hervé Coutau-Bégarie, who dedicated considerable time to the study of the career of the Admiral, contends that it is impossible to determine from the available sources whether any of Darlan’s actions were motivated by political affinities. While he suggests that George Melton’s portrayal of Darlan as a leftist

¹³⁰ Léon Marchal, *Vichy: Two Years of Deception* (New York: Macmillan, 1943), 118.

¹³¹ Langer, *Our Vichy Gamble*, 167.

¹³² Marchal, *Vichy: Two Years of Deception*, 118.

¹³³ Curtis, *Verdict on Vichy: Power and Prejudice in the Vichy France Regime*, (New York: Arcade Publishing, 2002), 87.

Republican is probably overdrawn,¹³⁴ he maintains that it would be a “cardinal error” to assume that the crypto-fascist nature of Vichy can be taken to mean that all its servants were proto-fascists before the war who only revealed their true character after the 1940 Armistice. For Coutau-Bégarie, agreeing with de Gaulle, Darlan’s gravest sin was to put the interests of the French Navy ahead of the interests of France.¹³⁵ This ignores the likelihood that for Darlan the two were synonymous.

Nonetheless, according to de Gaulle, even Weygand felt that two-thirds of France had been occupied by the enemy, “and the remaining third by the Navy –which was even worse.”¹³⁶ However, Philippe Lasterle, for one, considers that the influence of the Navy has been considerably exaggerated, pointing out that at the height of Darlan’s powers only 6.6 percent of active prefects were naval officers.¹³⁷ Nevertheless, Lasterle concedes that the Navy was undeniably more visible in the corridors of power during 1941 and 1942. This is confirmed by Hervé Coutau-Bégarie and Claude Huan who argue that even where civilians headed government departments, the navy was never far away. Admiral Tracou was cabinet director at the office of the Vice-President. A new *Commisariat Général du Pouvoir*, designed to ensure that the application of new administrative laws was carried out in the true spirit of the National Revolution, was put in the hands of Vice-Admiral Gouton, recently returned from the Levant, in which capacity he oversaw eleven *commissaires*. *Lieutenant de vaisseau* Duvivier was inserted to keep an eye on Paul Marion at the Ministry of Information. After 11 August 1941 *contre-amiral* Duprès oversaw the secret services. Baron Louis Guichard, former *capitaine de frégate*

¹³⁴ George Melton, *Darlan, Admiral and Statesman of France (1881-1942)* (Westport CT: Praeger, 1998).

¹³⁵ Hervé Coutau-Bégarie, “Le regard vide ou la vision politique de l’amiral Darlan,” *Revue d’histoire maritime* 14 (2011): 137-144.

¹³⁶ Charles de Gaulle, *The Complete War Memoires of Charles de Gaulle* (New York: Carroll and Graf, 1998), 174.

¹³⁷ Philippe Lasterle, “Les officiers de marine, préfets par gros temps ,” in *Les préfets, leur rôle, leur action dans le domaine de la Défense de 1800 à nos jours*, ed. Maurice Vaïsse (Paris: LGDJ, 2001), 336.

and naval attaché in The Hague, became Darlan's *chef de cabinet* at Foreign Affairs. Henri Rollin, *chargé de mission* at the Ministry of the Interior, was a former naval officer who had served at the same time as Darlan in Indochina. He was responsible for the arrest of Georges Loustaunau-Lacau 17 July 1941. Amiral Bourragué became Chief of Staff at the Defense Ministry.

In addition naval officers provided five *intendants de police*, eleven were detached to the Ministry of Education and Youth, eight to the Ministry of Colonies, eleven to the Merchant Marine, 39 to Propaganda and Recruitment. Overseas, Admirals Decoux, Esteva and Abrial became Governors General in the colonies, Admiral Robert High Commissioner in the Antilles, and Admiral Fenard became permanent Secretary General in French Africa after the departure of General Weygand. Admiral Fernet became secretary of the *Conseil national*.¹³⁸

Now, while this may not represent the “blue tide” of popular myth, and perhaps at best a “low tide” (in the words of Lasterle,) encompassing a total of 180 officers of a total complement of 2,662, it is clear that the quality of posts acquired outweighed their mere quantity in terms of the potential influence they promised to deliver. To give some perspective, it should be remembered that Hitler's first cabinet only contained two Nazis, Hans Frick at the Ministry of the Interior and Hermann Göring as Minister of the Interior for Prussia. The decrees of 9 February 1941 that brought Darlan to power effectively made him head of government and handed him the portfolio for Foreign Affairs, even while he remained Navy Minister and Commander in Chief of the Navy. The law of 9 February also attached responsibility for Information, the press and radio to the office of *vice-président du conseil*. When Marcel Peyrouton resigned as Minister of the Interior on 15 February, Darlan took that position as well,

¹³⁸ Coutau-Bégarie and Huan *Darlan*, 482-483. See also Marc Olivier Baruch *Servir l'Etat français: L'administration en France de 1940 à 1944* (Paris: Fayard, 1997).

wielding considerably more power than Frick had done under the Weimar Constitution. Before long, Admiral Bard became *préfet de police* in Paris, a position roughly analogous to Göring's in Prussia, and which, as the career of Jean Chiappe in the 1930s amply demonstrated, had an influence over the life of the capital that was surpassed only by that of the Occupying authorities.¹³⁹ To suggest, then, that the navy had no role in the policy of collaboration is to ignore the facts.

¹³⁹ Coutau-Bégarie and Huan *Darlan*, 376-377; William L. Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich: A History of Nazi Germany* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2011), 184-185.

CHAPTER FIVE

Fighting for Germany, Fighting for France

Introduction

According to Charles-Robert Ageron, a common theme among those occupying the more elevated levels of the Vichy regime was this: The Empire is France's last card; everything must be done to keep it alive. That was the argument used after 20 July 1940 by Admiral Platon, future Minister for the Colonies, to the governors who wanted to continue the war: "The Marshal has only one more card, the Empire. He wants to play it at the right moment. I implore you not to snatch it away from him."¹ It is, of course, significant that this utterance emanated from an admiral, since the primary organization responsible for maintaining the integrity of the Empire in the circumstances of 1940 was the navy. Furthermore, the government in whose service it was to fulfil this obligation was somewhat to the navy's liking. For Martin Thomas, "the French Navy encapsulated the limited independence and conservative authoritarianism of the Vichy regime." The attack on Mers-el-Kébir merely "reinforced an emergent French naval dogma which brought the majority of the French naval officer corps willingly into the service of the Vichy state." In fact, "[long] before Mers-el-Kébir, the Marine was a fertile ground for the notions of patriotic renewal that Pétain was supposed to represent."² And in the Empire, the navy found a philosophical soul-mate: as Jacques Soustelle put it in 1947, "[for] many French people in North Africa, if the National Revolution had not existed, they would have had to invent it."³ Thomas concludes: "The Vichy Navy cast itself as primary defender of the Pétainist conception of France's national interest. In effect this tied the preservation of the Vichy Empire to the prestige

¹ Charles-Robert Ageron, "Vichy et l'Empire," in *Le régime de Vichy et les français*, ed., Jean-Pierre Azéma and François Bédarida (Paris: CNRS, 1990), 123.

² Martin Thomas, "After Mers-el-Kébir: The Armed Neutrality of the Vichy French Navy, 1940-1943," *The English Historical Review* 112:477 (June 1997): 651, 649, 646.

³ Ageron, "Vichy et l'Empire," 123.

of the Marine. If the Navy permitted the loss of overseas territories without a fight, then the independence that the Vichy state claimed would be exposed as a sham.”⁴

Mers-el Kébir would, on this basis, turn out to be far from the last time the French navy found itself under fire. On 7 July 1940 Pierre Boisson, Governor General of French West Africa, dismissed an ultimatum presented by Acting Rear Admiral Rodney Onslow on board the aircraft carrier *Hermes* offering the same choices for the battleship *Richelieu* as had been presented to Admiral Gensoul at Mers-el-Kébir. A few hours later British ships picked up a radio signal ordering all French shipping in Dakar harbor to “meet attacks from the English enemy with the utmost ferocity.” The attack, when it came, was not quite what had been anticipated. *Hermes*’ motor launch, with a volunteer crew under Commander Bobby Bristowe, endeavored to enter the harbor equipped with 4 depth charges, which they deposited beneath the stern of the *Richelieu* under cover of darkness. The charges failed to explode. At 4 a.m. on 8 July *Hermes* launched 6 Swordfish torpedo bombers for a more conventional attack, but only one of their torpedoes ran true in the shallow water, exploding near *Richelieu*’s propellers. It was enough, detonating Bristowe’s depth charges and blowing a 500 square-foot hole in the French battleship as well as rupturing the starboard propeller shaft.⁵ It could have been worse. *Capitaine de vaisseau* Marzin, commander of the *Richelieu*, had caused several captured cargo ships to act as a protective screen for his ward which had successfully limited the size of the accessible target. And no one was hurt.⁶

⁴ Martin Thomas, “After Mers-el-Kébir,” 669.

⁵ Colin Smith, *England’s Last War Against France: Fighting Vichy, 1940-1942* (London: Phoenix, 2009), 96.

⁶ Archives Nationales (AN) AJ 41 1890-1909.

Dakar

General de Gaulle sent Commandant Philippe Leclerc (*nom de guerre* of the viscomte de Hautesclocque) to Africa, where he managed to rally Gaullist support in the Cameroons and the French Congo by August, and helped secure Chad after its Governor Félix Eboué declared himself for de Gaulle on 26 August 1940. 500,000 square miles in size, part of Chad's significance was that its northern frontier abutted Italian Libya.

The part of French West Africa that particularly interested the British, however, and for the same kind of reasons that had aroused their interest in the French fleet, was the port of Dakar. They feared that Vichy might allow the port to be used as a base for German U-boats and surface raiders with predatory intentions towards British shipping in the South Atlantic. At first de Gaulle was suspicious of British plans for the port, for reasons that General Edward Spears, Churchill's liaison with de Gaulle, explained: "He could never accept that we had no territorial ambitions at France's expense, always believed we would succumb to the temptation to help ourselves to some tempting morsel of the French Empire."⁷ It is intriguing to note that this was more or less precisely Admiral Darlan's position. In this sense notions of French prestige, of the value of the Empire and of the latent threat of foreign encroachment were demonstrably not the preserve of Vichy acolytes. Thus the Free French acquisition of the islands of St. Pierre and Miquelon on Christmas Eve 1941, in breach of the Monroe Doctrine, to the fury of the State Department, and to general embarrassment all round in the Allied camp can be seen in some respects as springing from the same emotional and ideological concerns as those that impelled the Vichy navy's defense of, say, Dakar. It wasn't a Vichy position, it was a French position.

⁷ Edward Spears, *Two Men Who Saved France: Pétain and de Gaulle* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1962), 144.

Having overcome his reservations, de Gaulle initially proposed a landing at Conakry in Guinea, almost 500 miles south of Dakar and 50 miles north of British Sierra Leone, intending to follow this up with an overland march to the port, the idea being that he might gather support as he went. This was considered too slow an undertaking to be practical and at a meeting on 6 August 1940, Churchill convinced him of the merits of an alternative. De Gaulle recalled how the meeting went: “‘We must’, he said to me, ‘together gain control of Dakar. For you it is capital. For if the business goes well, it means that large French forces are brought back into the war. It is very important to us. For us to be able to use Dakar as a base would make a great many things easier in the hard battle of the Atlantic. And so, having conferred with the Admiralty and the Chiefs of Staff, I am in a position to tell you that we are ready to assist in the expedition. We mean to assign to it a considerable force.’” Churchill explained that these ships could not long stay off the coast of Africa because of pressing needs nearer home, which was why he did not agree with de Gaulle’s proposal for a landing at Conakry, “which would oblige us to keep our ships in the neighborhood for months.” Churchill proposed instead a blend of friendly overture and military coercion. For his part, de Gaulle recognized that the British could not direct large naval forces to the Equator for long and so a more direct approach recommended itself. Besides, he reasoned, this way the Free French would be involved. Should he decline the offer, he felt that Dakar would ultimately present too enticing an objective for the British to resist.⁸

Churchill presented the plan to the Chiefs of Staff on 7 August and the following day outlined for General Ismay the reasons why time pressed. A telegram from the Governor of (British) Nigeria indicated the danger of German influence spreading quickly through the West African colonies of France with the connivance or aid of the Vichy Government “unless we act

⁸ Charles de Gaulle, *The Complete War Memoirs of Charles de Gaulle* (New York: Carroll and Graf, 1998), 115-116.

with celerity and vigour, we may find effective U-boat bases, supported by German aviation, all down this coast, and it will become barred to us but available to the Germans in the same way as the western coast of Europe.”⁹ Churchill also noted, referring to the time when the sailing of the *Massilia* had seemed to give hope for France continuing the war from North Africa: “It is now six weeks since the Cabinet was strongly disposed to action at Casablanca, and Mr. Duff Cooper and Lord Gort were dispatched. Nothing, however, came of this. The local French were hostile. The Chiefs of Staff were not able to make any positive proposals, and the situation has markedly deteriorated.”¹⁰ The Chiefs of Staff warned of the possibility of a French declaration of war in the case of such an aggressive intervention, a warning Churchill sidestepped, suggesting that the risk was a matter for the Cabinet to consider. Churchill’s view was that “[if] we won, Vichy could shrug its shoulders. If we lost, they could trade off their resistance with their German masters as a virtue.”¹¹

De Gaulle was certainly aware of the difficulties:

In West Africa the established authority was strongly centralized and, what was more, closely linked with that of North Africa. The military resources there were still considerable. The fortress of Dakar, well-armed, equipped with modern works and batteries, supported by several squadrons of aircraft and serving as a base for a naval squadron, including in particular some submarines and the powerful *Richelieu*, whose officers’ one dream had been vengeance since the British torpedoes had damaged the ship, constituted a redoubtable defensive and offensive entity.

In addition, Governor General Boisson was an ardent Vichyite who had already proven his credentials in July by imprisoning the administrator-in-chief of Upper Volta, M. Louveau, after he had declared adherence of the territory to Free France.

⁹ Winston S. Churchill, *Their Finest Hour* (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1949), 735.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* General Noguès had refused even to meet Duff Cooper and Lord Gort.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 477.

Nonetheless on 20 August Churchill summarized the plan at a meeting of the Chiefs of Staff and General de Gaulle:

The Anglo-French Armada would arrive at Dakar at dawn, aircraft would drop streamers and leaflets over the town, the British squadron would remain over the horizon, and French ships would come towards the port. An emissary, in a picket boat flying the Tricolour and a white flag, would go into the harbor with a letter to the Governor saying that General de Gaulle and his Free French troops had arrived. General de Gaulle would stress in the letter that he had come to free Dakar from the danger of imminent German aggression and it was bringing food and succor to the garrison and inhabitants. If the Governor was amenable, all would be well; if not, and the coast defences opened fire, the British squadrons would close in. If the opposition continued, the British warships would open fire on the French gun positions, but with the utmost restraint. If determined opposition was met with, the British forces would use all means to break down resistance. It was essential that the operation should be completed, and General de Gaulle master of Dakar, by nightfall.

General de Gaulle expressed his agreement.¹²

“Anglo-French Armada” was perhaps putting it a bit strongly. The French contribution, according to de Gaulle, consisted of three sloops and two armed trawlers, a force that the British official history referred to as “certain minor vessels.”¹³

On 27 August the Cabinet gave its final approval to the operation. There were, however, clouds on the horizon. On 21 June, the eve of the signing of the Franco-German armistice at Compiègne, the British Consul-General at Dakar had reported that in spite of fervent protestations from various branches of the administration, the armed forces and the population in general, the attitude of the local government would not be clear until the decision of the French Government was known.¹⁴ On 8 September *Contre-Amiral* Landriau, commander of the naval division in French West Africa, was informed by the French Admiralty that reliable sources said

¹² Churchill, *Their Finest Hour*, 479.

¹³ S.W. Roskill, *The War at Sea*, vol. I (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1954), 309; Charles de Gaulle, *The Complete War Memoirs*, 117.

¹⁴ Sir Llewellyn Woodward, *British Foreign Policy in the Second World War*, vol. I (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1970), 320.

de Gaulle had left Britain. He later reported that rumors abounded in Dakar and people were particularly nervous after the outbreak of “dissidence” in French Equatorial Africa, so much so that he felt it necessary to take precautions against a “Fifth Column.” The atmosphere, he said, was sufficiently tense for him to consider some kind of putsch not inconceivable. He also took the precaution of increasing reconnaissance with the scant resources at his disposal – four sloops and four seaplanes, which ensured that nothing could get within 50 miles of Dakar without being seen.¹⁵ It was not until 28 August, however, that reliable intelligence reached London about the state of French feeling in Senegal and of the defenses of Dakar, and it indicated that de Gaulle would not be welcomed and that serious resistance was likely to be encountered.¹⁶ Still, on 30 August the expedition duly set off, departing in three groups from Scapa, the Clyde and Liverpool. It was expected to reach Freetown, Sierra Leone, on 13 September where it would regroup and be joined by reinforcements from Gibraltar.

At 6.24 p.m. on 9 September the British Consul General at Tangier cabled Admiral Sir Dudley North, Flag Officer Commanding the North Atlantic Station based at Gibraltar that a “French squadron may try to pass Straits proceeding westward for unknown destination. This attempt may be timed to take place within the next 72 hours.”¹⁷ 24 hours later, the British naval attaché in Madrid reported to Gibraltar and the Admiralty that the French Admiralty had informed him that a squadron of six ships had left Toulon the previous day, although no destination had been mentioned.

This troubling news was in fact entirely coincidental to “Operation Menace,” as the Anglo-French enterprise had been dubbed. For some time the Vichy Government had been

¹⁵ AN AJ 41 1890-1909.

¹⁶ Roskill, *The War at Sea*, 308.

¹⁷ Churchill, *Their Finest Hour*, 479-480 .

trying to gain authorization for passage through the Straits from the Armistice Commissions of Germany and Italy in order to gain access to the food supplies necessary to sustain Metropolitan France. On 5 September the Germans gave their consent, although they drew the line at escorted convoys lest that might provoke British wrath. Nevertheless, Darlan began to experiment with single merchant vessels escorted at a distance by an accompanying warship. At the same time, with Chad declaring itself for de Gaulle, Vichy was eager to send reinforcements to prevent the spread of so-called “dissidence” to adjacent colonies. In Darlan’s view, the role of the Navy was now twofold: to protect French maritime traffic, and to protect the colonies from encroachment by de Gaulle or the British, or both.

Another reason why all this activity suddenly took on a greater importance was that on 30 August the German and Italian Armistice Commissions made it known that, as Britain had ceased its attacks on French ships, Article 8 of the Armistice, suspended after Mers-el-Kébir, could now be re-applied. The French fleet should therefore be disarmed by 30 September, leaving it with a sort of naval police force in France comprising six destroyers and six sloops. By appearing to be performing some useful function, Darlan hoped to provide the French negotiators at the Armistice Commission at Wiesbaden with cogent arguments why the Axis should not dismantle the French Navy after all.¹⁸ Of course, framing reasons why the navy should exist had been a preoccupation of the French Admiralty for 300 years, so in some respects this was business as usual. It was, then, partly with this in mind that on 29 August Darlan at a meeting of the Council of Ministers proposed the dispatch of warships to French Equatorial

¹⁸ Hervé Coutau-Bégarie and Claude Huan, *Darlan* (Paris: Fayard, 1989), 310.

Africa in order to suppress dissidence there.¹⁹ This movement was approved by the Italians and Germans on 1 September.

The reason the Germans and Italians had rescinded their earlier decision to suspend the provisions of Article 8 was the practical outcome of an Admiralty order of 12 July that no further action was to be taken in regard to French ships in their colonial and North African ports. This position had been repeated by Churchill in a speech to the House of Commons on 14 July and was therefore public knowledge.²⁰ It had unfortunate ramifications for “Operation Menace,” however, since it led Admiral North at Gibraltar to assume that when the French squadron, Force Y sailing from Toulon under the command of Admiral Bourragué, passed Gibraltar at dawn on 11 September, it did so with the sanction of the British Government. This conviction was reflected in the amiable exchange of signals between Gibraltar and Force Y: “What ship? – French cruisers and French destroyers – What names? – *Gloire, Georges-Leygues, Montcalm, Fantasque, Audacieux, Malin* – Thank you.”²¹

To complicate matters further on the British side, there were two Flag Officers on Gibraltar, North and Admiral James Somerville commanding Force H, from which the carrier *Ark Royal* had been detached for the Dakar operation. North was not informed about “Menace” and assumed, as had been the case previously, that if the Admiralty wanted any operational action taken by Force H against French warships, they would signal Somerville directly. “The truth is,” the official history reflected dolefully, “that the chain of command was ill-defined and

¹⁹ Ibid, 322.

²⁰ Hervé Coutau-Bégarie and Claude Huan, *Lettres et notes de l'amiral Darlan* (Paris: Economica, 1992), 235.

²¹ Coutau-Bégarie and Huan, *Darlan*, 323.

that such vagueness, besides being operationally dangerous, placed the responsible officers in an unfair position.”²²

The Admiralty suddenly woke up to the implications for “Menace” presented by French reinforcements at about noon on 11 September and ordered *Renown* and all the destroyers at Gibraltar to raise steam for full speed. Two hours later, Somerville was informed that he must prevent the French ships from reaching Dakar, but that he might allow them to proceed to Casablanca. In fact, as *Renown* put to sea, Bourragué’s Force Y was already tying up at Casablanca. Somerville established a patrol line to try and intercept them if they tried to move south. Informed of the presence of the British squadron, Bourragué put to sea again on the night of 12 September. Aware that his destroyers did not have sufficient fuel to reach Dakar, however, he sent them back to Casablanca on 13 September, although they followed some time afterwards. The reduced French force then found it relatively easy to evade Somerville’s slender resources and went on to enter Dakar on 14 September, joining the cruiser *Primauguet*, which had arrived a few days earlier having completed escort duty.²³

“This chapter of accidents sealed the fate of the Franco-British expedition to Dakar,” wrote Churchill. “I had no doubt whatever that the enterprise should be abandoned. The whole scheme of a bloodless landing and occupation by General de Gaulle seemed to me ruined by the arrival of the French squadron, probably carrying reinforcements, good gunners, and bitter-minded Vichy officers...” After a meeting of the War Cabinet on 16 September it was decided to cancel the operation.²⁴ The invasion force, however, carried on to Freetown, where it had

²² Roskill, *The War at Sea*, 311.

²³ Roskill, *The War at Sea*, 313-314; Coutau-Bégarie and Huan, *Darlan*, 323.

²⁴ Churchill, *Their Finest Hour*, 482-483.

been intended to regroup and refuel. De Gaulle and Admiral John Cunningham, commanding the naval component, registered their dismay at the cancellation by cable to London.

At this point the Vichy navy inadvertently intervened in the proceedings. De Gaulle recalled: “[Hardly] had we anchored at Freetown when a new and grave piece of information completed our perplexity. The squadron, reinforced by the cruiser *Primauguet*, had just weighed anchor and was heading southwards at full speed.”²⁵ This perhaps exaggerates the drama of the moment. In reality Bourragué was entirely oblivious to the presence of the Franco-British invasion fleet and had set sail merely to conform to his task of supporting Vichy forces at Libreville in Gabon. De Gaulle seems to have been under the impression that the whole of Force Y had departed Dakar and that the three heavy destroyers attached to it were in fact cruisers. His narrative therefore refers to a squadron of seven cruisers heading for Freetown, whereas of the four there were, *Primauguet* had been detached to escort a fleet tanker in advance of the main element. The three other cruisers, when they came upon Cunningham’s ships, were under standing orders to avoid engaging superior forces and had turned to the northwest. Shadowed by *Australia*, *Cumberland* and various destroyers, *Gloire* suffered an engine failure and was intercepted, eventually agreeing to return to Casablanca. *Georges-Leygues* and *Montcalm*, although contact was made with them, could not be prevented from regaining Dakar. *Primauguet* was intercepted by the cruisers *Cornwall* and *Delhi* and shepherded back to Casablanca.²⁶

In Vichy, Foreign Minister Baudouin was appalled when he heard the news on 20 September: “Summoned at 10 o’clock by Admiral Darlan, who had also called Pierre Laval and General Huntziger, I was brought up to speed on the absurd and unexpected events encountered

²⁵ De Gaulle, *The Complete War Memoirs*, 119-120.

²⁶ Roskill, *The War at Sea*, 315; Coutau-Bégarie and Huan, *Darlan*, 323.

by our light squadron...Instead of remaining concentrated, it divided itself into two which the English then separately invited to turn back. We're going to be ridiculous in the eyes of the Germans and the English! I did not conceal from Admiral Darlan how surprised I was to learn of the movement orders he had given to the cruiser squadron without telling anyone. Pierre Laval had not been warned of the initiative either."²⁷ Pétain had, however, been informed on 29 August; and of course permission had to be granted by the Armistice commissions.

Darlan was furious and blamed Bourragué. He noted, on 23 September, that the hapless admiral had "from Gib (sic) to Dakar, done nothing but run away." Furthermore, having learned of the British ultimatum to *Primauguet*, he had made no attempt to even try to join her.²⁸ Bourragué was relieved of his command and replaced by Admiral Lacroix, who departed for Dakar by air. Darlan later relented, realizing the extent of the odds Bourragué had faced, and promoted him. Baudouin, on the other hand, did not later serve as Foreign Minister under Darlan.

On the British side, Admiral Sir Dudley North, whose defenders point out that he had done nothing but obey orders, was also relieved of his command. Foreseeing this very outcome, Somerville expressed his agitation in a letter to his wife on 8 October 1940: "...[the Admiralty] wont keep us informed and in the picture, they keep us guessing and if we guess wrong then they want to have our blood...It looks to me as if they are trying to put the blame for this disastrous Dakar business on Dudley and me...Well I have a mouthful to say on the subject..."²⁹ When North returned to Britain he asked that he might be given "an opportunity in due course to

²⁷ Coutau-Bégarie and Huan, *Darlan*, 323-324.

²⁸ Coutau-Bégarie and Huan, *Lettres et notes de l'amiral Darlan*, 233.

²⁹ *The Somerville Papers*, ed. D. Simpson (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1996), 160.

vindicate myself before whatever board or tribunal their Lordships may see fit to appoint,” but this and subsequent representations were consistently refused.³⁰

One lesson to be learned from the entire episode is that commanders at sea on both sides displayed considerably less enthusiasm for shooting at each other than their political masters might have desired, or that might, for that matter, have been anticipated in the aftermath of Mers-el-Kébir. Once the guns did open fire, however, attitudes hardened again, unleashing a cycle of violence that escalated incrementally with every confrontation, reaching its senseless apogee in the waters off North Africa in November 1942.

Churchill had been impressed by the arguments of Admiral Cunningham and de Gaulle, however, and at a meeting of the Cabinet on 17 September, it was agreed to send a communication giving autonomous authority to commanders at the scene: “We give you full authority to go ahead and do what you think is best in order to give effect to the original purpose of the expedition.”³¹

And so, shortly before dawn on 23 September, a large number of ships gathered off Dakar. It had been thought that there were three possible outcomes. Ideally, variant “Happy,” the port’s occupants would be so impressed by the display of naval prowess off their shore that they would rally peacefully to de Gaulle’s cause. Unfortunately that day it was unseasonably foggy and the fleet remained invisible. Admiral Landriau put horizontal visibility at between 4 and 5,000 meters.³² This left two possibilities: “Sticky,” which involved symbolic resistance; and “Nasty,” circumstances that would precipitate the intervention of British ground forces.³³ It

³⁰ Roskill, *The War at Sea*, 314.

³¹ Churchill, *Their Finest Hour*, 485.

³² AN AJ 41 1890-1909.

³³ Bernard Costagliola *La Marine de Vichy: Blocus et collaboration, Juin 1940-Novembre 1942* (Paris: Tallandier, 2009), 64.

became apparent pretty quickly that “Happy” was not going to be the case, as de Gaulle’s emissaries were either taken prisoner or escaped precariously while under fire. Guessing where the “*Parlementaires*” were landing, Landriau had telephoned to have them arrested.³⁴ As soon as British aircraft were sighted overhead, the new commander of Force Y, vice admiral Lacroix, gave orders for his ships to raise steam.³⁵ Then the shore batteries opened up. Cunningham signaled by radio: “If fire continues on my ships I shall regretfully be compelled to return it.” The reply was succinct: “If you do not wish me to fire please remove yourself more than 20 miles from Dakar.” This referred to the exclusion zone from French territory created by Vichy for British shipping after Mers-el-Kébir. Even so, almost an hour elapsed before the British ships began to fire back.³⁶ Or, as de Gaulle put it, “[French fire] for several hours remained without reply.”³⁷ *Cumberland* was hit by a shell and forced at once to withdraw to Bathurst in the Gambia. The destroyer *Foresight* was also struck, but able to carry on. The French submarine *Persée* tried to leave harbor, but was hit by a shell and then depth-charged, although most of the crew was saved. A warning had been delivered by the British, but not received because it came across on a frequency the French did not monitor.³⁸ Had she dived she might have been delivered of this fate, but would have lost the chance of launching torpedoes against the two cruisers that suddenly loomed from the fog, so she remained on the surface. Having loosed her two forward torpedoes, she was struck by “three or four shells” while turning to bring her stern tubes to bear and began to sink. The crew was rescued by French sloops returning, somewhat hastily, from patrol, all the while under fire from the British cruisers.³⁹

³⁴ AN AJ 41 1890-1909.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Smith, *England’s Last War Against France*, 121.

³⁷ De Gaulle, *The Complete War Memoirs*, 124.

³⁸ AN AJ 41 1890-1909.

³⁹ AN AJ 41 1890-1909

An amphibious landing was attempted 13 miles down the coast, but repelled. French ships put to sea in the fog to investigate the commotion. Heavy destroyer *Audacieux* was spotted by the cruiser HMAS *Australia* and warned by signal to turn back, which she declined, only to be struck by a salvo of 8 inch shells for her trouble and forced to beach in shallow water, heavily on fire.⁴⁰ The three French cruisers that had set out after *Audacieux* failed to find the landing force in the fog and, informed of *Audacieux*'s fate by radio from *Richelieu*, returned to Dakar.

In London, Churchill remained up-beat. Told that the French had opened fire, he said: "Let 'em have it. Remember this: never maltreat your enemy by halves. Once the battle is joined, let 'em have it."⁴¹

At 11.45 p.m. an ultimatum was broadcast telling Governor General Boisson, Rear Admiral Landriau, and the people of Dakar that the allies must at all costs prevent the enemy becoming possessed of the base and demanded the acceptance of Allied terms by 6 a.m. The French were not much impressed. As Admiral Auphan put it: "The message was not very tactfully phrased, inasmuch as it accused the defenders of preparing to hand over Dakar to the Germans."⁴² Pierre Boisson's reply was curt, although not as curt as some of his junior officers are reputed to have suggested: "France has entrusted me with Dakar. I shall defend Dakar to the end."

If British fears about German interest in Dakar were exaggerated, they were not without foundation. A chance remark of Hitler's in the summer of 1938 had led to a German intelligence operation in French West Africa. As Walter Schellenberg, sometime head of the

⁴⁰ Paul Auphan and Jacques Mordal *The French Navy in World War II* (Annapolis MD: Naval Institute Press, 1959), 190.

⁴¹ John Colville, *The Fringes of Power: 10 Downing Street Diaries, 1939-1955* (New York: Norton, 1985), 249.

⁴² Auphan and Mordal, *The French Navy in World War II*, 190.

Sicherheitsdienst, tells it: “Himmler, always eager to see directives for concrete action in Hitler’s remarks, at once decided, in consultation with Heydrich [a former signals officer], to survey the situation of the West African coastal region and its harbors.” Thus, in the fall of 1938, Schellenberg was informed that “Heydrich wanted me to compile a full report on the harbor at Dakar...”⁴³ On 6 September 1940, Admiral Raeder, head of the German Navy, while reviewing the war situation in a report to Hitler “pointed out to him the vital importance of Gibraltar and the Suez Canal in the British war strategy, and also the corresponding benefits that the port of Dakar... would have for us if we could secure it.”⁴⁴ The record for the Führer conferences for the same day underscored the fact that Raeder “stresses once more the extreme importance of Dakar for Germany in this war.”⁴⁵ On 26 September Hitler returned to the theme: “The question of North-west Africa is also of decisive importance. All indications are that Britain with the help of Gaullist France, and possibly also of the USA, wants to make this region a center of resistance and to set up air bases for attack against Italy. Britain will try to prevent us from gaining a foothold in the African colonies. In this way Italy would be defeated. Therefore action must be taken against Dakar.”⁴⁶

Already on 16 July Otto von Stülpnagel, the military commander in France, had communicated through General Weygand Hitler’s desire for access to eight airbases in Morocco for the Luftwaffe and for use of the Tunis-Rabat railway and North African ports. That Pétain refused him, argues Robert Paxton, had less to do with his unwillingness to provide such concessions than it did with his desire to grant them only within the framework of more wide-

⁴³ Walter Schellenberg, *Hitler’s Secret Service* (New York: Pyramid Books, 1958), 53.

⁴⁴ Erich Raeder, *My Life* (New York: Arno Press, 1980), 335.

⁴⁵ Jak P. Mallmann Showell, ed., *Fuehrer Conferences on Naval Affairs, 1939-1945* (Annapolis MD: Naval Institute Press, 1990), 135.

⁴⁶ Showell, *Fuehrer Conferences on Naval Affairs, 1939-1945*, 141-142.

ranging negotiations.⁴⁷ Had Vichy resistance not materialized at Dakar, so General Huntziger was informed at Wiesbaden, the Germans would have taken over North Africa eight days after the British had established themselves at the port.⁴⁸ Otto von Stülpnagel commented at a meeting of the Armistice Commission: “The statement that Dakar is ‘under German control’ is just one of those lies the English have the habit of making.”⁴⁹ The French delegation probably agreed, but as a statement of German disinterest it was in all likelihood greeted with the same skepticism as British claims. There was, then, quite a lot at stake in what might have appeared a comedy of errors, had it not been so lethal.

As it was, the battle recommenced on 24 September a couple of hours after the reception of Boisson’s rejection of the ultimatum, with a series of air attacks that resulted in the loss of 8 British aircraft to no appreciable effect. Replying to fire from the British battleships, one of the guns in *Richelieu*’s No.2 turret exploded. In a lull the sloop *Hardi* put to sea to rescue aircrew from an aircraft observed from *Richelieu* to have been downed. *Hardi*’s appearance prompted a further outbreak of fire that did considerable damage to the port. The *Hardi*, having fulfilled her task, returned to harbor surrounded by the waterspouts from exploding shells.⁵⁰ The French submarine *Ajax* was sunk, although the crew was rescued. The British battleship *Barham* was struck four times by French fire without serious damage. Ominously, however, the captain of the *Richelieu* reported that he had identified the navigational track of the British battleships as they conducted their bombardment. This intelligence was passed to the captain of the submarine

⁴⁷ Robert O. Paxton *Vichy France: Old Guard and New Order, 1940-1944* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 61-62.

⁴⁸ Costagliola, *La Marine de Vichy*, 65.

⁴⁹ *La délégation française auprès de la Commission Allemande d’Armistice* vol. I (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1957), 330.

⁵⁰ AN AJ 41 1890-1909.

Bévéziers who then placed his vessel 10 miles to the south of the island of Gorée, on the approach route of the battleships.

Further afield the French responded by bombing Gibraltar. 40 Vichy bombers flying from Moroccan airfields dropped an estimated 150 bombs. While they did little damage, the raid was considerably larger than any of the nuisance raids that had previously been undertaken by the Italians.⁵¹ Some 600 tons of bombs were dropped in three raids on 24 and 25 September.⁵² “It was,” wrote Somerville to his wife on 24 September, “an absolute plastering and it was just luck that we weren’t hit as some were very close.”⁵³ The French bombers, operating at an altitude of 6,500 meters, observed that the anti-aircraft fire on the 25 September was more accurate than it had been the day before, but reported no major damage.⁵⁴ Already on 21 September General Doyen had informed Stülpnagel at Wiesbaden that the Vichy Government had “decided to defend its colonies and communications with them energetically” and requested that the “ships now present at Toulon could be sent to French Equatorial Africa,” including the battleship *Strasbourg*, two cruisers of 10,000 tons, one of 7,600 tons, as well as the heavy destroyers.⁵⁵ Once the attack developed, Darlan ordered the ships at Toulon made ready for sea, putting Admiral de Laborde in charge of the battle group with his flag raised on *Strasbourg*.

On 25 September, just as the Franco-British ships were taking up position to resume the bombardment of Dakar, *Resolution* was hit by a torpedo from the French submarine *Bévéziers* and badly damaged. Admiral Cunningham decided to withdraw to seaward. After a meeting of

⁵¹ Smith, *England’s Last War Against France*, 121.

⁵² Paxton, *Vichy France*, 71.

⁵³ *The Somerville Papers*, 152.

⁵⁴ AN AJ 41 1890-1909.

⁵⁵ *La délégation française auprès de la Commission Allemande d’Armistice*, vol. I, 329.

the cabinet, Churchill telegraphed: “On all the information now before us, including damage to *Resolution*, we have decided that the enterprise against Dakar should be abandoned...”⁵⁶

Naturally these events did nothing to foster feelings of amity, although the Anglo-French talks in Madrid continued for the time being. On 24 September Darlan’s orders of the day revealed the depth of his rancor. Denying any malevolent German intentions towards Dakar, he said that the British, pressed by de Gaulle, were acting out of selfish motives and accused them of trying to “starve our families, ruin our unhappy country, and dismember our Empire.”⁵⁷ Force H’s Admiral Somerville, who had been as unenthusiastic about the Dakar operation as he had been about Mers-el-Kébir, was moved to observe: “Seems to me that these damn Frenchmen are quite prepared to fight us at any time though they won’t fight the Germans.” Professional sensitivities getting the better of him, he added: “One can’t help admiring the reply from Dakar to our ultimatum, ditto *Primauguet*’s reply to *Cornwall*.”⁵⁸

Subsequent to the battle, de Gaulle noted a higher degree of aggressiveness among his followers: “...in spite of their reverse, the Free French remained unshakeable...all of them had been hardened by the hostile attitude of Vichy. So it happened that, when an airplane from Dakar came and flew over our ships at anchor, a furious fusillade greeted it from every vessel, which would certainly not have been the case the week before.”⁵⁹ Historian Robert Aron summarized the unhappy affair: “The attackers were convinced that Dakar was full of Germans and that Boisson was a traitor; the defenders knew *de visci* that there were no Germans: they therefore considered de Gaulle in the pay of England and guilty of treason.”⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Churchill, *Their Finest Hour*, 490-491.

⁵⁷ Coutau-Bégarie and Huan *Lettres et notes de l’amiral Darlan*, 235.

⁵⁸ *The Somerville Papers*, 151.

⁵⁹ De Gaulle, *The Complete War Memoirs*, 128.

⁶⁰ Robert Aron, *The Vichy Regime, 1940-44* (New York: MacMillan, 1958), 211.

The Germans, on the other hand, were impressed. The best policy, Hitler told Mussolini, was for Vichy to defend French Africa herself.⁶¹ It was, according to Robert Paxton, “a decisive turning point in Franco-German relations. Dakar had brought Hitler himself around to seeing some utility in voluntary assistance from an autonomous France.”⁶² The Germans were not, however, so impressed as to allow the *Strasbourg* battle group sail for Dakar, although they released four submarines for colonial stations, two for Indochina and two for Madagascar.⁶³ At the 25th meeting of the naval sub-committee of the Wiesbaden Armistice Commission, the German representative Captain Wever delivered the pleasing news that he considered certain issues to be no longer of any particular urgency as he anticipated the suspension of Article 8 of the armistice.⁶⁴

The attack on Dakar continued to have a poisonous effect on Franco-British relations, although given the amount of French maritime traffic, incidents at sea between the erstwhile allies were remarkably uncommon. The Royal Navy intercepted three French ships in September 1940, three in October, two in November, and none in December. However, on Christmas Day the Admiralty ordered Force H to capture French merchant vessels “to prevent the French making a hole in our blockade.”⁶⁵ On 1 January 1941 the 13th Destroyer Flotilla intercepted four ships *en route* from Casablanca to Oran. When a boarding party from HMS *Jaguar* met resistance, she opened fire on the liner *Chantilly*, killing two passengers, including a young girl. During the rest of January, the British stopped five more French vessels, in February

⁶¹ *Documents on German Foreign Policy* (DGFP), series D, vol. XI (Washington DC: US Government Printing Office, 1962), 411ff.

⁶² Paxton, *Vichy France*, 69.

⁶³ *La délégation française auprès de la Commission Allemande d'Armistice*, vol. I, 374-375.

⁶⁴ AN AJ 41 1890-1909.

⁶⁵ *The Somerville Papers*, 233-234.

three, and in March four.⁶⁶ On 24 February 1941 Darlan notified the British Government through US Ambassador Leahy that if the British did not stop seizing French merchant ships, he would use the French fleet to stop them. On 15 March Darlan asked the Germans for permission to use French warships for convoy duty, and the German Armistice Commission agreed, hoping to aggravate Anglo-French relations further. According to Paxton, a “virtual Franco-British undeclared naval war was taking shape in the spring of 1941.”⁶⁷

Naval Intelligence

Shooting at the British was not the only way to inhibit their maritime operations. It was possible to prompt the Germans to act as a proxy through the simple expedient of providing them with intelligence. The extent to which this actually occurred remains a subject of debate, not least because intelligence is a murky environment given to ambiguities. Furthermore, Vichy was a world that par excellence lent itself to ambiguity even in everyday life. To make judgement even more difficult, as Simon Kitson noted in his book on counterespionage in Vichy: “...it should be noted from the outset that my study of this documentation pertains mainly to the army’s secret services. A lack of available archives (as well as a dearth of memoirs) prevents me from pursuing a similar line of inquiry in regard to the naval secret services.”⁶⁸

Anglo-French cooperation in this area was quite extensive before the Fall of France in June 1940. A meeting took place in London on 30 January 1939 between French deputy secret service chief Commandant Malraison, the head of French counter-intelligence Captain Guy Schlessor, and their British counterparts, General Stewart Menzies, head of the British Secret

⁶⁶ Vincent P. O’Hara, *Struggle for the Middle Sea: The Great Navies at War in the Mediterranean Theater, 1940-1945* (Annapolis MD: Naval Institute Press, 2009), 125-126.

⁶⁷ Paxton, *Vichy France*, 116.

⁶⁸ Simon Kitson, *The Hunt for Nazi Spies: Fighting Espionage in Vichy France* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 58.

Intelligence Service, and Colonel Vernon Kell of MI5, the British internal security service. From this meeting emerged a major effort to coordinate French and British intelligence operations in Europe. According to Peter Jackson and Joseph A. Maiolo, relatively close collaboration “probably continued” in the domain of human intelligence from the outbreak of war until the fall of France. Collaboration in signals intelligence was demonstrably close. Success, for example, against the German Enigma codes was achieved in a “working partnership” between Bletchley Park in Britain and PC (*poste de commandement*) Bruno near Paris. A Franco-British committee on telecommunications was established to link the French *Inspection-Général Technique des Transmissions de la Défense Nationale* with the British Wireless Telegraphy Board, responsible mainly for coordinating the interception and distribution between British and French listening stations of German wireless traffic. By early 1940 Enigma messages picked up and decrypted in Britain were being forwarded immediately to PC Bruno and the general staff of the army in the field. Intercepts decrypted by the French were passed on to Bletchley.⁶⁹

Most interestingly, “[signals intelligence] cooperation between the British and French secret services survived the fall of France and lasted well into the Vichy period.”⁷⁰ PC Bruno was originally formed in late 1939 by Colonel Gustave Bertrand, head of the French Army’s radio intelligence organization, the *section d’examiner* (SE). Following the fall of France the team that had manned PC Bruno, after a short exile in Algeria, returned secretly to southern France to the Château de Fouzes near the town of Uzes. Rechristened PC Cadix, the new site was “manned by a polyglot team of Poles, exiled Spanish loyalists, Free French, and the

⁶⁹ Peter Jackson and Joseph A. Maiolo, “Intelligence in Anglo-French Relations Before the Outbreak of the Second World War” in *Anglo-French Defence Relations Between the Wars*, ed. M. Alexander and W. Philpott (London: Palgrave, 2002), 147.

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, 146-147.

occasional stray Englishman.” From October 1940 to November 1942 they intercepted German high frequency communications in Occupied France and elsewhere and transmitted the decrypts to Bletchley Park.⁷¹

Surprising a revelation as this is, two things about it are noteworthy. It was an army operation and it dealt in pure intelligence. A report by the British secret services from October 1942 noted in particular that the navy secret services were all considered to be anti-Allied. French naval secret services were quite possibly thoroughly penetrated by the Germans, too, to complicate matters. During 1940 “the heads of the naval secret services fled from Paris hurriedly leaving behind them a list of names and addresses of their agents,” a resource that the Germans took full advantage of. If there was to be contact with the Germans, however, Darlan wanted it to be managed. A letter from him to the Secretaries of State for Interior and War “was entirely explicit in the means to be used to limit contact between the public and the Germans.”⁷²

Darlan was extremely influential in the intelligence field, not least because in mid-1941 he created a “Center for Governmental Information,” an umbrella organization designed to gain more centralized control of the secret services, which was placed under the direct control of his office. The general situation was typical, however, of so many of Vichy’s dilemmas: “In sum, Vichy’s policy in the domain of anti-German counter-espionage oscillated between firmness and weakness as the government tried to reconcile the often conflicting needs of a defense of sovereignty and a promotion of collaboration.”⁷³

⁷¹ Robert J. Hanyok, *Eavesdropping on Hell: Historical Guide to Western Communications Intelligence and the Holocaust, 1939-1945* (North Chelmsford MA: Courier Corporation, 2013), 31-33.

⁷² Kitson, *The Hunt for Nazi Spies*, 43, 69, 92.

⁷³ Kitson, *The Hunt for Nazi Spies*, 155.

Naturally where there is ambiguity the temptation is to assume the worst, as General Spears did at Dakar. Before the French submarine *Ajax* was sunk by gunfire, a boarding party seized all the documents they could find, which included an order from Darlan instructing his fleet to use a certain code, explaining that it could also be read by the Germans and Italians. Spears, says Colin Smith, was outraged, “pointing out to London that it made a mockery of Vichy’s insistence that they were neutral because all their reports on the location of British ships were being shared with Berlin and Rome.”⁷⁴ Elsewhere, Martin Thomas suggests that “between 1940 and 1942 the naval authorities in French Somaliland did most damage to the Royal Navy, not by mounting sorties from Djibouti, but by using the port wireless station to send reports to Vichy on local British naval movements through the Red Sea. This intelligence was then relayed to the German and Italian authorities.”⁷⁵

This construct is fiercely contested by some French historians. Coutau-Bégarie and Huan maintain that no single British loss can be attributed to intelligence provided by the French. Although in 1940 Darlan did indeed pass intelligence to the Germans, they argue that it was extremely vague and intended principally to maintain the German authorization for French naval reconnaissance flights. The information divulged was either of no tactical value or was already known to the enemy.⁷⁶ In 1941 the French passed on intelligence regarding British fleet activity at Gibraltar, but this was, again according to Coutau-Bégarie and Huan, part of a double game. The Germans had established one of a number of observation posts at Linea, on the border between Spain and Gibraltar, to keep watch on the port and the Straits and monitor shipping, reporting on a daily basis. In 1940 the French broke their code and from that point on Naval

⁷⁴ Smith, *England’s Last War Against France*, 130.

⁷⁵ Thomas, “After Mers-el-Kébir,” 658-659.

⁷⁶ Coutau-Bégarie and Huan *Darlan*, 314-315.

Intelligence in Morocco passed on to Vichy what the Germans were reporting. From the end of May 1941, the French Admiralty passed to the Germans a slightly modified version of their own intelligence. Because this service was so secret, say Coutau-Bégarie and Huan, many after war believed that the telegrams to Wiesbaden were indeed evidence that the French navy was working for the Germans.⁷⁷ By the same token, of course, as Freud might have said, sometimes a cigar is just a cigar.

Maurice Pasquelot, in May 1940 a member of the French naval mission to London, goes further than Coutau-Bégarie and Huan. He maintains that French intelligence managed in February 1941 to secure copies of the Italian naval code “Duco,” one of which was smuggled to Berne and put in the hands of the SIS representative there, one Major Farrel. A few weeks later, says Pasquelot, the Italians were astonished to observe about a dozen of their vessels, both military and civilian, being dispatched by British submarines.⁷⁸ In addition, Pasquelot argues, it was thanks to the secret naval listening stations in Montpellier that *Bismarck* was located 400 miles from Brest in May 1941 and subsequently sunk by the Royal Navy.⁷⁹ This assertion in particular seems questionable given Darlan’s response to the sinking of the *Hood* and the fact that this was precisely the intelligence he was offering to trade with the Germans at a dinner party hosted in Paris by Admiral Otto Schultze, German commanding admiral in France, on 3 December 1941.⁸⁰

One thing is incontestable, however, and that is that the files contain numerous examples of intelligence passed on to the German Armistice Commission, even before Darlan arranged the

⁷⁷ Ibid, 422.

⁷⁸ Maurice Pasquelot, *Les Dossiers secrets de la Marine. Londres - Vichy 1940-44* (Paris: Nouvelles Editions Latines, 1977), 103.

⁷⁹ Ibid, 153-157.

⁸⁰ Showell, *Fuehrer Conferences on Naval Affairs*, 250.

communication of intelligence to the Germans in a meeting with Admiral Canaris, head of German military intelligence, in an attempt to save the life of *lieutenant de vaisseau* Estienne d'Orves, arrested by the Germans and charged with espionage. As early as 10 July 1940 Admiral Michelier is reported to have handed intelligence on British warships in the Mediterranean to the Germans at Wiesbaden, although this is recorded in the German minutes and not the French ones.⁸¹ The same day details of the position of a British task force observed by French reconnaissance was passed to the German Armistice Commission in Wiesbaden from the French Commission in Turin.⁸² It all appears to have been quite routine. A document from September 1941 refers to “numerous” pieces of intelligence furnished to the Italian Armistice Commission regarding British naval movements.⁸³

If the French Navy was happy to pass on intelligence about the British, it was strenuous in its efforts to prevent intelligence flowing the other way. Kitson makes the point that all the counter-espionage organizations in Vichy worked against both the Axis and the Allies. The ambiguity of the times was captured in the memoirs of Robert Terres, a member of the Toulouse *Travaux Ruraux* (TR), the counter-espionage service that camouflaged itself as an agricultural organization: “I started to recruit double agents against the British, and later on, against the Americans. It’s not that I really considered them enemies, but my job was to monitor them and pass the information to my chiefs. What they did with the information afterward was their own business, I trusted them. I am not sure now that I was right.” In 1941, 177 Allied and Gaullist

⁸¹ AN AJ 41 1890-1909.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ AN 2 AG 656.

agents were arrested by the French secret services. According to Paul Paillole, head of the TR, however, 601 Axis spies were seized in the same year.⁸⁴

Anglo-French clashes continued at sea. British torpedo boats chased a French freighter into the harbor at Port-Etienne in Mauretania on 24 March 1941 and a week later an armed French convoy was engaged off Nemours in Algeria by a British cruiser and five torpedo boats. It is worth noting in this context, however, that the captain of the French escort *Simoun* observed that the British ships did not open fire on the French ships even when the convoy was at their mercy. They only opened fire against the shore batteries that had started shooting at them.⁸⁵ On 26 and 29 March British aircraft bombed French merchant vessels at Sfax in Tunisia after the Italians had made use of the port facilities.⁸⁶ On 2 June 1941 Darlan publicly criticized British “piracy” claiming “these acts of brutality” had but one objective: “To destroy French maritime power, to cut off Metropolitan France from the Empire, to isolate us from the rest of the world.” The balance of these acts of piracy was a net loss to France of 792,000 tons of shipping, a cost of some 20 billion francs. Or, as Darlan pointedly observed, “slightly more than we have paid Germany since the armistice.” His list of grievances against Britain filled most of the front page of *Le Figaro* and went back as far as the First World War.⁸⁷

Indochina

In the Far East, Franco-British relations were more ambiguous. The fall of France opened the way for the Japanese to start making demands regarding Indochina. Then Governor General Georges Catroux sought American support in the form of some kind of naval

⁸⁴ Kitson, *The Hunt for Nazi Spies*, 67, 114.

⁸⁵ AN AJ 41 1890-1909.

⁸⁶ Paxton, *Vichy France*, 116.

⁸⁷ *Le Figaro* (2 June 1941).

demonstration in the Gulf of Tonkin, but this was refused and the Japanese Army installed itself in Tonkin in September, with the initial objective of supporting its operations in China.⁸⁸ French weakness also caught the attention of the neutral Thai government and in late 1940 the Thais decided to make a bid to recover disputed border provinces in Cambodia and Laos, resulting in border fighting with the Vichy French in late 1940 and early 1941. Given the tenor of Anglo-French relations in Europe at the time, it perhaps came as a surprise when the British Governor at Singapore offered British services as a secret arbitrator, hoping thereby to gain a quick settlement and keep the Japanese uninvolved. In December 1940 Admiral Jouan was dispatched by Hanoi to talks in Singapore which progressed until the Japanese unilaterally imposed their own settlement in January 1941.⁸⁹ In the meantime desultory fighting continued along the Thai border while the French Navy carried out an aerial reconnaissance of the Gulf of Siam.⁹⁰ After Thai infiltration of the Cambodian border, reprisals in the form of a combined land and sea operation were proposed which eventually led to the action at Koh Chang on 17 January.

This involved a French flotilla which, under the command of *Capitaine de vaisseau* Berenger in the old cruiser *Lamotte-Piquet*, consisted otherwise of two 2,000 ton sloops and two 600 ton colonial gunboats. With this slightly threadbare force he engaged the Thai fleet, sinking the new Japanese-built coastal defense battleship *Dhonburi* and forcing her sister, *Ayuthia*, to run aground. Three Thai destroyers, furnished by the Italians, were also sunk.⁹¹ It was the only outright naval victory for Vichy in the war and demonstrated a determination by the Navy to

⁸⁸ C.V. Jacques Michel (rt), *La Marine française en Indochine, 1939-1955*, vol. I : *Septembre 1939- Août 1945* Service Historique de la Marine (no date), 109.

⁸⁹ Richard J. Aldrich, *Intelligence and the War Against Japan: Britain, America and the Politics of Secret Service* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 44-45.

⁹⁰ Michel, *La Marine française en Indochine*, 123.

⁹¹ George Palocz-Horvath, "Thailand's War with Vichy France," *History Today* 45:3 (March 1995): 32-39.

fulfil its task of protecting the Empire to the best of its ability wherever it should happen to be. It certainly wasn't for the publicity. *Le Temps* gave the details of the story on 21 January.⁹²

In Indochina, perhaps more than anywhere, the ambiguity of Britain's relationship to Vichy was revealed. In southern Indochina a vigorous Gaullist movement seemed to be developing in mid-1940. This offered British Intelligence in the form of the Special Operations Executive (SOE) – whose 'F' section was supposed to set France ablaze – the possibility of disrupting Vichy rule and opposing the Japanese. But in London the feeling was that more fighting in Indochina might invite further Japanese intervention, to the peril of British interests in the region, and so assistance was denied to de Gaulle's followers. Indeed, by 1941, "the British had begun an uneasy episode in collaboration with Vichy in the Far East, even signing a regional agreement which guaranteed no naval hostilities and no subversive activities."⁹³

Indochina, however, could not remain forever an island in an ever widening conflict and once again events elsewhere caught up with it. In June 1941 French merchant shipping sailing to or from Indochina began to be seized by the Dutch Navy. Holland, although occupied, had at this point possession of the Dutch East Indies and a government-in-exile in London. The Dutch intervention led to the French introducing convoy escorts. Notwithstanding this muscular development, a French convoy was diverted to South Africa by a British naval force on 3 November 1941, after which all traffic between Saigon and Metropolitan France was suspended.⁹⁴

⁹² *Le Temps* (21 January 1941): 2.

⁹³ Aldrich, *Intelligence and the War Against Japan*, 107-108.

⁹⁴ Michel, *La Marine française en Indochine*, 110.

Syria

At the root of this Allied change in attitude towards Vichy shipping on the other side of the world lay Rashid Ali's coup in Iraq on 3 April 1941, followed three days later by the German invasion of Greece and Yugoslavia. According to General Spears, "German aims and intentions in the Levant became increasingly obvious, just as those of the Vichy authorities grew more and more equivocal. More and ever more precise information was coming in that German agents of all kinds were appearing in the Levant."⁹⁵

By 30 April the "situation had seriously deteriorated" and Iraqi troops were reported to be concentrating around the RAF air base at Habbaniyah. On 2 May Rashid Ali appealed to Hitler for armed support against the British.⁹⁶ On 3 May a meeting took place between Darlan and Ambassador Abetz at the German Embassy in Paris. Darlan was informed that he could expect to see Hitler soon and could anticipate obtaining certain concessions regarding occupation costs, the release of prisoners of war, and a limited relaxation of restrictions involving the demarcation line between occupied and non-occupied France. However, Abetz added sadly, Germany would be likely to support Spanish and Italian claims over French territory when the eventual peace treaty was negotiated, since there was a feeling that France was not to be trusted after the events of 13 December, when Pierre Laval was turned out of office. Words, said Abetz, could not restore that trust. Only actions.

One such action, suggested Abetz, would be to lend assistance to Iraq, by way of armaments, in its struggle against the British. To this end France could draw upon the stocks of its own arms currently held by the Italian Armistice Commission, could allow further transport

⁹⁵ Edward Spears, *Fulfilment of a Mission: Spears Mission to Syria and Lebanon, 1941-1944* (London: Archon Books, 1977), 27.

⁹⁶ Winston S. Churchill, *The Grand Alliance* (New York: Bantam Books, 1962), 224.

of arms across Syria and could permit transit and landing facilities in Syria for German aircraft going to Iraq. Darlan promised to present the issue to the Council of Ministers. On 6 May, at his next meeting with Abetz, Darlan observed that Iraq was probably beyond help and that any assistance rendered would provoke a British response and lead to the loss to France of Syria. However, in the interests of the betterment of Franco-German relations, Darlan announced himself prepared to stand before the French people as “the man who lost Syria.” His reward was a meeting with Hitler at Berchtesgaden on 11 May 1941.⁹⁷ On 6 May Darlan signaled General Dentz, commanding French forces in Syria, instructing to provide every facility to German aircraft heading towards Iraq.

Darlan returned from Berchtesgaden having gained nothing, but having promised to supply Rommel in Libya via the French ports of Toulon and Bizerte in Tunisia.⁹⁸ This was not mentioned in his report to the Council of Ministers, any more than was the possibility of conflict with Britain.⁹⁹ Darlan’s agreement foresaw the delivery of 400 trucks to Libya and an ongoing commitment to deliver 20,000 tons of supplies per month, along the very routes Pétain had refused access to the previous year.¹⁰⁰ And, as was the way with these deals in a variety of spheres, thanks to the Vichy obsession with sovereignty, instead of the Germans doing the heavy lifting, it was now going to be done by the French. Negotiations continued in Paris leading to the initial signing on 27 May of the infamous Paris Protocols. The first of these, concerning Syria and Iraq, provided for three quarters of the French war material stocked in Syria to be bought by the Germans, allowed access for the Germans to the aerodrome at Aleppo, and opened the ports, roads and railways of Syria for use in supplying Iraq. In addition there would be an exchange of

⁹⁷ Otto Abetz *Pétain et les Allemands. Memorandum d’Abetz sur les rapports Franco-Allemands* (Paris: Gaucher, 1948), 98-101.

⁹⁸ AN 2 AG/656.

⁹⁹ Michèle Cointet, *Nouvelle histoire de Vichy* (Paris: Fayard, 2011), 443-445.

¹⁰⁰ AN 2 AG/656.

intelligence regarding British movements in the Near East, while France undertook to defend Syria and Lebanon against any attack.¹⁰¹ According to Churchill, between 9 May and the end of the month about 100 German and 20 Italian aircraft landed on Syrian airfields.¹⁰²

Unfortunately, by mid-May 1941 the British had occupied Basra, which they were permitted to do under the provisions of a 1930 treaty, and had lifted the siege of the airfield at Habbaniya. On 1 June a pro-British regent regained the throne in Baghdad and Rashid Ali had departed for Persia.¹⁰³ British anxieties had, however, by now been irrevocably aroused. Crete fell to the Germans on 30 May and in the course of its evacuation the Royal Navy had lost three cruisers and six destroyers. Nine other cruisers and destroyers were under repair in Egypt and two battleships and an aircraft carrier had had to leave the theater to be repaired elsewhere.¹⁰⁴ At a meeting in Cairo on 5 May, General Spears had already outlined his view of German intentions: “Once they had a foothold in Syria they would certainly build up forces there. The Canal and Egypt would be under constant threat from the air...Did not this German threat present the gravest danger to our position in the desert and in Egypt?”¹⁰⁵ This was the prevailing feeling in the British camp.

And so, with irrepressible logic, on 8 June an invasion force composed of the 7th Australian Division, British and Indian elements and a Free French force under General Le Gentilhomme entered Syria. Damascus fell on 21 June 1941 and when on 8 July the Australians

¹⁰¹ Cointet, *Nouvelle histoire de Vichy*, 446.

¹⁰² Churchill, *The Grand Alliance*, 273.

¹⁰³ Douglas Porch, *The Path to Victory: The Mediterranean Theater in World War II* (New York: Farrer, Straus & Giroux, 2004), 577-578.

¹⁰⁴ Churchill, *The Grand Alliance*, 257.

¹⁰⁵ Spears, *Fulfilment of a Mission*, 64.

reached Beirut, Vichy authorized the French High Commissioner General Dentz to request an armistice.¹⁰⁶

The official British naval history is laconic in its summary: “To the Navy fell the usual duty of supporting the advance of the army along the coast...to begin with, adequate fighter protection was lacking because the RAF had none to spare, and the naval aircraft sent to protect the ships proved no match for the French shore-based fighters. The German bombers flown from Crete to help the Vichy French air force consequently caused some trouble, as did the resistance offered by the large and fast French destroyers based on Beirut.”¹⁰⁷

The problem for Darlan was whether or not to commit the bulk of his fleet to the campaign, which as usual was his first impulse. This would have entailed a general engagement with the British, which the navy had been anxious to avoid. As for the British, they were not only wary of the ships based at Toulon, but had fresh concerns regarding the French fleet interned at Alexandria, the main naval support base for operations in Syria. At the Middle East Commanders-in-Chief Committee meeting on 4 July 1941, Admiral Cunningham revealed that he had suggested to the Admiralty that “a further friendly agreement with the French Navy at Alexandria would be desirable, as he did not want a battle in Alexandria harbor as a result of our action against Syria.”¹⁰⁸ On 11 June he wrote to the First Sea Lord Admiral Sir Dudley Pound to tell him of a meeting with the French Naval Commander in Alexandria: “I had an interview with Godfroy yesterday...Godfroy, I think, realizes that he is on a bad wicket and is fairly amenable.

¹⁰⁶ Cointet, *Nouvelle histoire de Vichy*, 449.

¹⁰⁷ Roskill, *The War at Sea*, 516-517.

¹⁰⁸ M. Simpson, *The Cunningham Papers*, vol. I: *The Mediterranean Fleet, 1939-1942* (Navy Records Society, 1999), 477.

We have had five or six further deserters and they tell us that all is prepared for instant scuttling...”¹⁰⁹

If Cunningham’s concerns were, as he confessed, more at the level of irritation than outright worry, they were not idle concerns. Even after the invasion of North Africa in November 1942, Godfroy insisted he would destroy his own ships rather than be compelled either to denounce Pétain or to leave Alexandria to sail to the USA for refit. Just before the North African landings Godfroy had agreed to move the battleship *Lorraine* to a less threatening berth. Up to that point his squadron was under orders, in the event of British interference, to attack specified British targets, either by means of hastily rearmed guns or by ramming designated British vessels.¹¹⁰ On 7 July 1942 the French Admiralty transmitted President Roosevelt’s proposals for the Alexandria Squadron to the Italian and German Armistice Commissions. The next day they passed on their reply: “If the Federal Government was, as it claims, merely wishing to safeguard the interests of the French Navy...it should facilitate the departure of our ships in Alexandria for a port in France.”¹¹¹ Admiral Godfroy did not throw his lot in with the Allies until 12 May 1943.¹¹²

“The one thing,” wrote Admiral Auphan, “that the French Government could do was to throw a limited part of the Navy into the action...just enough to make some show of defending the French territories.” They sent a naval air wing from North Africa and additional ships, sailing singly.¹¹³ The British position was expressed in Admiral Cunningham’s war diary on 7 June: “The following general directions of policy have been given by the Admiralty: a) No

¹⁰⁹ Simpson, *The Cunningham Papers*, 667.

¹¹⁰ Thomas “After Mers-el-Kébir,” 667.

¹¹¹ AN AJ 41 1890-1909.

¹¹² Vincent P. O’Hara *Struggle for the Middle Sea: The Great Navies at War in the Mediterranean Theater, 1940-1945* (Annapolis MD: Naval Institute Press, 2009), 212.

¹¹³ Auphan and Mordal, *The French Navy in World War II*, 198.

action is to be taken against French warships unless they attempt to interfere with our operations...”¹¹⁴ This attitude altered rapidly with an action taking place two days later off Sidon. Three British destroyers ran into the Vichy heavy destroyers *Valmy* and *Guépard* as they were engaged in bombarding advancing columns on shore.

It was, reported *Capitaine de vaisseau* Gervais de Lafond, master of the *Guépard* and flotilla leader, a fine day with calm seas, light winds gusting occasionally, excellent visibility, with the sun high above the horizon. The French opened fire at 10:30 at long range and *Janus*, the leading British destroyer, was hit several times and badly damaged. By 11:05 *Guépard* had fired 300 rounds and decided to cease firing. Cunningham’s report on the Syrian campaign concluded that “there is no doubt that the good Vichy destroyer produced long range gunnery of an accuracy considerably above our destroyer standard.”¹¹⁵ The French withdrew undamaged to Beirut as British reinforcements came on the scene. De Lafond concluded that the attitude of all ranks had been exemplary: “Everyone performed their task with the greatest *sang froid*, just as if we had been on exercise.”¹¹⁶ In the meantime three British navy Fulmar fighters were shot down by French fighters. As a result of these developments, Cunningham issued orders that all French surface ships and submarines should be treated as hostile. On 15 June the British destroyers *Isis* and *Ilex* were damaged by air attack, prompting Cunningham the next day to order his destroyers to retire into Haifa in daylight unless there was sufficient air cover.¹¹⁷

With their forces short of ammunition and supplies, the French Admiralty resorted to sending the heavy destroyer *Chevalier Paul* from Toulon with much needed ammunition, but she

¹¹⁴ Simpson *The Cunningham Papers*, 482.

¹¹⁵ Ibid, 493. The “good” destroyer was *Guépard*, whose fall of shot could be distinguished by the color of the water column produced by the explosion, as French shells contained a dye for that purpose.

¹¹⁶ AN AJ 41 1890-1909.

¹¹⁷ Roskill, *The War at Sea*, 517; Simpson *The Cunningham Papers*, 485.

was caught on the night of 15 June 50 miles off the coast of Syria and sunk by British aircraft flying from Cyprus. One of the torpedo planes was also lost. Shadowed since mid-afternoon by alternating Sunderland flying boat patrols, *Chevalier Paul* was running low on fuel, which limited her range of maneuver. Three minutes after first hearing the torpedo aircraft and ten seconds after sounding the alarm she was struck.¹¹⁸ Another heavy destroyer, *Vauquelin*, made it to Beirut but was seriously damaged there by British bombers on 17 June.¹¹⁹ On the night of 23 June, *Guépard* and *Valmy* again put to sea and in an eleven-minute engagement with the cruisers *Naiad* and *Leander* as well as three destroyers, *Guépard* was struck by a six-inch shell from *Leander*. “Taking it all in,” Cunningham later reflected, “it must be stated that the Vichy destroyers were well and boldly handled and took good advantage of their situation.”¹²⁰ In a letter to Rear Admiral Burrough on 30 June, Cunningham observed: “The mainstay of resistance is I think the French Admiral and his ships.” Saddened by the turn of events, Cunningham added: “I am not sure Admiral Gouton is quite so happy now though as we have mauled his forces pretty effectively.”¹²¹ On 25 June the British submarine *Parthian* torpedoed and sank the French submarine *Souffleur* as she recharged her batteries on the surface.

Renewed attempts to send reinforcements also met without success. Hitler had ordered seven trains of French reinforcements to make their way to Salonika.¹²² Those that arrived embarked on two small troopships, *St. Didier* and *Oued Yquem*. *Valmy* and *Guépard* were sent to provide security and refueled from *Kriegsmarine* stocks. The intention was to sail through neutral Turkish waters to the Syrian port of Latakia. Making an attempt to do this, the *St. Didier* was caught at anchor just off the Turkish coast by navy aircraft flying from Nicosia and

¹¹⁸ AN AJ 41 1890-1909.

¹¹⁹ Auphan and Mordal, *The French Navy in World War II*, 200.

¹²⁰ Simpson, *The Cunningham Papers*, 493.

¹²¹ Simpson, *The Cunningham Papers*, 490.

¹²² Porch, *The Path to Victory*, 581.

torpedoed. She went down with the loss of 52 lives. 500 troops survived to be interned in Turkey. The *Oued Yquem* was ordered to turn back and Vichy ceased all efforts to send reinforcements by sea.¹²³

After two days of negotiations, an armistice was signed at St. Jean d'Acre on 14 July.¹²⁴ Admiral Auphan later wrote: "The armistice of 1940 had been signed with the expectation that it would bring peace to a suffering France. If this was peace, it was certainly a strange peace."¹²⁵ And although General de Gaulle ordered that Vichy and Free French dead in Syria be buried side by side and that no medal be struck for the campaign, the loss of life – including about 1,300 Free French and around 6,000 Vichy casualties, as well as 3,300 British and Commonwealth dead – further poisoned relations between the two sides.¹²⁶

Madagascar

With the United States in the war after Pearl Harbor, by February 1942 the US Ambassador to Vichy Admiral Leahy recalled: "There was some discussion in the press at this time about the important French possession of Madagascar, lying off the African east coast. It had long seemed inexcusable to me that Madagascar, Réunion, and Mauritius islands, flanking our supply routes to the Red Sea had not been occupied by the Allies." On 20 February, in a letter to the President, he repeated this argument and remarked that "[the] local press yesterday reported a statement by General Smuts that there is as yet no reason for taking any action in regard to Madagascar." This, Leahy said, was reassuring to Vichy, where there had been some fear of a pre-emptive take-over of the island by the Allies before the Japanese got there. He went

¹²³ Smith, *England's Last War Against France*, 258-259.

¹²⁴ Ibid, 269.

¹²⁵ Auphan and Mordal, *The French Navy in World War II*, 201.

¹²⁶ Porch, *The Path to Victory*, 581.

on: "...the time has already passed when this war for the preservation of our civilization permits of giving further consideration to the pride or sensibilities of defeated France in Madagascar, in Indo-China, or elsewhere."¹²⁷

According to Julian Jackson, "[the] weeks of scheming preceding Darlan's dismissal were Byzantine even by Vichy standards."¹²⁸ Failure to gain significant concessions from Germany alienated Pétain, while the decision to try at Riom those who were responsible for losing the war, rather than for causing it, enraged the Germans. With America's entry into the war, their opposition to Laval turned Darlan's political survival into a trial of strength between the USA and Germany, prompting Berlin to lend their support to the former premier. On 26 April 1942, Pierre Laval formed a new government, although Darlan remained a "leading figure in the regime as commander in chief of the armed forces."¹²⁹ That month Laval suggested to the Germans that France, whose relations with the Japanese were now much better than they had been under Darlan, could be useful to Germany in Asia. Negotiations had begun under Darlan for the Japanese chartering of French merchant ships in Indochina, but these had not reached a conclusion by February 1942.¹³⁰ As it turned out, the Japanese seized them in their entirety, which may have explained the lightening of their mood. Laval proposed to discuss Japanese naval use of Madagascar with Ambassador Mitami. According to Robert Paxton, Governor General Annet in Madagascar "seems to have received orders to accept the presence of Japanese submarines but to resist any British force."¹³¹ US decrypts of Japanese diplomatic traffic also revealed that Berlin was encouraging Tokyo, which already had a carrier task force in the eastern

¹²⁷ William D. Leahy, *I Was There* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1950), 80, 478.

¹²⁸ Julian Jackson, *France: The Dark Years, 1940-1944* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 185.

¹²⁹ Paxton, *Vichy France*, 134.

¹³⁰ Leahy, *I Was There*, 478.

¹³¹ Paxton, *Vichy France*, 313, 313 (n42).

Indian Ocean, to occupy the island and cut off supplies to the British 8th Army before Rommel launched a fresh offensive in the Western Desert.¹³²

On 2 May Darlan's "Directive No. 1" as commander in chief, addressed to his senior subordinates, highlighted the task before them: to defend Metropolitan France and the Empire with all the means at their disposal. Almost everywhere, he said, French possessions were under threat, from Madagascar to the Antilles. He even anticipated the possibility of some kind of attack on the coastline of Provence. Darlan had prohibited any official mention of the Germans as potential aggressors, so the focus was on the "Anglo-Saxons."

On 3 May the Japanese admirals Nomura and Abe arrived in Vichy and met Laval and Darlan. Darlan was keen to know of their intentions towards Madagascar, but gained no information from them. In fact Japan had already been in contact with Germany, Madagascar being in the German zone of operations, with a view in due course to occupying the island. Ribbentrop had given his consent, but recommended seeing how the French felt about it. On 23 April, the French Admiralty had decided to set up an intelligence post at Diego Suarez, which probably expressed quite how the navy, if not Laval's Government, felt about it.¹³³

In any case it is disingenuous of those who do so to dismiss British fears out of hand. Auphan writes that "there had not been a single Japanese attempt against Madagascar," which is true in the strictly physical sense, without ruling out the possibility that one might have occurred in the future. He continues: "Admiral Darlan had made a written pledge to Admiral Leahy, the US Ambassador at Vichy, to inform him promptly if the Japanese even subjected the French

¹³² Smith *England's Last War Against France*, 288.

¹³³ Coutau-Bégarie and Huan, *Darlan*, 553-554.

Government to the slightest pressure in this respect.”¹³⁴ Leahy left Vichy for the last time on 1 May 1942, two days before the Japanese admirals arrived.

Robert Aron positively ridicules the British attitude: “The British, ill-informed, had feared a Japanese occupation of Madagascar. In fact, there was not a single Japanese in the whole island, with the exception of an old woman who had arrived there in 1902 and a woodcutter who had been living there for twenty years: an inoffensive couple, one might suppose, who, indeed, did not even know each other.”¹³⁵

French naval resources at Madagascar were, as usual, quite limited, although from March 1941, the French naval delegates at Wiesbaden had secured some relaxation of the controls placed upon Commandant Maerten’s naval garrison at Diego Suarez. Commander of a destroyer at Mers-el-Kébir in 1940, which perhaps gives an indication of the tenor of his feelings towards the British, Maerten was able as a result of this freedom to add to the port’s defenses, laying mines at the entrance in July 1941. In addition Madagascar became the home base for the four submarines of the French Indian Ocean Command. Reinforcement of French Indian Ocean territories, however, was prohibited by the Germans after a French convoy, led by the colonial sloop *d’Iberville*, was seized by the Royal Navy in November 1941 *en route* to Madagascar and Indochina.¹³⁶ Only one more convoy was permitted, with the cargo ship *Condé* sailing from Dakar on 10 February 1942 escorted by the submarine *Bévéziers* and the sloop *D’Entrecasteaux*. The presence of the German ship *Wartenfels* and two Italian vessels at Madagascar probably explain this anomaly.¹³⁷ Maerten’s available forces therefore remained four submarines, two

¹³⁴ Auphan and Mordal, *The French Navy in World War II*, 203-204.

¹³⁵ Aron, *The Vichy Regime*, 378.

¹³⁶ Thomas, “After Mers-el-Kébir,” 658.

¹³⁷ Costagliola, *La Marine de Vichy*, 305.

colonial sloops, the auxiliary cruiser (converted liner) *Bougainville*, and a few auxiliary minesweepers.

The attack, when it came on the morning of 5 May 1942, was a complete surprise. The British commander Rear Admiral E.N. Syfret had, with the merchant vessels carrying the landing forces and their equipment, over fifty ships under him including two aircraft carriers and the battleship *Ramillies*, two cruisers, eleven destroyers, eight corvettes and four minesweepers. The landing force consisted of around 13,000 troops, including 2,000 marines, which, as Aron implied, was a lot to take on two elderly Japanese. But the port itself had a garrison of about 3,000, supported by about thirty aircraft. Altogether there were about 8,000 Vichy defenders.

Things went according to plan at first, but the attack stalled in the face of fierce defense and it took two days to secure the port. At sea, attacks by aircraft from *Illustrious* quickly sank the *Bougainville* and the submarine *Bévésiers*, killing over a hundred, the survivors joining the defense ashore. *D'Entrecasteaux* escaped the port, but was later forced to beach, although she continued to fire upon the landing beaches and was not abandoned for 36 hours.¹³⁸ The submarines *Héros* and *Monge*, at sea at the time of the attack, were recalled. *Héros* was sunk on 7 May, *Monge* the following day. Only *D'Iberville* and the submarine *Glorieux* escaped, eventually reaching Dakar. In response to British signals, Maerten and his army opposite number Colonel Edouard Claerebout, responded by radio: "Diego Suarez will be defended to the end in accordance with the traditions of the French Army, Navy and Air Force."¹³⁹ It took six months to take the rest of Madagascar.

¹³⁸ Auphan and Mordal, *The French Navy in World War II*, 204-205; Colin Smith *England's Last War Against France*, 290, 298.

¹³⁹ Auphan and Mordal, *The French Navy in World War II*, 204.

Darlan was predictably furious, issuing a bellicose order of the day: “Make the British pay as dearly as possible for their acts of highway robbery...Defend yourselves, defend the honor of France. The day will come when England will pay.” Fearing that the British might seize Force X at Alexandria as Rommel drew ever closer, Darlan ordered it to make preparations to break out, intending to provide cover at sea with the Toulon fleet; but this proved a pipe dream. At the same time, US pressure began to build in regard to the French Antilles, although an agreement was eventually reached that kept the existing regimen in place. Yet it was rancor generated by Madagascar and the Antilles, argue Coutau-Bégarie and Huan, that explain Darlan’s response to Laval’s infamous speech of 22 June, following the German invasion of the Soviet Union, in which he asserted: “I wish for a German victory, for without her Communism will spread everywhere.” Darlan was the only one among Vichy’s luminaries to send a telegram of congratulations, which was quickly published, further damaging his reputation with the Allies. However, suggest Coutau-Bégarie and Huan, from about this time, with US victory at Midway and a growing disillusionment with the viability of the policy of collaboration, Darlan was playing a double game.¹⁴⁰

Operation TORCH

Looking to the future, military circles in Vichy considered it inconceivable that any Allied landing designed to initiate a second front would occur anywhere other than Axis occupied territory. After the disastrous raid on Dieppe on 19 August 1942 it was considered unlikely that a full-scale confrontation with the Wehrmacht would take place in northern France, while southern France and North Africa were neutral under the terms of the armistice. US chargé d’affaires Pinkney Tuck assured Admiral Auphan personally, regarding the possibility of

¹⁴⁰ Coutau-Bégarie and Huan, *Darlan*, 553-556.

new assaults on Dakar: “As long as you have not admitted the Germans to Dakar, we have no reason to intervene there.” This Auphan took as something of a guarantee for the French Empire. But in any case, the French also calculated that the Allies would not have sufficient shipping for a major operation before 1943.¹⁴¹

So it came as something of a surprise when at 1 a.m. on Sunday 8 November American and British troops began to come ashore at Algiers. Altogether some 90,000 men began to disembark at three objectives along the North African coast from Algiers to Casablanca. Little help was given the invaders by the military authorities, in case they had been expecting it, or the local population, “who remained sullenly inactive or openly hostile.”¹⁴² No one was more surprised than Admiral Darlan, who happened to be in Algiers visiting his son in hospital there. He was apprised of the situation by the seemingly ubiquitous US envoy Robert Murphy in the early hours of 8 November at the residence of General Juin. Darlan, says Murphy, turned purple and exploded: “I have known for a long time that the British are stupid, but I always believed Americans were more intelligent. Apparently you have the same genius as the British for making massive blunders.”¹⁴³ A confused situation ensued during which Murphy found himself arrested by local *Gardes Mobiles*. At 5:30 a.m. the French Admiralty transmitted a message from Pétain ordering continued resistance: “We are under attack. We will defend ourselves. That is the order I am giving.” Darlan and Juin took themselves off to Army Headquarters, while local outbreaks of “dissidence” were quelled. The Germans offered air support from bases in Sicily and Sardinia and Darlan requested that they concentrate on the naval forces and transports off Algiers. Pétain signaled again, this time to express the full confidence he had in

¹⁴¹ Auphan and Mordal, *The French Navy in World War II*, 210-211.

¹⁴² Arthur Bryant, *The Turn of the Tide* (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1957), 423.

¹⁴³ Robert Murphy, *Diplomat Among Warriors* (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1964), 128.

the admiral. Darlan moved to the hotel St.-Georges, from where he observed developments until in a telephone conversation with General Juin, by now under US mortar fire, at 4 p.m. the admiral authorized a local cease-fire. He informed Vichy of this, and of the fact that he would be negotiating with the Americans (Murphy and his party having been released) the following day. General Mark Clark duly arrived in the afternoon of 9 November. At 11:20 a.m. on 10 November, Darlan ordered a general ceasefire to all French forces in North Africa.¹⁴⁴

Philippe Burin summarized Darlan's role in these events: "Darlan's reaction was typical of a Vichy leader: he feared an armistice might lead to occupation of the free zone and was clinging to the hope that some good might come of the situation. On the 9th he wrote to Pétain as follows: 'We must avoid requesting aid from Germany, unless it replaces the armistice situation by a different, more advantageous formula.'...However the following day Darlan gave way to pressure from the Americans and ordered a general ceasefire. He was promptly disavowed by Pétain, who reiterated his order to resist. The admiral bowed his head and declared himself the prisoner of the Americans."¹⁴⁵

Darlan's soul-searching came at considerable cost to his sailors. Early on 8 November, the sloop *Surprise*, having assisted in preventing a landing in the harbor at Oran, emerged from the port to investigate landings reported at Les Andalousee. At 6:40 a.m. she attacked the British destroyer *Brilliant* with her single gun only to be sunk with the loss of 55 sailors. The destroyer *Tramontane* put to sea to attack enemy forces reported in Arzew Bay, followed by another destroyer, *Typhon*. *Tramontane* encountered the British light cruiser *Aurora* and was badly knocked about before running aground off Cape Aiguille. *Typhon* arrived and launched torpedoes at *Aurora* before coming alongside *Tramontane* to take off survivors. The destroyer

¹⁴⁴ Coutau-Bégarie and Huan, *Darlan*, 578-588; Auphan and Mordal, *The French Navy in World War II*, 219-224.

¹⁴⁵ Philippe Burin, *France Under the Germans: Collaboration and Compromise* (New York: New Press, 1996), 160.

Tornado, damaged earlier in a collision, now emerged, managing to hit the British destroyer *Boadicea* before being mortally struck by *Aurora*. *Tornado* lost 12 men and *Tramontane* 28.

The next morning the destroyers *Épervier* and *Typhon* received orders to put to sea at once and “sailing as a group make for the most favorable port in Metropolitan France.” Outside Oran they were spotted by naval reconnaissance and then observed the light cruisers *Aurora* and *Jamaica* approaching them from different directions and, *Épervier* leading, they reversed course to return to port. *Épervier* was badly damaged by shells from *Aurora* and beached below the cliffs at Cap de l’Aiguille having lost 21 men. *Typhon* was eventually hit by fire from *Jamaica* and although she made port was ordered to scuttle in the harbor’s best navigable channel.

At Casablanca Admiral Michelier ordered the 18 warships at his disposal, eight of them submarines, to action stations as the Americans appeared over the horizon. *Richelieu*’s sister-ship *Jean Bart*, still in dry dock, managed to loose seven shots before being demolished by shells from the battleship *Massachusetts*. Gervais de Lafond, formerly of the *Guépard*, whose work Cunningham had so admired off Syria, was now commander of a light squadron which he led to sea aboard the heavy destroyer *Milan*. It took a little over three hours for the Americans to sink or ruin all but one of their attackers. The French lost nearly 500 sailors killed and another 1,000 wounded at Casablanca.¹⁴⁶

In Tunis, Darlan’s ceasefire never even began. Admiral Jean-Pierre Esteva was ordered by Laval at 1:15 a.m. on 9 November to make Tunisian airfields available to incoming Axis forces. By evening, 90 German aircraft had touched down at El Aouina airfield outside Tunis.

¹⁴⁶ Smith, *England’s Last War Against France*, 397-400, 411-412; Vincent P. O’Hara *Struggle for the Middle Sea*, 191-196.

On 10 November Tunisian ports were opened for use by the Germans.¹⁴⁷ Tunis and Bizerte were not taken by the Allies until the following May. France, on the other hand, was overrun by the Germans on 11 November 1942. Having refused to join Darlan in Algiers, Admiral de Laborde, to prevent the fleet falling into German hands, issued the orders for it to be scuttled on 27 November 1942.

Conclusion

Between June 1940 and November 1942, the Vichy Navy lost irrecoverably one battleship, one cruiser, two heavy destroyers, seven destroyers, four sloops and an astonishing 22 submarines. By 1 January 1943 it had lost 2,827 sailors killed with a further 1,172 wounded.¹⁴⁸ By any standards these were heavy losses for a neutral country. Furthermore, even as it kept fighting, there must have been some awareness that the Navy, pride of Vichy in 1940, by 1942 was a wasting asset. After Admiral Godfroy attached himself to the Allies in May 1943, his ships at Alexandria were quickly assessed to be too old to be of military value and the crippled *Jean Bart* at Casablanca adjudged more trouble than it was worth to complete in a US ship yard. The only ships deemed worthy of modernization by the US Navy were *Richelieu*, the modern light cruisers and heavy destroyers of Force Y at Dakar and the mine-laying cruiser *Émile Bertin* in the Antilles.

The nature of the work carried out on French vessels in the USA reveals how far the naval world had moved on since 1940. One of the main tasks was to strip out all the existing anti-aircraft weapons, which were of too light a caliber to be effective, and replace them with 40mm Bofors guns linked by a centralized fire control system. These were supplemented by

¹⁴⁷ Porch, *The Path to Victory*, 360.

¹⁴⁸ AN AJ 41 1890-1909.

large numbers of 20mm Oerlikons wherever room could be found for them. US radars were fitted, lack of which had been a huge handicap in North Africa.¹⁴⁹

So, given the material deficiencies and the mounting losses, why did the Vichy Navy keep fighting? The answer, ironically, is perhaps to be located in a closer look at General de Gaulle. On 17 April 1942 de Gaulle made a speech in London in which he reminded his listeners: “Over a period of 1500 years she (France) has become accustomed to being a great Power, and insists that everybody and first of all her friends, should not lose sight of this fact. In short, Fighting France has only one reason and one justification for finding herself in the camp of freedom; that of being France herself, and treated as such by her co-belligerents.”¹⁵⁰ The darker part of de Gaulle’s motivation was recalled by General Spears: “...I understood and had some sympathy for de Gaulle’s point of view. I realized the gaping wound the French defeat had left in his heart... but especially perhaps the personal responsibility he felt for keeping the French Empire intact. It is also a fact that the belief had been burnt into his very soul since childhood that England had always been the enemy, the real enemy...”¹⁵¹ Such, one senses, were the very emotions that kept the Vichy Navy afloat to the end of November 1942.

In 1946 *Life* magazine published a speech delivered to Parliament by Churchill in secret session on 10 December 1942 in answer to protests aroused by Allied dealings with Darlan after the TORCH landings in North Africa. Speaking of Darlan, Churchill said:

I hold no brief for Admiral Darlan. Like myself he is the object of the animosities of Herr Hitler and of Monsieur Laval. Otherwise I have nothing in common with him. But it is necessary for the House to realize that the government and to a large extent the people of the United States do not feel the same way about Darlan as we do. He has not

¹⁴⁹ Vincent P. O’Hara, W. David Dickson and Richard Worth, *On Seas Contested: The Seven Great Navies of the Second World War* (Annapolis MD: Naval Institute Press, 2010), 33-38.

¹⁵⁰ William L. Langer, *Our Vichy Gamble* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1947), 259.

¹⁵¹ Spears, *Fulfilment of a Mission*, 284.

betrayed them. He has not broken any treaty with them. He has not vilified them. He has not maltreated any of their citizens. They do not think much of him, but they do not hate and despise him as we do over here.

Churchill went on to demonstrate that in what was essentially an American campaign it was both expedient and politic to allow the Americans to make the decisions over whom they should have dealings with in the interests of furthering their aims. More unexpectedly, however, Churchill quotes Darlan himself from a letter dispatched to General Clark: “I did not,” Darlan wrote, “act through pride, ambition nor calculation, but because the position I occupied in my country made it my duty to act.”¹⁵²

Writing retrospectively in his history of the Second World War, Churchill was even more forgiving: “In this new situation he showed himself a man of force and decision who did not wholly comprehend the moral significance of much that he did. Ambition stimulated his errors. His vision as an Admiral had not gone beyond his Navy, nor as a Minister beyond immediate local or personal advantages.” Showing greater magnanimity for a former enemy than he did for men like General Wavell who had served him, Churchill ends: “Let him rest in peace, and let us all be thankful that we have never had to face the trials under which he broke.”¹⁵³ According to David Reynolds: “On a human level, Churchill represents Darlan as an ardent French patriot, whose motives he could respect if not share...”¹⁵⁴ Darlan was assassinated on 24 December 1942 by a 22-year-old royalist, Fernand Bonnier de la Chapelle, in circumstances that remain an object of conjecture.

Churchill might have had greater reservations about this judgement had he been present at dinner with Darlan and Göring in the Reichsmarschall’s train at Saint-Florentin-Vergigny on

¹⁵² *Life* 20:5 (4 February 1946): 85, 98.

¹⁵³ Winston S. Churchill, *The Hinge of Fate* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1986), 580.

¹⁵⁴ David Reynolds, *In Command of History: Churchill Fighting and Writing the Second World War* (New York: Basic Books, 2005), 328.

13 December 1941. In the same breath in which the admiral parried Göring's continued interest in his navy with the usual arguments in favor of French sovereignty, Darlan emphasized its continuing value to Germany, boasting – erroneously as it happened – that the French Navy had killed more British sailors at Dakar than the British had French at Mers-el-Kébir.¹⁵⁵ The conversation exemplified the paradox of Vichy's situation: even refusing the fleet to the Germans, it was put at the service of their interests and was futilely emasculated as a result.

There are any number of commonplace aphorisms to illustrate how unwise it was to engage in a relationship with what was both a victorious enemy and a malevolent regime. Vichy, however, confident of ultimate German victory, ignored the precedents set elsewhere and dreamt of a privileged position in Nazi-dominated Europe. It was a serious miscalculation, but one that required French sailors in increasing numbers to lay down their lives, although they would not have seen it that way, for the Axis cause. Having voluntarily established the principles underlying engagement with the Germans, there inevitably came a time when there was nothing Vichy France could reasonably refuse. By fighting for Vichy, of course, the navy played its part in reinforcing the fiction of French sovereignty that ultimately led the state towards a policy that implicated it in genocide. This fiction was laid bare when the German Army marched unopposed across Vichy to the Mediterranean in November 1942. The reality of deportation, however, had already begun.

¹⁵⁵ AN 2AG 656.

CHAPTER SIX

Vichy, the Navy, and the “Final Solution of the Jewish Question” in France

Introduction

In the words of Robert O. Paxton: “The change of regime in July 1940 dramatically revived the officers' ability to ‘make themselves heard.’” After a decline in political influence under the Third Republic, the position of military officers was considerably revived under Vichy. If this was true for the Army, it was even more so for the Navy. The Ministry of the Colonies was returned to the Navy, where it had been before 1895, and placed in the hands of Admirals Platon and Bléhaut, the latter also referred somewhat obscurely as “in charge of the Navy work camps” in Jules Roy’s account of Pétain’s trial.¹ Admiral de Kervéréguin de Penfentyo served for a while as Secretary General of Family Affairs. Four fifths of the most important overseas possessions were administered by admirals: Abrial in Algeria, Estéva in Tunisia, Decoux in Indochina and Robert in the Antilles. Admiral Bard served as Prefect of Police in Paris from 14 May 1941 until nominated as Ambassador to Switzerland on 30 May 1942. Three other sailors became prefects: Jean Tracou (Indre-et-Loire), Eugène le Gouic, former captain of the submarine *Surcouf* (l’Eure), and *Capitaine de vaisseau* Hamon (Drôme). Vice admiral Fenard became Secretary General in North Africa, Vice-Admiral Gouton became *Commissaire du pouvoir*, and Admiral LeLuc had a position in the *Conseil d’Etat*. Jean Jardel became Director of the Budget.² When on 24 September 1940 a special court martial was established at Gannat for “crimes and acts against the unity and security of the state,” its board included an admiral. Its successor, the *Tribunal d’Etat*, with powers to judge “not according to the violations of the law but according to the damage to the state,” included Admiral Caudron among its five members. Pétain’s *chef de*

¹ Jules Roy, *The Trial of Marshal Pétain* (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), 166.

² Michèle Cointet, *Nouvelle histoire de Vichy* (Paris: Fayard, 2011), 404.

cabinet, Dumoulin de Labarthète, listed in his memoirs thirty admirals in high administrative positions.³ Nor did admirals travel in isolation to their elevated posts: typically they were accompanied by an entourage of middle-grade naval officers.⁴

After 21 February 1941, says Paxton, “it was Admiral Darlan who raised the power of an officer-minister to its maximum. In his own hands, he accumulated the offices of Vice-President of the Council, Foreign Minister, Minister of the Interior, and Minister of Information.”⁵ As Chief of Staff for the Ministry of National Defense he selected Admiral Bourragué, who had almost fought the British at Dakar in 1940. A naval officer served as his direct liaison with Charles Rochat, Secretary General of the Foreign Office.

Yet Pierre Laval’s is perhaps the name most generally associated with the deportation of Jews from France. At his trial, Laval was accused of plotting against the safety of the state and of intelligence with the enemy. His 3,000 word indictment referred to the persecution of the Jews, Freemasons, Communists, and resistance groups of all parties, the introduction of the Gestapo and the arrest of 22,000 people in Paris in one night.⁶ Convicted on 9 October 1945, Laval was executed on 15 October.

On this subject Laval’s son-in-law René de Chambrun quotes the erstwhile Foreign Minister of Vichy Paul Baudouin, purportedly no great supporter of Laval: “Laval was the most opposed [of those in the government] to the anti-Jewish measures.”⁷ In fact de Chambrun launched a considerable campaign in defense of his father-in-law’s record. Quoting Laval’s recollection of events, he wrote that as soon as Laval received word in July 1942 from SS

³ Robert O. Paxton, *Parades and Politics at Vichy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), 147-152.

⁴ Service historique de la Marine (SHM) TT B 150.

⁵ Robert O. Paxton, *Parades and Politics at Vichy*, 149.

⁶ *The Times*, 50265 (5 October 1945): 4.

⁷ Paul Baudouin, *Neuf Mois au Gouvernement* (Paris: La Table Ronde, 1948), 341, quoted in René de Chambrun, *Pierre Laval: Traitor or Patriot* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1984), 80.

Colonel Helmut Knochen, representative in France of the *Reichssicherheitshauptamt* (RSHA); the umbrella authority over the different Nazi secret police and intelligence organizations, of the intention to deport Jews from the Occupied Zone, he protested vigorously and immediately saw the German ambassador. Laval claimed to have interceded with the overall SS and military police commander in France, SS Brigadier General Karl Oberg. Oberg insisted that “[the] Jewish problem has no frontiers for us.” Laval instructed Charles Rochat at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Vichy to notify foreign ambassadors and ministers and to urge them without delay to intervene with the German authorities on behalf of their Jewish nationals resident in France. He claims to have worked with René Bousquet, former prefect of the Marne who in May 1942 took over as the secretary-general of the *Police Nationale* in the Ministry of the Interior, “to place every difficulty in the way of carrying out the move.” SS First Lieutenant Heinz Röthke, who in July became head of the Gestapo’s *Judenamt* in France, had occasion to complain to Knochen of Laval’s failure to allow the French police to participate in the arrest of Jews in the Occupied Zone. De Chambrun also claims that “Laval instructed the French prefects to do all in their power to protect the Jews, as well as the Freemasons and other victims of German persecution.” Laval, he says, even suggested to American *chargé d’affaires* Pinkney Tuck that the United States send ships to Marseille to save as many foreign Jewish children as possible. Tuck was “distressed to report that his country could not assume this responsibility, as Germany might consider such an intervention a hostile act.”⁸

This would be a curious attitude for a country that had been at war with Germany since the previous December, and not surprisingly Tuck’s recollection was different. Reporting to Cordell Hull on 26 August 1942, Tuck wrote: “It was evident from Laval’s attitude that he had

⁸ Chambrun, *Pierre Laval*, 80-85.

neither interest nor sympathy in the fate of the Jews, who he callously remarked, were already far too numerous in France. I again reminded him that the French Government had at one time given these people asylum to save them from Nazi persecution and that history would judge the Government which was prepared to surrender them.”⁹ Laval’s position was not a new one. In early August 1940 Robert Murphy, US *chargé d’affaires* at Vichy, informed the Secretary of State that Laval informed him the Jews “were congregating in Vichy to an alarming extent. He believed they would foment trouble and give the place a bad name. He said he would get rid of them.”¹⁰ In 1951 Paul Morand, who had been dispatched to London by Baudouin as an unofficial point of contact with the British until he was withdrawn after Mers-el-Kébir, recalled a conversation with Laval in May 1943. Laval was giving an account of an exchange with a “little Nazi fanatic”: “I said to him... ‘Just go and travel around a bit in the Auvergne. That’s my home country, and I can tell you that in our villages you’ll not see a single Jew. They couldn’t even live among us because a Jew could not live off an Auvergnat.’”¹¹

As for Laval’s communications to the prefects “to do all in their power to protect the Jews,” Tuck went on to report that he had received “from a secret but reliable source the copy of a circular telegram addressed on August 9 by the Ministry of the Interior to all Prefectures directing that all foreign Jews who entered France after January 1st, 1936 should be sent to the occupied zone before September 15.”¹² Regarding René Bousquet’s credentials as a willing collaborator in the protection of Jews, in 1992 he was belatedly charged of crimes against

⁹ Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS), 1942, vol. II (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1942), 710.

¹⁰ FRUS 1940, vol. II, 565.

¹¹ *France During the German Occupation, 1940-1944: A Collection of 292 Statements on the Government of Maréchal Pétain and Pierre Laval*, vol. III (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1957), 1337.

¹² FRUS 1942, vol. II, 711.

humanity relating to the deportation of 194 Jewish children who died in Nazi camps. He was assassinated before coming to trial.

Laval, in other words, continues in many respects to be painted as the arch villain of the piece. The truth is, however, that anti-Jewish measures were part and parcel of Vichy's *Révolution nationale* and that many of the mechanisms that facilitated the most extreme expressions of anti-Semitism under Laval had been put in place before his return to government in the spring of 1942, many, indeed, under the stewardship of Admiral Darlan. As Michèle Cointet put it, Darlan “put in place a harshly repressive policy which has been wholly and wrongly attributed to Laval.”¹³

Darlan's Role

Robert Frank argues that Vichy found in Darlan someone who understood the interaction of internal and foreign policy. On 7 November 1940, in response to a request from Pétain, Darlan wrote a paper on the policy of collaboration announced after Montoire. He advised three complementary positions: military neutrality, economic collaboration and political collaboration. Military neutrality was advisable, at least in the short term, to avoid a complete rupture with the “Anglo-Saxons,” the first casualty of which would in all likelihood be the French Empire. Economic cooperation was necessary in the medium term to keep the population nourished and thus avoid any potentially revolutionary situation. The argument for long term political collaboration was based on Darlan's conviction that it was going to be a long war that Germany would eventually win. The long term goal, therefore, was to be the integration of France as a

¹³ Cointet, *Nouvelle histoire de Vichy*, 452.

loyal and active partner in a European New Order dominated by Germany. This was the only way to preserve both the Vichy regime and the prestige of France¹⁴

“Neutrality” in Darlan’s sense was really just military non-participation for tactical reasons, since he considered that the harsh conditions of a peace imposed by a victorious Germany would be no worse than those imposed by a victorious Britain, “which,” he wrote on 9 October 1940, “would be no less severe and which would bring, furthermore, the return to power of cosmopolitan Jews and Freemasons in thrall to Anglo-Saxon policies.”¹⁵ Nor did “neutrality” exclude French participation in the “European civil war against communists, *résistants*, and Jews.”¹⁶ In an *aide-mémoire* from February 1941 Darlan dedicated himself to a “concerted struggle against the communists (gaullists), the Jews and the Masons.”¹⁷ In order to achieve any kind of collaboration, however, there had to be some form of dialogue with Germany, something that was absent after the events surrounding the departure of Laval. To facilitate the opening of talks the French Government made overtures and acts of good will, one of which was the creation of the *Commissariat général aux questions juives* (CGQJ).¹⁸

In a telegram of 6 March 1941 to the German Foreign Ministry, Ambassador Otto Abetz reported on a conversation he had had with Admiral Darlan at dinner in the Embassy the previous day. “Regarding the question of establishing a central office for Jewish affairs in France, Darlan indicated his willingness to let the French Government set up such an office...” Abetz then laid bare his menacing intentions:

¹⁴ Robert Frank, “Pétain, Laval, Darlan” in *La France des années noires I De la défaite à Vichy*, ed. Jean-Pierre Azéma and François Bédarida (Paris: Seuil, 1993), 328.

¹⁵ Hervé Coutau-Bégarie and Claude Huan, *Lettres et notes de l’amiral Darlan* (Paris: Economica, 1992), 239-241.

¹⁶ Frank, “Pétain, Laval, Darlan,” 329.

¹⁷ Denis Peschanski, “Exclusion, Persécution, Répression” in *Le Régime de Vichy et les Français*, ed. Jean-Pierre Azéma and François Bédarida (Paris: Fayard, 1992), 217.

¹⁸ Jean-Paul Cointet, *Histoire de Vichy* (Paris: Perrin, 2003), 194.

The central office for Jewish affairs would thus have a valid legal foundation and its activity could then be stimulated through German influence in the occupied territory to such extent that the unoccupied territory would be forced to join in the measures taken.¹⁹

By 24 March 1941 the German Embassy was able to report on the progress that had been made:

In the last few weeks the French Government has detailed Aryan commissioners to most of the Jewish business enterprises. Furthermore, a central Office for Jewish Affairs with headquarters in Paris will be set up in the immediate future, which is to take a census of all the Jews living in France...The French Government has also taken in hand the placing of alien Jews in concentration camps in the unoccupied zone; the French Jews are to follow later. So far about 45,000 Jews have been interned in this manner...Parallel measures are to be taken in the occupied zone as soon as the necessary camps have been prepared.²⁰

The new General Commission on Jewish Affairs (CGQJ) was duly created by Vichy on 29 March 1941. Darlan named Xavier Vallat as head of the new organization, a confirmed anti-Semite who was also a resolutely anti-German nationalist. His purpose, as Abetz saw it, was to oversee the enforcement of French anti-Jewish measures and to harmonize French law with German regulations in the occupied zone, all the while preparing fresh anti-Jewish legislation. Abetz had, however, begun to perceive an unsettling French predilection for distinguishing between foreign Jews and what he referred to as the “old established” ones. He was not entirely wrong. Education Minister Jérôme Carcopino recalled Darlan declaring in cabinet: “The stateless Jews who have thronged to our country for the last fifteen years do not interest me. But the others, the good old French Jews, have a right to every protection we can give them,” adding slightly improbably, “I have some, by the way, in my own family.”²¹ Unfortunately Abetz was pressing for a law “authorizing the French Commissioner for Jews to declare ‘old established’ Jews who have acted contrary to the social and national interests of the French nation to be

¹⁹ *Documents on German Foreign Policy* (DGFP), series D, vol. XII, February 1 – June 22 1941 (Washington DC: US Government Printing Office, 1962), 228.

²⁰ DGFP, 346-347.

²¹ Michael R. Marrus and Robert O. Paxton, *Vichy France and the Jews* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1981), 85.

‘foreign.’” At the same time Counselor of Legation Zeitschel was appointed liaison to Vallat and “the specialist for Jews of the security service in Paris.”²² Carl-Theo Zeitschel was known for favoring the mass sterilization of Jews.²³

On 29 May 1941 a letter from Vallat to Darlan regarding a new statute regarding Jewish lawyers and census of Jews in France demonstrated that something was in the wind.²⁴ On 2 June 1941 a second *Statut de Juifs* was promulgated, extending the list of jobs forbidden to Jews to include advertising, banking and financial matters, and real estate agencies. Quotas were imposed in “liberal, commercial, industrial or artisanal professions” and in lower public service posts. After just six months at his post, Vallat could claim that 3,000 civil servants had been dismissed, with similar proportions dismissed from posts in the press, radio, cinema, and “in all areas where their functions gave them power...over minds.”²⁵ Penal sanctions for failure to comply included fines and internment “even if the person is French.” The same day another law authorized a census of Jews and their property in the unoccupied zone. On 22 July “Aryanization” was similarly extended to the unoccupied zone, with the proceeds from the sale of Jewish property being deposited on behalf of the former owner in the *Caisse des Dépôts et Consignations*, less 10 percent which went to the CGQJ.²⁶

As far as schools were concerned, Darlan had a hand in the changes that took place in France. On 26 May 1941 he forwarded a copy of a letter from General Weygand to Vallat in which Weygand pointed out that with the implementation of the *Statut des Juifs* in North Africa there was now an excessive number of Jewish graduates to fill the limited quota of jobs available

²² DGFP, 438-439.

²³ Marrus and Paxton, *Vichy France and the Jews*, 78.

²⁴ Centre de Documentation Juive Contemporaine (CDJC), cx 47.

²⁵ Robert O. Paxton, *Vichy France: Old Guard and New Order 1940-1944* (NY: Columbia University Press, 2001), 178-179.

²⁶ Cointet, *Histoire de Vichy*, 217.

in the liberal professions. It seemed to Darlan that the same situation pertained in France. He considered it dangerous to train Jewish students for jobs that were closed to them and recommended a limit on Jewish entrants to higher education and the *grandes Écoles* that bore some relation to the *numerus clausus* of the different professions. In fact, he continued, “one wonders whether the limitations envisaged should not be applied to secondary education as well.”²⁷ On 21 June 1941 Jewish students were limited to making up 3 percent of attendees in universities and secondary schools.²⁸

Part of Darlan’s program of rationalization involved reform of the police. Mainly in the spring of 1941 no fewer than 13 laws were passed with this object in mind. The law of 23 April 1941 created the *École nationale de police*, to be headed by another sailor, *Contre amiral* Ven, to bring an end to the various forces working at crossed purposes. The same month saw the introduction of regional police intendants and regional prefects who held police powers and were responsible to the Secretary of State for the Interior and a new Secretary General for the police. On 6 May the municipal forces of communities of more than 10,000 people were integrated into a national police force. The *Gendarmerie mobile*, which was forbidden in the occupied zone, was replaced by *Groupes mobiles de reserve* and put at the disposal of the regional prefects. All in all this represented an expansion and centralization of police powers.²⁹

In this context it should be remembered that considerable elements of the navy were “civilianized,” that is to say taken out of uniform, while remaining under the jurisdiction of the Admiralty. Certain projects associated with the National Revolution, such as the *Chantiers de la Jeunesse*, a sort of paramilitary organization dedicated to imbuing the youth of France with the

²⁷ CDJC, cx 43.

²⁸ Paxton, *Vichy France*, 179.

²⁹ Denis Peschanski, “Exclusion, Persécution, Répression,” 217; Claude Huan and Hervé Coutau-Bégarie, *Darlan* (Paris: Fayard, 1989), 499; Cointet, *Histoire de Vichy*, 212.

ideals of Vichy, were also richly endowed with a naval presence. In the case of the *Chantiers de la Jeunesse*, detached officers were payed through that organization's budget to maintain the appearance that it was a strictly civilian enterprise.³⁰ In October 1941 a committee developed a law whereby anyone involved in certain occupations, which included the police, had to have served in the armed forces. The committee had representatives from all the armed services, the ministry of national defense and the ministry for veterans' affairs and yet half of its members were serving naval officers.³¹ As early as March 1941 specific rules were being drawn up relating to naval personnel attached to the *Sûreté Nationale*.³² In other words, the activities of naval personnel were often conducted under a different rubric and "navy" need not necessarily appear in their description at all.

Anti-Jewish Measures in France

Even before Darlan rose to prominence in early 1941, scarcely had the new regime installed itself in Vichy than the outlook for many French citizens began to look bleak. On 17 July 1940 a new law restricted entry into French public service to those who could claim a French father. On 22 July 1940 a law set up a commission to review all naturalizations accorded in France since 1927 and to strip nationality from anyone considered undesirable. This eventually cost about 15,000 people their citizenship, including about 6,000 Jews. To put this in some perspective, between 1927 and 1940 about 900,000 people had one way or another gained French nationality, of whom between 20 and 50,000 were Jews. By contrast, 40 percent of those

³⁰ SHM TT B 29.

³¹ SHM TT B 29.

³² SHM TT B 29.

denaturalized according to the 22 July law were Jews. The lists were published in the *Journal officiel*.³³

A law of 16 August also restricted entry into the medical profession to those with French fathers. The same restrictions were applied to the legal profession on 10 September. Although “Jews” were not explicitly mentioned in these laws, Jews were most prominently affected. Laws of 3 and 27 September gave prefects the power, respectively, to intern anyone considered a threat to national security, and all males between the ages of 18 and 55 thought to be “superfluous in the national economy.”³⁴

27 August 1940 saw the repeal of the Marchandau Law, an amendment put in place by Daladier that had outlawed any attack in the press “toward a group of persons who belong by origin to a particular race or religion when it is intended to arouse hatred among citizens or residents.” Right-wing *L’Action Française* was, of course, delighted: “Those who had a hand in writing this decree should be sought out and flogged. They played a large part in unleashing catastrophe.”³⁵ After 27 August “antisemitism was free to spread itself in French newspapers.”³⁶ And in fact “[an] anti-Semitic press, often with covert Nazi funding, soon proliferated.”³⁷ On 6 December 1940 Lucien Rebatet entitled an article in *Le Cri du peuple*: “Finish with the Jews!” According to Saul Friedländer there were “an astonishingly high number of newspapers and periodicals with anti-Semitism as their core message.”³⁸

³³ Bernard Laguerre, “Les dénaturalisés de Vichy 1940-1944,” *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d’histoire* 20 (October-December 1988): 3-15.

³⁴ Susan Zucotti, *The Holocaust, The French, and the Jews* (New York: Basic Books, 1993), 53.

³⁵ *L’Action Française* (29 August 1940): 1.

³⁶ Marrus and Paxton, *Vichy France and the Jews*, 3.

³⁷ Zucotti, *The Holocaust, The French, and the Jews*, 53.

³⁸ Saul Friedländer, *Nazi Germany and the Jews, 1939-1945: The Years of Extermination* (New York: Harper Collins, 2007), 110-111.

As for the Germans, they seemed to have very little impact at first. Henry Bulawko, a Jewish immigrant, recorded that “[the] fear and panic of the first days soon changed into an uneasy quiet. The Germans were ‘correct,’ as the posters and collaborationist press told us all the time. Their anti-Semitism seemed purely verbal.”³⁹ This changed gradually. After a meeting with Hitler, on 17 August 1940 Otto Abetz presented an astonished Werner Best with a list of initial proposals for anti-Jewish measures: firstly, to prevent Jews in the unoccupied zone from re-crossing the demarcation line; secondly, to put in motion preparations for the removal of all Jews from the Occupied zone; and thirdly, to examine the possibility of confiscating Jewish property. On 26 August, Abetz was informed by Foreign Minister Ribbentrop that Hitler had consented to the execution of his proposals.⁴⁰

On 27 September 1940 General Otto von Stülpnagel, head of the military occupation authority, signed a decree which contained a definition of and a provision for the registration of Jews in the occupied zone. On 18 October this was followed with a definition and registration of Jewish businesses. According to Raul Hilberg, what was novel in this case was that for “the first time in German experience a foreign authority had to be employed for the administrative paper work.” He goes on:

The initial task of the French bureaucracy was the enforcement of the registration provisions of the German decrees. In the entire occupied zone the prefects of the *départements* and the subprefects of the *arrondissements* were now mobilized for the registrations. The information received was to be collated on lists, to be prepared in four copies; one copy was to be submitted to the Vichy Undersecretary for Industrial Production and Labor; another copy went to the Undersecretary for Finance; two copies were to be handed over to the German command.⁴¹

³⁹ Zucotti, *The Holocaust, The French, and the Jews*, 51-52.

⁴⁰ Friedländer, *Nazi Germany and the Jews*, 115-116.

⁴¹ Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews* (Chicago: Quadrangle, 1961), 393-394.

The German definition of a Jew included anyone adhering to the Jewish religion, or had once done so, or anyone with more than two Jewish grandparents, whose Jewishness was similarly adjudged by religious affiliation.

In addition the ordinance prohibited Jews who had fled to the unoccupied zone from returning. About 100,000 Jews had joined the 8 to 10 million refugees of the 1940 *débâcle*, preceded by about 15,000 Jews from Alsace and Lorraine and about 40,000 from Belgium, Holland and Luxembourg.⁴² The ordinance also demanded that the word *Juif* be stamped on identity cards and required that Jewish businesses reveal themselves as such, with a yellow sign in two languages reading *Entreprise juive* and *Judisches Geschäft*. The census, ignored by an estimated 10 percent of those it was aimed at, was carried out between 3 and 19 October and in the Paris region alone identified 149,734 Jews, including 85,664 citizens and 64,070 foreigners.⁴³

The censuses also provided a fresh opportunity for anti-Jewish propaganda in the press involving wild exaggerations of the numbers of resident Jews. So on 31 October 1942 the *Révolution Nationale* estimated the number of Jews at 2,700,000 (according to a circular from the Ministry of the Interior) while in the same month the *Cri du Peuple* thought there were 2,500,000. In May *L'Appel* claimed that since 1808 the Jewish population in France had increased by 2,463 percent while the population at large had increased by only 44 percent.⁴⁴

Shocking as the German developments were, Vichy went further, promulgating on 3 October 1940 the *Statut des Juifs* ("Statute on the Jews"). This, say Marrus and Paxton,

⁴² Friedländer, *Nazi Germany and the Jews*, 110.

⁴³ Zucotti, *The Holocaust, The French, and the Jews*, 53-54.

⁴⁴ Zosa Szajkowski, "Glimpses on the History of Jews in Occupied France," *Yad Washem Studies on the European Jewish Catastrophe and Resistance* 2 (1958): 150.

“assigned, on the basis of race, an inferior position in French civil law and society to a whole segment of French citizens and to noncitizens and foreigners living on French soil.”⁴⁵ The first article of the law gave the legal definition of a Jew, henceforward to include anyone with three grandparents of the Jewish race, or two grandparents if the spouse of an individual was similarly defined as Jewish. Or, to put it more bluntly, a half-Jew was considered Jewish if married to a Jew.⁴⁶ As a result of the law all Jews were banned from high public office or from positions in private concerns that benefited from public funds, from the officer corps, the ranks of non-commissioned officers, and from all positions of ownership or responsibility in the press, theater, radio and film. Jews could hold low level positions in the public sector provided they had either served in the First World War or with distinction in the recent campaign. A quota system was introduced for employment in the liberal professions.

Employment

Curiously the Ministry of Marine, says Michèle Cointet, having managed to avoid the scrutiny of Pétain, underwent no particular purge.⁴⁷ This will turn out to be somewhat contentious, but it does raise the question of who precisely in the Vichy government was in favor of the anti-Jewish measures. American *chargé d'affaires* Matthews considered it obvious that Charles-Roux's defense of the *Statut* “was half-hearted and that he personally deplored the promulgation of the law.”⁴⁸ The law itself, often attributed to Raphaël Alibert, Secretary of State for Justice, was actually penned by Minister of the Interior Marcel Peyrouton, Alibert's proposal

⁴⁵ Marrus and Paxton, *Vichy France and the Jews*, 3.

⁴⁶ Joseph Billig, “La condition des juifs en France (Juillet 1940- Aout 1944),” *Revue d'histoire de la Deuxième Guerre mondiale* 24 (October 1956): 26.

⁴⁷ Cointet, *Nouvelle histoire de Vichy*, 250.

⁴⁸ FRUS 1940, vol.II, 568.

to strip citizenship from all French Jews being deemed excessive by the Council of Ministers.⁴⁹ Peyrouton himself claimed not to be anti-Semitic at all.⁵⁰ Pétain, recalled Foreign Minister Paul Baudouin, “was the most severe. He insisted particularly that the Justice and Education [Ministries] should contain no Jews.”⁵¹ By contrast neither the Secretary of State for Nation Defense General Weygand, nor the Secretary of State for the Marine Admiral Darlan were considered anti-Semitic.⁵² Nor was Pierre Laval.

Nevertheless the army, navy and the air force not only observed the letter of the *Statut*, but all three went beyond its requirements. Whereas the law only excluded Jews from the officer corps, the military excluded them voluntarily from the enlisted ranks as well. The Armistice Army expelled 96 Jewish officers and 216 Jewish NCOs. An order of 24 October 1940 forbade Jews to volunteer as soldiers.⁵³ In January 1940 the French Army had counted 60,000 Jews in its ranks.⁵⁴ The War Ministry boasted in its posters that recruits would no longer have to associate with Jews.⁵⁵ Meanwhile, attesting to the rigid application of the new rules by the navy, when Xavier Vallat tried to introduce a third *Statut des Juifs* in 1942, Admiral Paul Auphan’s main complaint was that naval services had already completed 80,000 file cards in compliance with the first two *statuts*. He was, however, “in entire agreement” with Vallat’s basic “dispositions of principle.”⁵⁶

One person affected by the *Statut* was *Ingénieur Mécanicien de 2ème Classe de Reserve* Schweisch, André. On 16 October 1940 *Lieutenant de vaisseau* Nivet-Doumer wrote on his

⁴⁹ Cointet, *Nouvelle histoire de Vichy*, 246-247.

⁵⁰ Michael Curtis, *Verdict on Vichy: Power and Prejudice in the Vichy France Regime* (London: Phoenix, 2004), 81.

⁵¹ Zucotti, *The Holocaust, The French, and the Jews*, 56.

⁵² Cointet, *Nouvelle histoire de Vichy*, 246.

⁵³ Paxton, *Parades and Politics at Vichy*, 176.

⁵⁴ Esther Benbassa, *The Jews of France: A History from Antiquity to the Present* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 166.

⁵⁵ Marrus and Paxton., *Vichy France and the Jews*, 68.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 126.

behalf to the admiral of the fleet requesting the continuation of his engagement. His problems were numerous and, one suspects, not untypical. His home was in the occupied zone, so being Jewish he was unable to return. His civilian job as technical director at *l'Ecole spéciale de travaux aéronautiques* had ceased to exist with the onset of war. His employer could not get him another job because he was not a civil servant. He was unable to find work in the private sector. If the Navy demobilized him he would be without resources, homeless, and responsible for a wife, a six-month old child, his mother, sister and nephew. Nivet-Doumer emphasized the Schweisch family's tradition of service: Schweisch's mother's family was from Alsace, his grandfather had enlisted to fight the Prussians in 1870 and was incarcerated in 1914 for having pro-French sentiments; his father's family was from Lorraine, one uncle had been a Commandant d'artillerie in 1870, was shot by the Germans in 1914 and his house burnt down, his father, recipient of the *Croix de Guerre*, had died from wounds received in the First World War. In 1940 the family's possessions had been seized by the Germans. His brother-in-law was presumed to be a prisoner of war. Nivet-Doumer concluded by adding: "This officer is conscientious and I am very satisfied with the manner in which he conducted his service."⁵⁷

There is no record of any specific reply to this plea. However in a memorandum regarding the release of foreign Jews from internment, Darlan revealed his sensibilities on the matter, emphasizing that none would be released who had not been resident before 1 May 1940 and that in consequence "in future please refrain from forwarding requests for release for individuals in this category." He considered them to be "incapable of integrating themselves into the national collective" and therefore "everything should be put in motion to secure their

⁵⁷ SHM TT B 155, 16 October 1940.

departure from France.”⁵⁸ In response to questions from Admiral Ryvoire regarding the service of Jews in the Navy, Darlan wrote on 11 November 1940 that as the Secretary for War had already forbidden Jews to join the services or to renew their contracts, in future there would be no Jewish noncommissioned officers. The most liberal interpretation of the law, thought Darlan, would be to allow Jews to finish existing contracts which would then not be renewed. Thus the “Jews would progressively disappear.”⁵⁹

Referring to the 12 December 1940 decision of the Conseil d’Etat to exclude Jews from any function likely to confer influence or authority, on 27 December Darlan wrote to Vice Admiral Fernet, *secrétaire général de la présidence du Conseil*, expressing the thought that Jews should be denied all access to central administration, naval installations and arsenals, unless they came under the exemptions listed in article 3 of the *Statut de Juifs*. In March 1941, he confirmed to Admiral Plurien that this was “the position of the Navy in this matter.”⁶⁰ The same month there was a meeting of the *Secretariat de coordination* to consider the application of the *Statut* to civilians working for the military. The army representative recommended letting them keep their jobs. The air force suggested getting rid only of those who posed a threat to national security. Admiral Plurien for the navy observed that in these sorts of jobs Jews (“israëlites,” denoting Jews of French origin) being in contact with personnel of different categories were in a position to gain intelligence that one would not like to confide in them. For this reason the navy recommended the total exclusion of Jewish workers, apart, “of course,” for those who came under article 3.⁶¹

Internment

⁵⁸ CDJC, ccxvi-i.

⁵⁹ SHM TT B 155, 11 November 1940.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ SHM TT B 155.

On 4 October 1940 a second law authorized prefects to intern any foreign Jews in their departments, assign them to supervised residence or put them in forced labor units. By the end of 1940 some twenty-eight thousand to thirty-five thousand Jewish immigrants and refugees had been interned in the unoccupied zone.⁶² New camps such as Rivesaltes, Noé, Récébedou were constructed, while established camps such as Gurs saw their population increase considerably. By February 1941 it is thought that some 40,000 Jews were interned in appalling conditions in the southern zone.⁶³ At the end of 1940, 70 percent of all those interned were Jewish. In February 1941, they represented 75 percent of the camp population.⁶⁴ Indigent male immigrants between the ages of 18 and 55 who could work could be forced into *Groupements de travailleurs étrangers* (GTE), or civilian labor groups for foreigners under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Labor. A demilitarized version of the foreign labor companies formerly attached to army units, by the end of July 1941 they had drafted about 60,000 men, of whom about a third were Jews.⁶⁵ Serge Klarsfeld estimated that about 3,000 people died in French internment camps, mostly between 1940 and 1942. At Gurs alone, during the first few months after the arrival of Jewish deportees from western Germany over 1,000 people died of starvation, dysentery and typhoid out of a total population of 13,500. In the camp cemetery 1,187 people are buried of whom 20 are Spaniards. The rest are Jews.⁶⁶

Property

⁶² Susan Zucotti, *Père Marie-Benoît and Jewish Rescue: How a French Priest Together with Jewish Friends Saved Thousands during the Holocaust* (Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press, 2013), 58.

⁶³ Anne Grynberg, "Les camps du sud de la France: de l'internement à la déportation," *Annales* 3 (May - June, 1993): 557.

⁶⁴ Benbassa, *The Jews of France*, 170.

⁶⁵ Susan Zucotti, *Holocaust Odysseys: The Jews of Saint-Martin-Vésubie and Their Flight through France and Italy* (New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 2007), 41-42.

⁶⁶ Marrus and Paxton, *Vichy France and the Jews*, 176.

On 18 October 1940, a second German ordinance required Jews to declare their possessions at police headquarters and established a system for nominating “temporary administrators” of Jewish businesses for the purpose of selling them to non-Jewish buyers or simply liquidating them.⁶⁷ On 19 October the general delegate for the French government for the Occupied Zone, General de la Laurencie, wrote: “The purpose of the German ordinance is to take away from Jews all of their economic influence, while the goal of the French is to take away all of their political influence.”⁶⁸ Nonetheless the Vichy government, anxious to maintain an element of control over unfolding events, responded through the medium of the Ministry of Industrial Production to set up the *Service de Contrôle des Administrateurs Provisoires* (SCAP), “whose business it was to insert French administration into the German projects concerning Jewish property in the Occupied Zone.”⁶⁹ Having appointed the first of these administrators the Germans quickly authorized the regional prefects and the Paris Prefect of Police to appoint them for businesses with storefront windows. The Paris prefecture duly appointed 1,141 Aryan administrators, who were given control over 7,285 Jewish businesses. Beginning on 20 June 1941 SCAP provided lists of these administrators directly to the German military authorities. The power of provisional administrators to sell and liquidate Jewish businesses was confirmed by a French law on 2 February 1941.⁷⁰

Among those who offered their services as *administrateurs provisoires* were former naval officers. Their task was to investigate about a hundred Jewish businesses each with regard to the owner’s nationality, race, country of origin and language and the size and value of the business. Although the available records suggest they were few in number – correspondence

⁶⁷ Zucotti *The Holocaust, The French, and the Jews*, 60.

⁶⁸ Renée Poznanski, *Jews in France During World War II* (Lebanon NH: University Press of New England, 2001), 42.

⁶⁹ Marrus and Paxton, *Vichy France and the Jews*, 8.

⁷⁰ Poznanski, *Jews in France During World War II*, 37.

from the *Service de contrôle des administrateurs provisoires* refers to six – most revealing are the objections raised regarding their mission. None, it seemed, had any particular objection to the spoliation of Jewish businesses. They were scandalized, however, that there were no provisions in place to make exceptions for veterans, holders of high decorations and war wounded. Four of them resigned.⁷¹

Overseas Territories

Circumstances were not better in French overseas territories, where the navy was very much the controlling power. On 7 October, repealing the provisions of the 1870 Crémieux Decree, approximately 115,000 Jews in Algeria were deprived of French citizenship.⁷² So intense was anti-Semitism among European settlers that Algerian authorities exceeded the provisions of the *Statut des Juifs*, even banning Jewish primary and secondary students from schools, something that happened in France only at the beginning of the school year in 1941.⁷³ Internment was intensified with prisons used to house criminal and political prisoners together, work camps used forced labor, and the GTEs were introduced – the one at Aïn Sefra was dubbed the “French Buchenwald of North Africa” – and *centres de séjour surveillé*, surveillance centers for local and foreign activists. Over the next two years some 7,000 to 10,000 people were interned. In 1941, between 14,000 and 15,000 Jews were interned in North Africa⁷⁴. Far-right and fascist groups mushroomed and right-wing youth groups caused mayhem in the streets and helped to purge Jews and other undesirables from the universities. In May 1941 Heinz Pol claimed in *The Nation* that thousands of men had been herded into camps in Tunisia and Morocco. These were made up of “German, Austrian, Czech, Polish and Spanish refugees who

⁷¹ CDJC, cx 61.

⁷² Zucotti, *The Holocaust, The French, and the Jews*, 57.

⁷³ Benbassa, *The Jews of France*, 169.

⁷⁴ *Ibid*, 170.

chose to enlist in the Foreign Legion rather than remain in a French concentration camp” and now were “kept by the Vichy government as slaves in the Sahara desert.”⁷⁵ And it was all done under the administration of admirals. Admiral Jean-Marie Charles Abrial had become Governor General in July 1940.⁷⁶ The Secretary General in North Africa was another admiral, Vice Admiral Fenard.

In general the Secretary of State for the colonies and, later, the *Commissariat Général aux Questions Juives* (CGQJ) took care to oversee the strict application of anti-Jewish laws in the colonies in order to maintain an ideological coherence with Metropolitan France. This gave rise to some problems in places that did not fit into the Vichy narrative of overwhelming Jewish presence. Yet the fact that there were only 30 lawyers in Madagascar did not prevent the 2 percent *numerus clausus* being applied, for example; nor did it prevent the voluminous distribution of anti-Jewish tracts in Togo, where there were no Jews.

Under Admiral Platon, in fact, the Colonial Ministry became “a veritable machine” in its efforts to duplicate the National Revolution overseas.⁷⁷ This was reflected in the characters of the personnel overseeing its operation overseas. Rear-Admiral Jean Decoux in Indochina was known for his devotion to Pétain, declaring on 21 April 1942 that “Indochina is at one with the French community through their shared cult...of the person of the Marshal, Head of State, Leader of the Empire.” And in Indochina the navy played a dominant role in first introducing the National Revolution. General Sabbatier observed: “Both official and unofficial propaganda tended to present the navy as a model of discipline and cohesion. From that to making it the

⁷⁵ Heinz Pol, “Vichy’s Slave Battalions,” *The Nation* (3 May 1941): 528.

⁷⁶ Allison Drew, *We are no Longer in France: Communists in Colonial Algeria* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014), 115-116.

⁷⁷ Eric Jennings and Sébastien Verney, “Vichy aux Colonies. L’exportation des statuts des Juifs dans l’Empire,” *Archives Juives* 41:1 (2008): 108-119.

guardian of the principles of the National Revolution, and by extension a political instrument of Vichy, was but a small step. This step was taken.”⁷⁸

In the Antilles Admiral Georges Robert was an “ultraconservative” and “a staunch Pétainist who carried out the unpopular directives of National Revolution with unusual zeal.” His subordinate in Guadeloupe, Admiral Rouyer, “fired a number of blacks, whom he saw as unfit to serve as functionaries, as well as homosexuals and Jews whom, he claimed, ‘infested’ the island’s administration.”⁷⁹

“Judeo-Bolshevism”

On 15 August 1940 *La Revue des Deux Mondes* published an article under the banner “National Education” which for Denis Peschanski summarized Vichy’s intellectual point of departure. It said: “There is no such thing as neutrality between true and false, between good and evil, between health and sickness, between order and disorder, between France and anti-France.” Peschanski argues that Vichy’s condemnation of the representatives of “anti-France” found its roots in an attempt to assign blame for defeat upon the defects of French society, defects which, it said, found their source in a plot hatched by Jews, foreigners, Communists and Freemasons. The regeneration of France required the exclusion of all these elements of “anti-France,” a view held by most of the members of the new government.⁸⁰ Julian Jackson agrees that “[all] Vichy leaders shared certain fundamental values. They accepted an end to democratic individualism in favor of elitist and authoritarian policies. They rejected ‘class struggle’ for a policy of ‘social peace’ (strikes were prohibited and trade unions suppressed). They wanted to

⁷⁸ Eric T. Jennings, *Vichy in the Tropics: Petain's National Revolution in Madagascar, Guadeloupe, and Indochina, 1940-44* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 142, 147.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 86-87.

⁸⁰ Peschanski, “Exclusion, persécution, repression,” 209-210

strengthen the family. They believed in the need to eliminate what they called ‘anti-French elements’ (Jews, Communists, and Freemasons).”⁸¹

In his memoirs diplomat Jean Chauvel recalled Darlan saying in 1941 that France had just suffered the worst defeat in her history. He was, Chauvel recounted, all the more willing to admit this since “he excluded himself from the defeat in question.” Chauvel ran a caustic eye across the explanations offered by Vichy for the sorry position France found herself in, bearing in mind that Darlan, Weygand and the Maréchal himself were not implicated in the defeat. France, he suggested, had been badly led. Not merely badly led, but betrayed by her political leaders. And betrayed by some of her military leaders – not the ones who signed the Armistice in June, of course - but the ones who lost the war in May. It was a problem of regime, the Third Republic that had allowed such rottenness to take over. And behind all this there had been the Jews and the Freemasons. “And behind Jews and Freemasons, Jewified England, cradle of Freemasonry, uncertain and selfish ally, which had abandoned us in Belgium, at Dunkirk, on the Bresle, in fact at every turn...”⁸² Not surprisingly, then, the German authorities were confident that they could count on the support of the Vichy regime so long as they focused their repressive measures against Communists and Jews.⁸³

In the navy a Communist ban was already in place, but on 13 August 1940 a law was passed forbidding Freemasonry. A Vichy circular of 24 August on the application of the law against “secret societies” as far as the Navy was concerned emphasized that this included the Communist Party. On 15 September another circular explained that any sailor participating in

⁸¹ Julian Jackson, “The Republic and Vichy” in *The French Republic: History, Values, Debates*, ed. Edward Berenson, Vincent Duclert and Christophe Prochasson (New York: Cornell University Press, 2011), 71.

⁸² Jean Chauvel, *Commentaire: de Vienne à Alger (1938-1944)* (Paris: Fayard, 1971), 154-156.

⁸³ Gaël Eismann, “Représailles et logique idéologico-répressive. Le tournant de l’été 1941 dans la politique répressive du Commandant militaire allemand en France,” *Revue historique* 316:1 (2014): 137.

any of the proscribed groups would face up to two years in prison and a fine of up to 10,000 francs. Two days later Darlan issued another order saying that any officer who refused to sign a declaration denying any connection with such “secret societies” would be summarily dismissed.⁸⁴ A common naval attitude to Jews was expressed by *Capitaine de frigate* Mas de Saint Maurice, master of the colonial sloop *D’Iberville* who on 21 July 1941 wrote to complain that after a month at sea he had returned to Dakar to learn that a certain “Levy,” resident in Algiers, had made an application to civil court to change his name to Saint Maurice. “I could not tolerate,” he wrote, “indeed on principle, that just anyone, and above all an Israélite, should bear my name.” The letter was forwarded by Admiral Landrieu to Darlan. On 31 July 1941, Darlan passed it on to the *Commissaire Général aux Questions Juives* with his approval and a request to be kept abreast of the “measures you feel you can take in this matter.”⁸⁵

The conflation of Judaism and Bolshevism that came so naturally to Nazis was assisted in France by German policy. On 26 April 1941 another German ordinance added to the list of occupations prohibited to Jews that had been drawn up by Vichy. As a result Jews were forbidden employment in hotels, insurance, navigation and transport, travel agencies, banks and other financial institutions, real estate, schools and a variety of other occupations involving contact with the public.⁸⁶ The result was that by the summer of 1941 it was estimated that 50 percent of Jews had been deprived of all means of subsistence.⁸⁷ Even before the Germans ordered the freezing of Jewish assets, bank accounts and savings on 28 May 1941, French banks had begun to treat Jewish accounts with caution as a result of the German ordinance of 18 October 1940 which reserved the right to declare null and void any action disposing of Jewish

⁸⁴ SHM TT B 153.

⁸⁵ SHM TT B 155.

⁸⁶ Zucotti, *The Holocaust, The French, and the Jews*, 60.

⁸⁷ Benbassa, *The Jews of France*, 170.

assets. Loans were sometimes suspended, mortgages forbidden, deficit accounts avoided and large scale withdrawals refused.⁸⁸

Consequently increasing numbers of Jews came to rely upon relief organizations. Barred by German regulations from soup kitchens established by municipal authorities, the relief itself had to be Jewish and was provided by a number of organizations. One came under the umbrella of the Federation of Jewish Societies in France (FSJF), a group of left-wing and/or Zionist activist groups with pre-war roots. Joining together as the “Amelot Committee” they ran four soup kitchens that served on average 1,500 meals a day. A fifth was run by the Communists and another by the Consistorial Association of the Israelites in Paris (ACIP). According to Renée Poznanski, “activists found themselves having to use extralegal and then illegal means to meet the needs of the Jewish population.”⁸⁹

In the Communist’s view of things there was a basis for hope in the destiny shared by Jews and non-Jews. Because the fate of the Jews foreshadowed what was to happen to everyone else, they were all united in one struggle. If this seems unlikely, in June 1941 a Communist tract to this effect was distributed in Paris. Its exhortations were, says Poznanski, “accompanied with recommendations worded in a manner that could only make many Jewish victims feel they were naturally allied with the Communists.”⁹⁰ In fact, unlike French Jews who since the Revolution had seen the State as an instrument of emancipation, many of those who had come to France between the wars saw it rather as hostile, even anti-Semitic. They maintained a communal solidarity and tended towards radical orientations in politics, whether communism or Zionism, gravitating towards organizations like the communist Union des sociétés juives de France, or, as

⁸⁸ Curtis, *Verdict on Vichy*, 139-140.

⁸⁹ Poznanski, *Jews in France During World War II*, 35.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

we have seen, the FSFJ, which grouped together 70 or 80 associations leaning towards Zionism.⁹¹

The association, real or, in the case of indigenous French Jews, largely perceived, with militant radicalism would prove to be particularly unfortunate once the Germans had launched Operation Barbarossa against the USSR in June 1941. Christopher Browning made the point:

When the Nazis invaded Poland in September 1939, the fate of the Polish Jews could wait but the fate of the Polish intelligentsia could not. The *Einsatzgruppen* were targeted to carry out the immediate genocidal elimination of all potential carriers of the Polish national identity. As the Nazis prepared to confront Bolshevism in 1941, neither the Russian commissars nor Russian Jews could wait; both would have to be eliminated by the onrushing *Einsatzgruppen*, for ultimately they were one - the political and biological manifestations of the same "Jewish-Bolshevik conspiracy."⁹²

In other words, the events that would unfold in France have to be seen in the context not just of Vichy's tendency, especially after the invasion of the Soviet Union, to conflate Jews and Communists, but, as Peter Longreich says:

[Since] the National Socialist leadership largely assumed an identity between Communism and Jewry, from their point of view in an increasingly brutal war it was entirely consistent to act more harshly against the Jewish minorities, even outside Eastern Europe, if it was assumed that they were primarily the ones offering support to the resistance movement. That the Nazi leadership proved so determined to start the deportations of European Jews in late summer 1941 must, therefore, also be due to the phantom of a Europe-wide Jewish-Communist resistance movement.⁹³

In April 1941, by which time Darlan led the government, there were the first arrests of Jews involved in Communist activism, and all Jewish groups came under close scrutiny from the *Renseignements Généraux*, the plain-clothes intelligence wing of the police. Werner Best, of the

⁹¹ François and Renée Bédarida, "La persécution des Juifs," in *La France des années noires, tome 2 : De l'Occupation à la Libération*, ed. François Bédarida and Jean-Pierre Azéma (Paris: Seuil, 2000), 149.

⁹² Christopher R. Browning, "Nazi Resettlement Policy and the Search for a Solution to the Jewish Question, 1939-1941," *German Studies Review* 9:3 (October 1986): 517.

⁹³ Peter Longreich, *Holocaust: The Nazi Persecution and Murder of the Jews* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 270.

military occupation authority in France, explained in the same month that “the Germans must progressively rid all the European countries of Judaism,” and he invited the French to consider “preliminary measures” for the future deportations.⁹⁴

During a series of meetings held on 3 and 4 April 1941 Dannecker, Abetz, Stülpnagel and Werner Best all asked Vallat to demonstrate French commitment to racial ideals and arrest “politically unpleasant Jews.”⁹⁵ Six weeks later, with the agreement of the *Délégation générale du gouvernement dans les territoires occupés* (DGTO), Vichy’s liaison organization with the MBF, French police on 13 May 1940 delivered summonses to 6,694 foreigners and stateless Jews in Paris. Some 3,710 Jews, mostly Polish, duly presented themselves to the required location to find themselves instantly held in detention. Taken to the Austerlitz railway station they were delivered in 4 special trains to the camps at Pithiviers and Beaune-la-Rolande in the *département* of the Loiret.⁹⁶

Quite what the navy’s response to these developments was and what the reaction of the rank and file may have been can be judged to a degree by subsequent events. On 20 January 1938 the *Journal officiel* published the contents of law concerning discipline in the navy. According to Article 27 it was explicitly forbidden to serving personnel to join groups or associations of a political nature. A circular at Vichy of 19 May 1943, signed on behalf of the Secretary of State for the Navy by *Capitaine de vaisseau* Jacquinet, demonstrated quite how much things had changed since that time: “Officers, NCOs and others currently on armistice

⁹⁴ Michael R. Marrus and Robert O. Paxton, “The Nazis and the Jews in Occupied Western Europe, 1940-1944,” *The Journal of Modern History* 54:4 (December 1982): 694.

⁹⁵ Thomas J. Laub, *After the Fall: German Policy in Occupied France, 1940-1944* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 228.

⁹⁶ Poznanski, *Jews in France During World War II*, 56; Rita Thalmann, “La traque des Juifs: Dans le contexte de la ‘mise au pas’ de la France,” *Annales* 3 (May - June 1993): 601.

leave are authorized to join the *Milice Française*, created by Law No. 63 on 30 January 1943.”⁹⁷

The *Milice* was an organization that developed from the *Service d’Ordre Légionnaire* (SOL). SOL was established under Darlan on 12 January 1942, with its first section receiving its investiture at Nice on 22 February 1942 under the leadership of Joseph Darnand. Its brief was to act against “Gaullist dissidence, Bolshevism, Jewish Leprosy and Heathen Freemasonry.”⁹⁸ In January 1943, under Laval, Darnand transformed it into the collaborationist *Milice*. He was executed in 1945. To give but one example of the participation of naval officers, the *Chef du Service des Gardes des Communications* of the *Milice* was *Capitaine de frégate* Fontaine.⁹⁹

In December 1941 arrangements were also made to allow auxiliary personnel to take temporary leave in order to enroll in the *Légion des volontaires français contre le bolchévisme* (LVF).¹⁰⁰ The LVF fought in German uniforms on the Eastern Front and eventually became the French SS Charlemagne Division. On 22 June 1943 the administrative arrangements were extended to other than auxiliary personnel in the navy.¹⁰¹ On 27 December 1944, *Quartier-Maître* Drougard was reported as having been arrested and charged with threatening state security in his capacity as Top Sergeant in the LVF.¹⁰² The same legal framework also allowed French sailors to serve in the *Kriegsmarine*. In February 1944 a recruiting office for the German Navy publicized its location on, ironically, the *Boulevard des Alliés* in Caen.¹⁰³ According to Robert Forbes, well over a thousand Frenchmen served in the German Navy, although it is unclear how many of these had formerly served in the French Navy.¹⁰⁴ One thing is clear,

⁹⁷ SHM TT B 153.

⁹⁸ Cointet *Histoire de Vichy*, 211.

⁹⁹ AN AJ 72 1151.

¹⁰⁰ SHM TT B 153.

¹⁰¹ AN F/1a/3748.

¹⁰² SHM TT B 102.

¹⁰³ AN AJ 72 1151.

¹⁰⁴ Robert Forbes, *For Europe: The French Volunteers of the Waffen-SS* (Mechanicsburg PA: Stackpole Books, 2010), 141

however, and that is that nothing legal stood in the way of those who wanted to do both, and there is no indication that the French Admiralty tried to put obstacles in their way. Moreover it seems to say a lot about the navy's opinion of Jews and Communists that it not only opened the way for its personnel to join these organizations, but that some were subsequently prosecuted for having done so.

Whatever the original dynamic behind these reforms, things became seriously radicalized when on 22 June 1941 Hitler launched Operation Barbarossa, the invasion of the Soviet Union. Even before then 4 to 5,000 communists, or presumed communists had been arrested. On 25 June Darlan ordered the Secretary General for the Police Chavin to make a study of the measures to be taken against communists. On 30 June a police dragnet against communists was initiated. The dragnet was not an unfamiliar tool to Chavin, who had conducted similar operations along the Côte d'Azur between April and July, although his target had been different. On 6 June the *New York Times* reported that raids upon Jews "accused of being foreign agitators and upon persons engaged in alleged illicit activities were conducted today in the Marseille district and along the French Riviera under orders of Admiral François Darlan as Minister of the Interior." The official bulletin said that 47 foreign Jews had been arrested and 400 others transferred to residences elsewhere. The round-up was continuing.¹⁰⁵ The chief of police in Marseille since October 1940 was Rodellec du Porzic, who assumed responsibilities as regional police intendant in July 1941. He was also a naval officer and brought in two other naval officers, Robert-Stéphane Auzanneau and Boule, to act as his assistants.¹⁰⁶ Du Porzic was also a Darlan protégé.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ *The New York Times* (6 June 1941): 10.

¹⁰⁶ SHM TT B 150.

¹⁰⁷ Donna F. Ryan, *The Holocaust and the Jews of Marseille: The Enforcement of Anti-Semitic Policies in Vichy France* (Champagne IL: University of Illinois Press, 1996), 61.

All this notwithstanding, incidents involving the occupying forces began and quickly escalated. There were 54 in July, 73 in August, 134 in September and 162 in October.¹⁰⁸ Coming at a time when Darlan was already preoccupied with negotiations over the Paris Protocols and ominous developments in Syria, in July 1941 he handed over the reins of the Interior Ministry to Pierre Pucheu. Skeptical of the zeal to be expected in the service of the ideas and aims of the National Revolution of a police force in the process of reform but more or less inherited from the Third Republic, Pucheu put in place a triptych of *polices auxiliaires* to specialize in the fight against the figures of “anti-France.” These were the *Service de police anticommunist* (SPAC), the *service de police des sociétés secrètes* (SSS), and the *Police aux questions juives* (PQJ).¹⁰⁹ Pucheu urged all police to take vigorous action against the Communists, blaming them both for the attacks on the Germans and the German reprisals that followed. Typical of Vichy policy towards the occupying Germans, Pucheu was anxious to demonstrate French willingness to implement anti-terrorist measures for fear that the authority to do so be prorogued by the Germans themselves.¹¹⁰

Pucheu also tried, completely without success, to extend his authority to include the Paris Police Prefecture. Since 14 May 1941 the incumbent *Préfet de Police* had been Admiral François Bard. His mandate was to get rid of anything that smacked of the Third Republic. Under his authority the *Brigades spéciales* were revived to deal with attacks on German personnel. Originally such acts were treated as criminal, to deprive them of any patriotic connotation, and therefore put by Bard in the hands of the *Police judiciaire* (PJ). Eventually the *Brigade spéciale* given this task was, however, transferred to the *Renseignements généraux*, who

¹⁰⁸ Huan and Coutau-Bégarie, *Darlan*, 503.

¹⁰⁹ Herman Roodenburg, *Social Control in Europe: 1800-2000* (Columbus OH: Ohio State University Press, 2004), 308.

¹¹⁰ Jean-Marc Berlière, *Policiers français sous l'occupation* (Paris: Perrin, 2009), 209.

considered themselves well up on political questions, a fact that preserved the *Police judiciaire* from accusations of collaboration even though it contained several PJ inspectors.

After the war, Maurice Bel, an assistant principal inspector, was put on trial accused of arresting patriots and was jailed on 17 September 1946. In his defense he said: “As for the arrests I made, they resulted from the orders given by my different bosses... [including Bard] who never stopped repeating that we were covered whatever happened.” Émile Hennequin, Assistant Director of the Municipal Police, was also charged with collaboration, setting up units to arrest patriots (the *brigades d’interpellation divisionnaires*), responsibility for the “*plan du blocage*,” which sealed exit routes from the scene of an attack,¹¹¹ raids to arrest Jews and incitement by threat or reward of officers to repress patriots and Jews. Hennequin replied with some eloquence: “The Prefect gave the orders. He was obeyed.” The person responsible for reviving the *Brigades spéciales de lute anticommunist de la police municipale* was Bard. He put in place the “*plan du blocage*.” He was also responsible for the systematic expulsion from the police of all people of foreign origin, all Freemasons, all suspected communists. And all Jews.¹¹²

On 12 August 1941 during the final interval of a performance of Boris Godunov in the Grand Casino at Vichy a message from Pétain was broadcast which, says Robert Aron, “marked a sharp turning point in Vichy’s policy.” An “ill wind,” said Pétain, was “blowing from several regions of France.” He continued:

...it will take a long time to overcome the resistance of all the adversaries of the New Order, but we must set to at once to break up their organizations and destroy their leaders.

¹¹¹ Jean-Marc Berlière and Denis Peschanski, “Police et policiers parisiens face à la lute armée (1941-1944),” in *La Résistance et les Français: lutte armée et maquis : colloque international de Besançon 15-17 juin*, ed. François Marcot (Besançon: Presses Univ. Franche-Comté, 1996), 176.

¹¹² Berlière, *Policiers français sous l’occupation*, 195, 245.

If France does not realize that she is condemned by the force of circumstances to change her regime, she will see before her the abyss into which Spain almost disappeared in 1936 and from which she was only saved by faith, youth and sacrifice.

He went on to list a new set of repressive measures. Activity by all political parties or groups were suspended. The powers of the police were doubled. Increased powers were given to the regional prefects. *Commissaires au Pouvoir* were to be given the duty of breaking all opposition to the National Revolution. Those engaged in public functions, including the Navy, were to take an oath of loyalty to Pétain.¹¹³ Despite a challenge from Dumoulin de Labarthète, Darlan managed to appoint his own *Commissaires au Pouvoir* and put them under the command of Admiral Gouton.¹¹⁴

On 13 August 1941 a communist demonstration took place at the Porte Saint-Denis in Paris and clashes took place with German troops and French police. The next day the *Sicherheitsdienst* (SD) informed Stülpnagel of the incident and in response he issued the *Kommunistenlass* making Communist agitation punishable by death, urging Bard to do the same.¹¹⁵ Two suspects were tried by German military court and shot, Henri Gautherot and Samuel Tyszelman. Tyszelman's Jewish background was explicitly mentioned to legitimize his execution and to justify the subsequent actions against Parisian Jews.¹¹⁶

Resettlement

In its 1939 to 1940 conception German anti-Jewish policy focused on resettlement. Thus in the autumn of 1939, immediately after the German defeat of Poland, Heydrich approved a plan to force Jews into a temporary reservation south of the Polish city of Radom, near the river

¹¹³ Robert Aron, *The Vichy Regime, 1940-44* (New York: Macmillan, 1958), 295-297.

¹¹⁴ Huan and Coutau-Bégarie, *Darlan*, 501.

¹¹⁵ Sylvie Bernay, *L'église de France face à la persécution des Juifs, 1940-1944* (Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2012), 253.

¹¹⁶ Christopher Neumaier, "The Escalation of German Reprisal Policy in Occupied France, 1941-42," *Journal of Contemporary History* 41:1 (January 2006): 116.

Nisko. Then in May 1940 Himmler drafted a memorandum entitled "Some Thoughts on the Treatment of Alien Populations in the East." As far as the Jews were concerned he wrote: "I hope completely to erase the concept of Jews through the possibility of a great emigration of all Jews to a colony in Africa or elsewhere." The solution he fell upon in June 1940 was the island of Madagascar. Madagascar, says Christopher Browning, had long exercised a fascination among antisemites "as the ideal dumping ground for the European Jews," but the idea did not become a concrete proposal among the Nazis until put forward by the Jewish expert of the German Foreign Office, Franz Rademacher, in early June 1940, when it seemed probable that Germany might redistribute the French empire as she saw fit. By June 18 Hitler had informed Mussolini of his intention to use Madagascar as a Jewish reservation, and he broached the subject again with Admiral Raeder, head of the German Navy, on June 20. Realization of the Madagascar Plan, however, required the defeat of not only France but also Great Britain. By mid-September it was clear that this was not imminent, and the plan quickly faded.¹¹⁷

This of course did not mark an end to German plans for Jewish resettlement. One of the targets for their proposed migration was unoccupied France. Thus in July 1940 some 3,000 Jews were expelled to France from Alsace. On 8 August 1,400 German Jews that had taken refuge in Bordeaux were deported by German authorities to the unoccupied zone. On 22 October 6,504 Jews were dispatched from Baden and the Saar-Palatinate to Lyons, without the Vichy authorities even having been informed. They ended up in French concentration camps in Languedoc and Provence.¹¹⁸ Vichy's policy towards the Jews being somewhat analogous, in

¹¹⁷ Browning, "Nazi Resettlement Policy," 509-512.

¹¹⁸ Robert O. Paxton and Andrée Lyotard-May, "La spécificité de la persécution des Juifs en France," *Annales* 3 (May - June 1993): 612.

that it was keen to deport them, clearly the two policies were mutually incompatible. Tragically Vichy remained wedded to a policy of deportation.

Therefore when on 23 October 1941 Gestapo chief Heinrich Muller, Eichmann's superior at the RSHA, passed along an order from Himmler to the effect that apart from a few exceptions, no more Jews were to emigrate from Germany or anywhere in occupied Europe, Vichy's desire to be rid of its internal enemies remained the same. Darlan was above all preoccupied with the number of foreigners in internment camps and the cost to the state this entailed. In February 1941 the *Comité supérieur de l'immigration* was created with the specific intention of emptying the internment camps through emigration, but few countries were interested in accepting people to whom France had granted asylum, despite considerable pressure brought to bear by Vichy.¹¹⁹ As late as October 1942 British Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden reported that the Belgian Foreign Minister had visited him accompanied by the Belgian ambassador to complain that he was "being strongly pressed to allow the admission of Jews from Vichy France into the Congo."¹²⁰ The German Embassy reported in August 1941 that Darlan was again discussing sending all the Jews of Europe to Madagascar.¹²¹ Zietschel at the German Embassy reported to his superior Otto Abetz the same month that the Madagascar plan, while a good idea, was impractical; it would be better to deport all the Jews to the newly conquered territory in the east.¹²²

If any part of Vichy policy towards the Jews evinced ambiguity, however, it was the policy on emigration. From February to April 1941 at least six ships of varying categories left Marseille filled with refugees bound for Fort-de-France in Martinique. Initiated by then Interior

¹¹⁹ Cointet, *Nouvelle histoire de Vichy*, 454.

¹²⁰ The National Archives FO/954/1B, 7 October 1942.

¹²¹ Marrus and Paxton, *Vichy France and the Jews*, 113.

¹²² Marrus and Paxton, "The Nazis and the Jews in Occupied Western Europe," 696-697.

Minister Marcel Peyrouton this program represented the “last legal avenue out of Vichy France in the winter of 1940 and the spring of 1941.”¹²³ From the first it encountered opposition from the Pétainist Minister of the Colonies Admiral Platon and from his subordinates, down to the governors of individual colonies. The same logic that left the Vichy Government aggrieved when Germany deported Jews to France worked internally when France tried to send Jews to the colonies. Admiral Platon said as much to Darlan, writing on 6 May 1941: “The same imperious reasons which drive you to distance these people from metropolitan France oblige me to forbid these foreigners to gain access to the territories under my control [the colonies].”¹²⁴ Nonetheless the program went forward, to the extent that by April 1941 Platon was already complaining that the Antilles and Guiana were being overrun by “large numbers of stateless peoples and Jews.”

In many ways, says Eric Jennings, the French Antilles turned out to be a short-lived and even chimerical haven. “No sooner did passengers disembark than the vexations and persecutions began.” Furthermore, “the harsh treatment reserved for refugees was of course owed to the Pétainist convictions of the naval forces in control of Martinique” and more specifically “to the resolve of Vichy’s high commissioner to the Antilles, Admiral Robert.” Almost all refugees were imprisoned in two camps outside of Fort-de-France, Balata and Lazaret, a former leper colony. This was nothing new to the navy, which had after all been responsible for organizing France’s penal colonies.

It is difficult to understand why Vichy, so eager to rid itself of foreign Jews, should on the one hand, despite the best efforts of the Jewish emigration association HICEM and the work of Varian Fry, director of the American Emergency Rescue Committee, make it so difficult for

¹²³ Eric Jennings, “Last Exit from Vichy France: The Martinique Escape Route and the Ambiguities of Emigration,” *The Journal of Modern History* 74 (June 2002): 294.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 298.

them to leave France, for the bureaucratic obstacles were formidable. On the other hand, given the events of 1942, it is equally difficult to understand why it should facilitate the escape of a few from the grasp of the Germans. Varian Fry arrived in Marseille with \$3,000 and a “much haggled-over list of two hundred names” of prominent Jews he was to save.¹²⁵ It is a sobering thought that for good or ill, if you were a Jew in France you were going to end up on a list and that your life depended upon which one you made. In the end, however, Varian Fry reported that in a summer 1941 interview with Rodellec du Porzic, the police intendant explained his intention to have Fry expelled for having “protected Jews and anti-Nazis too much.”¹²⁶ Du Porzic was, as we have seen, a naval officer on detachment.

The Final Solution

It is unclear at precisely whose instigation it occurred, but on 20 August 1941 an operation was initiated in Paris with Admiral Bard providing 2,400 French police who, with the support of the German *Feldgendarmarie*, sealed off the 11th arrondissement and conducted massive arrests of Jews. The first day not achieving the desired results, with only 3,000 Jews being taken into captivity, the operation was continued until 25 August, and extended to other areas of Paris. 4,232 Jews were seized by French police in 16 sections of the city including, this time, about 1,000 French Jews, of whom 150 were veterans of the First World War. 40 French Jewish lawyers were also arrested by special German order.¹²⁷

20 August 1941 also saw the opening of the notorious camp at Drancy. It is a testament to the improvised nature of the August arrests that when the new internees arrived, the Wehrmacht was still in residence and remained so until October when it departed, taking with it

¹²⁵ Marc Leepson, “Our Man in Vichy,” *World War II* 22:10 (March 2008) 62.

¹²⁶ Ryan, *The Holocaust and the Jews of Marseille*, 61.

¹²⁷ Bernay, *L'église de France face à la persécution des Juifs*, 254.

all the mattresses. The new camp was run, like the others, by the French gendarmerie. However, according to an agreement concluded on 27 August between *général de gendarmerie* Guilbert and the *Préfet de Police*, Admiral Bard was made responsible for the camp and the services of the gendarmerie and the supply services of the prefecture of the Seine were placed under his orders. 150 gendarmes, or four brigades, were put at his disposal.¹²⁸ Incredibly a German military commission was so appalled by the conditions at Drancy that it ordered the release of about 900 sick and dying prisoners.¹²⁹

Even as the arrests were going on, and possibly in retaliation for the execution of Henri Gautherot and Samuel Tyszelman, on 21 August German Navy *Marinehilfsassistent* Alfons Moser was shot in the metro station at Barbès-Rochechouart. The same day shots were fired at two German soldiers at Bastille. On 22 August, in absence of the military commander, the commander of Greater Paris Major General Schaumberg announced that all those imprisoned by the German authorities or those in French prisons under German authority (like Drancy) would be regarded as hostages. The announcement made explicit that in the German view the attacks were the responsibility of the “Jewish Bolsheviks.”¹³⁰ Further attacks would result in the shooting of hostages. As a response to the Moser attack Vichy promised the heads of six communists, Fernand de Brinon the Vichy ambassador having indicated that if no action were taken the Germans would shoot 50 hostages. Darlan signed the text of a law published in the *Journal officiel* on 24 August that created the special section courts, backdated to avoid the appearance of reacting to German demands. With another admiral on its board the *section spéciale*, alongside the Paris court of Appeal, condemned to death three communists detained for

¹²⁸ Annette Wieviorka and Michel Laffitte, *A l'intérieur du camp de Drancy* (Paris: Perrin, 2012), 27-28.

¹²⁹ Thomas J. Laub, *After the Fall: German Policy in Occupied France, 1940-1944* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 228.

¹³⁰ Christopher Neumaier, “The Escalation of German Reprisal Policy in Occupied France, 1941-42,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 41:1 (Jan., 2006): 118.

minor offences. When the magistrates refused to take further steps, Pucheu created the *Tribunal d'État*, this including Admiral Caudron among its five members, which completed the quota.¹³¹

It is perhaps significant that the first six hostages shot in France were all designated “Jewish Communists” by Ernst Jünger in his “Memorandum on the Execution of Hostages” although only one, Edmond Brucker, actually was.¹³² The attacks continued and so did the executions. Between September 1941 and May 1942, according to the trial dossier compiled in the case of Karl Oberg after the war, 471 hostages were shot.¹³³

On 16 December 1941 the *Journal des débats* carried an announcement that following attacks on members of the German armed forces, severe measures of repression were to be taken in the occupied zone. Following Abetz’s advice regarding the preservation of Franco-German collaboration, Stülpnagel blamed the attacks on Jews and Bolsheviks in the pay of the Anglo-Saxons.¹³⁴ The repercussions were severe indeed. A fine of a billion francs was to be paid by the Jewish community. A hundred Jews, Bolsheviks and Anarchists were to be shot. “A large number” of criminal Judeo-Bolshevik elements were to be deported to labor camps in the East.¹³⁵

Preparatory to his 14 December announcement, on 12 December Stülpnagel unleashed another set of arrests, taking prisoner 743 Jewish, mostly French, men. To make up the 1,000 foreseen in the deportation plan, 300 detainees were transferred from Drancy to Compiègne under German escort. On 15 December 95 hostages were shot, of whom 51 were Jews. On 27

¹³¹ Philippe Burrin, *France Under the Germans: Collaboration and Compromise* (New York: New Press, 1996), 133; Huan and Coutau-Bégarie, *Darlan*, 504.

¹³² Eismann, “Représailles et logique idéologico-répressive,” 109-141.

¹³³ Peschanski, “Exclusion, Persécution, Répression,” 220.

¹³⁴ Rita Thalmann, “La traque des Juifs: Dans le contexte de la ‘mise au pas’ de la France,” *Annales* 3 (May - June 1993), 601.

¹³⁵ *Journal des débats politiques et littéraires* 588 (16 December 1941): 1.

March 1942, while Darlan still led the government, the first convoy of 1,112 men left Compiègne for Auschwitz.¹³⁶

In the unoccupied zone, the major round-ups of August 1942 were made considerably easier by the actions that had been taken towards the end of 1941 against foreign Jews there who had entered France since 1 January 1936. To find their victims, police used the censuses that Darlan had ordered on 10 December. Many of those on the lists had, in fact, already been drafted into camps or labor battalions or been assigned to a residence under police surveillance. On 26 January 1942, Interior Minister Pucheu had ruled categorically that internment was to be the general rule for all stateless persons and foreigners “who had lost the protection of their country of origin.”¹³⁷

Conclusion

On 20 January 1942 SS-Obergruppenführer Reinhard Heydrich, head of the *Reichssicherheitshauptamt* (RSHA), convened the conference at the Berlin suburb of Wannsee designed to provide a template for implementation of the Nazi Final Solution to the Jewish Question. Among the core decisions reached there were the following: “Able-bodied Jews, separated according to sex, will be taken in large work columns to these areas for work on roads, in the course of which action doubtless a large portion will be eliminated by natural causes. The possible final remnant will, since it will undoubtedly consist of the most resistant portion, have to be treated accordingly...”¹³⁸ Under Secretary of State Luther, responsible at the Foreign Ministry for the diplomatic aspects of the Jewish Question, raised the possibility of objections

¹³⁶ Eismann, “Représailles et logique idéologico-répressive,” 129-132.

¹³⁷ Marrus and Paxton, *Vichy France and the Jews*, 170, 258.

¹³⁸ Wannsee Protocol in *The Holocaust: Selected Documents in Eighteen Volumes*, vol. 11: *The Wannsee Protocol and a 1944 Report on Auschwitz by the Office of Strategic Services*, ed. John Mendelsohn (New York: Garland, 1982), 18-32.

being raised by the countries concerned at the prospect of Jews being transported to the East. He anticipated a certain reticence on the part of the Italians, and even outright opposition from Norway and Denmark. Neither he nor Heydrich foresaw any difficulty in France.¹³⁹

How this came to be so was revealed on 30 January 1941 in a conference between representatives of Otto von Stülpnagel, head of the German military occupation authority in France (*Militärbefehlshaber in Frankreich*, MBF), Kurt Lischka, assistant to the Paris head of the *Sicherheitspolizei* (SIPO) and *Sicherheitsdienst* (SD) Helmut Knochen, together with Theodor Dannecker, the SS officer in charge of the Jewish Affairs subsection of Section IV (anti-German groups) on Knochen's staff and Eichmann's direct representative in the capital. According to Lischka: "It would be advisable to leave it to the French to take care of it so as to avoid in this area the kind of popular reaction that emerges against anything that comes from the Germans. German services should restrict themselves to acting in an advisory capacity."¹⁴⁰

A year later SS *Sturmbahnführer* Carl-Theo Zeitschel, responsible at the German Embassy for matters relating to the Jewish Question, noted that Dannecker had informed Heydrich that although part of France was occupied, it would not be possible to act with the kind of measures undertaken in Germany. Zeitschel underlined, however, that according to the outcome of meetings he had been able to have in Vichy, the French Government was prepared to make the largest possible concessions over the Jewish Question. In fact they would be quite happy to get rid of the Jews somehow, so long as it was done discreetly.¹⁴¹ In a February 1942 memorandum to Zeitschel, the German Consul-General in Vichy Roland Krug von Nidda wrote that Vichy leaders would support the deportation of 1,000 to 5,000 Jews per month provided it

¹³⁹ Thalmann, "La traque des Juifs," 595.

¹⁴⁰ Serge Klarsfeld, "Juillet-septembre 1942: Les divergences dans l'appareil policier nazi et la réalisation de la Solution finale en France," *Annales* 3 (May - June 1993), 546.

¹⁴¹ Thalmann, "La traque des Juifs," 602-603.

was carried out discreetly.¹⁴² Discretion was certainly one of Vichy's preoccupations. Anti-Jewish measures were rarely mentioned in official speeches or communiqués.¹⁴³ The part that the French authorities actually played, however, was summarized by Major von Teuchert, last head of the administrative services of the German military command in France. According to Teuchert, with German manpower never exceeding 40,000, including 2,500 to 3,000 SIPO-SD agents, they could never have fulfilled their ambitions without the active assistance and cooperation of the Vichy Government and the majority of high level public officials.¹⁴⁴ Paxton agrees, and goes further: "In addition to the police, who were the most directly involved, there were countless others - prefects and their subordinates, judicial officials, mayors, railwaymen, concierges - who had a part to play. The French government at Vichy authorized their involvement, and indeed welcomed a situation in which French and not German personnel exercised authority in the country..." German activities in this area were hesitant as they were "anxious not to disturb local sensibilities and unable to invest men or resources in preparing an as yet ill-defined operation." High level Nazi officials felt compelled to restrain, for example, the enthusiasm of future Ambassador Otto Abetz, taking weeks to authorize his proposals and emphasizing already that the measures should be executed by French authorities. No doubt much to their surprise: "The only west European countries where there appeared a determined and energetic anti-Jewish drive from the very beginning were Vichy France and Norway, where collaborationist governments forged ahead on their own, eager to set their national stamp upon a new political and ideological order."¹⁴⁵ Furthermore: "In this regard, French authorities outdid

¹⁴² Laub, *After the Fall*, 231.

¹⁴³ Peschanski, "Exclusion, persécution, repression," 210.

¹⁴⁴ Thalmann, "La traque des Juifs," 602-603.

¹⁴⁵ Marrus and Paxton, "The Nazis and the Jews in Occupied Western Europe," 695, 706-707.

any in Europe except the Bulgarians and possibly the Slovaks, by actually volunteering to hand over such unwanted Jews from *unoccupied* territory.”¹⁴⁶

In 1983 the English edition of Serge Klarsfeld’s *Memorial to the Jews Deported from France 1942-1944: Documentation of the deportation of the victims of the Final Solution in France* was published in New York. A monumental work, it gives the name, date of birth, nationality and convoy number of all 75,721 Jews deported from France between 27 March 1942 and 22 August 1944. During that period 79 Jewish convoys left France and 17 convoys transferred Jews from the Unoccupied to the Occupied Zone of France.¹⁴⁷ The details are bleak and unemotional, from Convoy One from Drancy, the main transit camp on the north-east outskirts of Paris, “to Auschwitz, 1112 men, mostly French nationals, none chosen for immediate gassing, 22 survivors in 1945” to “No 79, 17 August 1944, carrying 51 ‘special Jews’ whom Eichmann’s man on the spot, SS Hauptsturmführer Alois Brunner, managed to transport by trading some pigs for three cars that belonged to an aircraft battery.”

By the time the first train departed for Auschwitz, the navy had become implicated in every stage of the execution of the Final Solution in France. Because of its military and maritime capabilities, it was the backbone and the lifeblood of the Vichy regime whose ideology and policies made such a thing imaginable. It helped frame the laws that made it possible. It controlled the police that arrested the victims and the transit camp at Drancy that was the gateway to Auschwitz. With the large number of naval engineers on detachment to Paris, it would come as no surprise to discover it ran the trains.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, original italics.

¹⁴⁷ Serge Klarsfeld, *Vichy-Auschwitz, La “solution finale” de la question juive en France* (Paris: Fayard, 2001), 170-1, 370 ; See also Ludivine Broch, “French Railway Workers and the Question of Rescue During the Holocaust,” *Diasporas* 25 (2015): 147-167.

¹⁴⁸ SHM TT B 150.

CONCLUSION

In 1958, just as de Gaulle was about to return to power and Aron's "sword and shield" version of Vichy to dominate the French narrative of the Second World War, the Oscar for Best Picture went to a movie directed by David Lean and starring Alec Guinness. In *The Bridge on the River Kwai*, Guinness plays a British Army colonel whose concern for the well-being and morale of his troops leads him actively to cooperate with his Japanese captors in the construction of the eponymous bridge. The scale of the collaboration develops as the work progresses, moving from merely prohibiting acts of sabotage to voluntarily acting in breach of the Geneva Convention, forcing officers to perform manual labor and encouraging the sick and lame to abandon hospital beds in favor of "light duties" on the bridge. Despite attacks on his sense of moral rectitude by a conscientious doctor, it is not until the completed bridge comes under attack by Allied commandoes that the colonel experiences a moment of agonizing revelation at the implications of his actions. His last words before setting off the explosive charges that bring about the bridge's final destruction are: "What have I done?"

It was perhaps ironic that the British would start to examine the repercussions of collaboration just as the French tried to forget them. There are a number of striking parallels between the film's plot-line and the experience of Vichy: resistance invited retribution, cooperation brought benefits, and the absence of any kind of balance between the two seems to have gone largely unremarked. Indeed participation in collaboration became enthusiastic, as if the actions occupied a time and space entirely detached from the wider situation that provided their context in the first place. The difference is in the ending. For Darlan there was no "what have I done" moment. Rather, until it became abundantly clear in 1942 that further resistance to the Allies in North Africa was useless, he presided over a futile squandering of lives and materiel

off the coasts of Morocco and Algeria. Having been determined by the Vichy authorities to be a captive of the Americans, his appeal for the fleet to sail to North Africa from Toulon was ignored. Instead, determined to keep the French fleet out of the hands of Allies and Axis alike, Admiral de Laborde ordered its destruction.

This was an inglorious end for a fleet upon which its historians have heaped accolades. According to Admiral Auphan: “The result of the Navy’s dogged perseverance was that at the beginning of the war France possessed a strong, homogenous fleet...The ships were well built and dependable; their gunnery was excellent...All the ships had been trained in day and night squadron maneuvers.”¹ For Charles W. Koburger, jr.: “The fleet had a homogeneity rarely known in modern times. And it was trained to a fine edge. It was the best France had had since Colbert – or Vergennes.”² For Anthony Heckstall-Smith: “At the outbreak of war in 1939, the French fleet was one of the most formidable afloat...a splendid navy, manned by highly trained and disciplined ships’ companies...”³ Winston Churchill was to record: “I respected (Darlan) for the work he had done in re-creating the French Navy, which after ten years of his professional control was more efficient than at any time since the French Revolution.”⁴

With the outbreak of war, despite the strategic misgivings of its Commander-in-Chief, this was the French navy that cooperated so well in practical terms with the Royal Navy. On 18 November 1939, the First Sea Lord Admiral Sir Dudley Pound had felt moved to report: “Throughout, close co-operation has been maintained with the French Navy which has helped to

¹ Rear Admiral Paul Auphan and Jacques Mordal, *The French Navy in World War II* (Annapolis MD: United States Naval Institute Press, 1959), 15.

² Charles W. Koburger, jr., *The Cyrano Fleet: France and Its Navy, 1940-1942* (New York: Praeger, 1989), 13.

³ Anthony Heckstall-Smith, *The Fleet That Faced Both Ways* (London: Anthony Blond, 1963), 1.

⁴ Winston S. Churchill, *Their Finest Hour* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1949), 229.

meet the general requirements of the Naval Situation.”⁵ When the armed merchant cruiser *Rawalpindi* was sunk by the *Scharnhorst* on 23 November, the French response merited a particular mention in the Weekly *Résumé* of Cabinet Meetings of 2 December: “In the special dispositions made as a result of the sinking of HMS *Rawalpindi* the French Navy have taken an active part.” Similarly, following the destruction of the German pocket battleship *Amiral Graf Spee* off Montevideo on 17 December, considerable forces were deployed in a search for her support ship, the tanker *Altmark*, believed to have on board about three hundred prisoners, the remainder of the crews of the merchant vessels sunk by the *Amiral Graf Spee*. The British Admiralty reported: “The French have disposed a number of submarines and armed merchant cruisers to intercept the *Altmark* should she work towards the North Atlantic. The area to be covered is a very large one.”⁶ We have seen how the two navies cooperated during the abortive Norwegian campaign and during the Battle of France. Crossing the Channel in February 1940, René La Bruyère, Special Correspondent of *Le Petit Parisien*, was moved to comment upon the “remarkable collaboration between ourselves and our allies.” In his eyes a state of unity had been achieved that reminded him of the words of Louis XIV upon his son’s accession to the Spanish throne: “The Pyrenees are no more!” For La Bruyère, the Channel had become a large Franco-British river; a link rather than a barrier.⁷ On the face of it, then, Darlan’s later conversations with the Germans seemed inconceivable. Yet on 28 January 1942, at a meeting with the Commander of the *Kriegsmarine* Grand Admiral Raeder, Darlan confided: “The European Fleet will need aircraft carriers when France is on Germany’s side.”⁸

⁵ CAB/66/3/29, 18 November 1939.

⁶ CAB/66/4/28, 30 December 1939.

⁷ *Le Petit Parisien* 23004 (23 February 194): 1.

⁸ Jak P. Mallmann Showell, ed., *Fuehrer Conferences on Naval Affairs, 1939-1945* (Annapolis MD: Naval Institute Press, 1990), 253.

According to American historian Charles W. Koburger, Jr. the role of the French fleet was, at the outbreak of war, straightforward and well-defined: “The stated overall mission of this fleet was threefold: to protect the coast of the metropole against attacks from the sea; to assure the freedom of maritime communications; and to secure the empire.”⁹ After the armistice came into effect in June 1940, as far as the navy was concerned, nothing had changed. Innocuous as this proposition may have appeared at the time, however, it was the thin end of the wedge in terms of collaboration with the Nazis. It should perhaps have been foreseeable that the outcome would be that the French navy subsequently killed more British sailors than it had German ones, and that it would lose more ships and men as a neutral than it had as a combatant.

Even so, had the activities of the French navy been restricted to defending French territory, even in the service of a regime as odious as Vichy’s, few would be moved to castigate it if only on the basis that it was a military organization that carried out the brief formulated for it by a legitimate government. De Gaulle might have been unhappy with that characterization of Vichy, but it was one accepted without any sign of objection by, among others, the governments of Switzerland and the United States. Unfortunately the navy went on to embrace tasks that were beyond these traditional limits. That it did so can largely be laid at the door of its Commander-in-Chief Admiral Darlan.

This may have come as something of a surprise, not least, as Peter Mangold observed, because the British Political Warfare Executive issued a directive on 2 May 1941 noting that there was no occasion for the BBC to make personal attacks upon the character of Admiral Darlan “as nothing detrimental was known about him.”¹⁰ This attitude changed over the period

⁹ Charles W. Koburger, Jr., *Franco-American Naval Relations, 1940-1945* (Westport CT: Praeger, 1994), 8.

¹⁰ Peter Mangold, *Britain and the Defeated French : From Occupation to Liberation, 1940-1944* (New York: I.B.Tauris, 2011), 110.

of Darlan's premiership, to the extent that in November 1942, upon discovering Darlan's presence in Algiers, Allied Supreme Commander General Eisenhower recalled that a "simple and easy answer would have been to jail him." Later, in a memoir in which he is almost relentlessly nice about everyone he comes across, Eisenhower summarized his position as follows: "My entire acquaintanceship with Darlan covered a period of six weeks. His reputation was that of a notorious collaborator with Hitler, but during the time that he served as the administrator of French North Africa he never once, to our knowledge, violated any commitment or promise. On the other hand, his mannerisms and personality did not inspire confidence and in view of his reputation we were always uneasy in dealing with him."¹¹ Eisenhower subordinate General Omar Bradley's recollection was more forthright: "Collaboration with Darlan was fully as nauseous to Eisenhower as it was to his critics in the United States."¹²

This reorientation of attitude towards Darlan suggests that he had somehow acted out of character, that his collaboration was something that could not have been anticipated, and that therefore it must represent some personal flaw such as opportunism or lust for power. These may have been part of his make-up, but the reality was that he served, in Vichy, a conservative and authoritarian regime that was entirely consistent with his world view. It was also consistent with the prevailing ethos of the French navy. It was nationalist, conservative, and Catholic. Not for nothing were the naval chaplains of the 19th century who had trained in Brittany, a hub of naval recruitment, considered "Gallican" as opposed to "Ultramontane" at a moment when Ultramontanism was triumphing in France. Their primary loyalty was to France, not to Rome,

¹¹ Dwight D. Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe* (New York: Permabooks, 1952), 128, 154.

¹² Omar N. Bradley, *A Soldier's Story* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1951), 32.

and in this they reflected the spirit of their flock.¹³ Darlan and his cohorts had been brought up within this tradition and it would have been strange if their attitudes had not reflected this.

Nor, moreover, was conservatism the exclusive preserve of the French navy. Often expressed as an antipathy for the Left, it was common to many military organizations. In the opinion of Lieutenant General Friedrich von Boetticher, the German military attaché in Washington D.C. from 1933 to 1941, American officers maintained a conservative outlook and a wary eye for radical influences. According to Alfred M. Beck: “General MacArthur in the year before von Boetticher’s arrival in America had at least two clashes with ‘communistic elements’ and his onetime vice chief of staff, Maj. Gen. George Van Horn Moseley, had in 1930 advocated the immediate deportation of this vague but dangerous societal stratum to a semitropical island in the Hawaiian chain.”¹⁴

In France this animosity towards the radical Left struck a chord with a broad constituency that found particular expression in 1939 with the Soviet invasion of Finland. Certainly considerable public pressure was brought to bear upon the French Government regarding action in support of Finland. Writing on 25 January, Maurice Prax had written: “Finland certainly has no need of exhortation or congratulations. But she needs arms, ammunition, and men.”¹⁵ On 3 February, Edmond Demaître was more emotive: “Finland doesn’t need condensed milk for children or warm sweaters for soldiers, or expressions of sympathy. But, so that she can defend her women and children while the men do their duty on the front, she needs – and quickly – fighter ‘planes, anti-aircraft guns, and bombers, so that she can retaliate against the Soviets in the

¹³ Samuel Gicquel, *Prêtres de Bretagne au xixe siècle* (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2008), 161-190.

¹⁴ Alfred M. Beck, *Hitler’s Ambivalent Attaché: Lt. Gen. Friedrich von Boetticher in America, 1933-1941* (Dulles VA: Potomac Books Inc., 2006), 90.

¹⁵ *Le Petit Parisien* 22975 (25 January 1940).

only fashion the Communists, Nazis, and other murderers of children deserve and dread.”¹⁶ Elie-J. Bois urged the peoples of France and Britain to consider the judgment of future historians: “When they decided to intervene, it was too late. The victim was already beaten, and dead.” Furthermore, Bois added, Finland required not just *materiel*, but men.¹⁷ Such views were entirely in accord with those taken by Darlan and were reflected in his enthusiasm, and that of his service, for declaring war on the USSR,

Even before Darlan embraced collaboration, his view of an appropriate outcome of the war was conservative, to say the least. Darlan’s stated vision for the post-war world included a federal Catholic state encompassing Bavaria, Austria, Hungary and Czechoslovakia to counterbalance Italy. It also foresaw a left bank of the Rhine and Rhine basin under Allied mandate; a Poland with closer links to Lithuania that would separate East and West Prussia; most favored nation status for Italy in the Balkans and Somalia.¹⁸ Germany would be crushed, and Europe placed safely in the hands of conservatism, where it belonged. Such ideas were not without currency among collaborationist intellectuals. Alphonse de Brédenbec de Chateaubriant, member of the conservative Catholic Breton gentry, winner of the Prix Goncourt in 1911 and author of an interwar bestseller, went somewhat further than Darlan and proposed a Franco-German reconciliation in a unified Europe that, according to one commentator, amalgamated a “mystical Catholicism” with a “mystical Nazism.” Chateaubriant went on to organize the *Groupe Collaboration*, whose sponsors included members of the *Académie Française*, the rector of the Catholic Institute of Paris, the head of the *Opéra-Comique* and the curator of the Rodin Museum,

¹⁶ *Le Petit Parisien* 22984 (03 February 1940).

¹⁷ *Le Petit Parisien* 23000 (19 February 1940).

¹⁸ Hervé Coutau-Bégarie and Claude Huan, *Lettres et notes de l’amiral Darlan* (Paris: Economica, 1992), 132.

whose robust support for the pursuit of a new Franco-German Europe free of Communism perhaps came closest to fulfilment under the premiership of Darlan.¹⁹

Nor was anti-Semitism a novelty in France. In the late nineteenth-century it had coalesced in the public consciousness around issues like the collapse of the *Union Générale* bank, the scandals involving the failed Panama Canal project and, most famously, the Dreyfus case.²⁰ In the 1930s Jews again became a lightning rod for right-wing dissatisfaction with the influx of refugees from the east. It was by playing upon ingrained fears of Communists and Jews that German officials persuaded, without much effort, their French counterparts to arrest foreign Jews and thus secured invaluable administrative support for Germany's expanding racial agenda. Julian Jackson reminds us, furthermore, that "the leading personalities of the [Vichy] regime were mostly former servants of the Republic... These were not men who had been 'excluded' from the Republic; rather, they had been 'disappointed' by it."²¹ The Republic that had disappointed them François and Renée Bédarida described as being in 1939 "dominated by a sense of crisis that was at once national, political, moral, demographic and social, where fear was fed by anxieties over external threats and internal powerlessness, where resentments and doubts, xenophobia and antisemitism became inextricably intertwined in a large section of public opinion, haunted by the specter of the Popular Front and of Léon Blum with whom it was synonymous, and terrified by the wave of immigration, mostly Jewish, from Central and Eastern Europe."²²

¹⁹ Frederic Spotts, *The Shameful Peace: How French Artists and Intellectuals Survived the Nazi Occupation* (New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 2010), 48-49.

²⁰ Frederick Brown, *For the Soul of France: Culture Wars in the Age of Dreyfus* (New York: Anchor Books, 2011), 75, 162, 186.

²¹ Julian Jackson, "The Republic and Vichy" in *The French Republic: History, Values, Debates*, ed. Edward Berenson, Vincent Duclert and Christophe Prochasson (New York: Cornell University Press, 2011), 68.

²² François and Renée Bédarida, 'La persécution des Juifs' in *La France des années noires, tome 2 : De l'Occupation à la Libération* ed., François Bédarida and Jean-Pierre Azéma (Paris: Seuil, 2000), 149.

In this context the response of many French to the sudden arrest and internment of Jews was one of indifference. Indeed according to Saul Friedländer, Vichy's anti-Jewish legislation was "generally well received by a majority of the population in the non-occupied zone." On 9 October 1940 the *Commission centrale de contrôle téléphonique* reported that "hostility against the Jews remains." On 2 November it considered that the *Statut de Juifs* had been widely approved and even that for some it did not go far enough.²³ Robert Gildea reflected that "[it] may seem surprising that when it came to 'Aryanization' of Jewish businesses, the French public could be a good deal more anti-Semitic than the French administration..."²⁴ For most historians, however, before the massive deportations of the summer of 1942, the overwhelming emotion was indifference. So, for John Sweets, in the Auvergne people were "[at] first indifferent, insensitive, or perhaps unaware of the implications of Vichy policy towards the Jews..."²⁵ For Susan Zucotti "[the] racial laws of 1941 were greeted with the same public silence as those of 1940. The French remained, for the most part, indifferent."²⁶ Ian Ousby agrees: "Many people, perhaps even most people, were indifferent. In the autumn of 1940 they had other things to think about; later they could find little room for fellow feeling or concern for the public good in their own struggle to survive. What happened to the Jews was a secondary matter: it was beyond their immediate affairs, it belonged to the realm of the 'political' which they could no longer control or even bring themselves to follow with much interest. And when they did pay attention, they were inclined to agree with the measures Vichy and the occupiers had taken..."²⁷

²³ Saul Friedländer *Nazi Germany and the Jews, 1939-1945: The Years of Extermination* (New York: Harper Collins, 2007), 112.

²⁴ Robert Gildea, *Marianne in Chains: Daily Life in the Heart of France During the German Occupation* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2002), 221.

²⁵ John Sweets, *Choices in Vichy France: The French under Nazi Occupation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 118.

²⁶ Susan Zucotti, *The Holocaust, The French, and the Jews* (New York: Basic Books, 1993), 61.

²⁷ Ian Ousby, *Occupation: The Ordeal of France, 1940-1944* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), 179.

Xavier Vallat, Darlan's appointee to the *Commissariat Général aux Questions Juives* (CGQJ), in fact suggested that he had no interest in what happened to Jews outside of France: like the admiral he just wanted to exclude foreign Jews from inside France. The rest was a problem for the Germans. "More than in other countries," he wrote, "the Jewish problem is present in France as a problem of foreigners...In reality, it belongs to the victor, if he wants to organize a durable peace, to find the way, a worldwide way if possible but in any case a European way, to make the wandering Jew settle." That being said, Vallat argued to Dr. Werner Best that allowing each people to use its own means of dealing with the Jewish Question would aid rather than impede the realization of a "global solution."²⁸ It was a thin line between indifference and condoning persecution.

With this in mind it is all the more surprising that one of the arguments deployed in defense of Laval by his son-in-law René de Chambrun has proved so resilient. Namely, that "three quarters of the Jewish community in France survived the war." De Chambrun opens his argument with a comparative table, pointing out that the collective Jewish population of Belgium, Czechoslovakia, Greece, Holland, Poland, Yugoslavia and Austria declined from a 1939 figure of 4,116,000 to 239,000 in 1946. In France on the other hand there were 330,000 Jews of whom "about half were foreigners." In 1946 there were about 180,000 Jews, of whom 160,000 were French. In other words, according to de Chambrun, "Pierre Laval and his aides, and notably the admirable corps of Prefects and their staffs, helped to save 95 percent of the French Jews, as well as kept a great many foreign Jews from being deported."²⁹

²⁸ David Carroll "What it Meant to be 'a Jew' in Vichy France: Xavier Vallat, State Anti-Semitism, and the Question of Assimilation," *SubStance* 87 (1998): 39-41.

²⁹ René de Chambrun, *Pierre Laval: Traitor or Patriot* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1984), 84-85.

This is a gross distortion of the reality and as Maxime Steinberg put it, “does one dare say ‘only a quarter – from 24 to 28 percent’” of French Jews were deported. Nonetheless, historians have subsequently tried to explain why this should have been the case. As Susan Zucotti puts it: “Insofar as the Vichy government and the French people cared about the roughly 59 percent of the Jews who were French, German security police felt obliged to respect their concern, at least in part and especially in Paris, where roundups had the largest potential audience...A full 30,000 Parisian Jews, mostly citizens, continued to live in the homes where they were registered...They were the beneficiaries of French police reluctance to arrest French Jews, of Parisian sensitivity to the sight of Germans making such arrests, and of Knochen’s dependency upon the French police in general.”³⁰ Thomas J. Laub suggested that geography and dispersal may have assisted French Jews to survive: “Although many French Jews lived in Paris, a substantial number fled before advancing German armies, scattered throughout the unoccupied zone, and found some refuge in the relative wilds of southern France.”³¹ Indeed the censuses of Jewish residents taken at intervals throughout the war attest to the wide dispersal of refugees.³² Others suggest that something as prosaic as the relative distances from Auschwitz to France or the Netherlands may have played a role, or the very nature of the occupation government. The best thing to have on your side may have been, as Primo Levi posited, simple luck.³³ Omer Bartov went so far as to argue that “[had] the Germans not been driven out of France by the Allies, the remaining Jews

³⁰ Susan S. Zucotti, “The Situation in France” in *The Holocaust and History: The Known, the Unknown, the Disputed, and the Reexamined*, ed. Michael Berenbaum (Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press, 2002), 501.

³¹ Thomas J. Laub, *After the Fall: German Policy in Occupied France, 1940-1944* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 220.

³² Zosa Szajkowski, “Glimpses on the history of Jews in occupied France” *Yad Washem studies on the European Jewish Catastrophe and Resistance* 2 (1958): 153.

³³ “A Conversation with Primo Levi by Philip Roth” in Primo Levi, *Survival in Auschwitz* (New York: Touchstone, 1996), 180.

would probably have also been murdered.”³⁴ In any case Laval’s largesse does not feature prominently as an explanation for survival. Darlan, for his part, did nothing to mitigate the inevitable outcome of his own policies. Jews were located, counted, and often interned ready for eventual deportation while he was premier. It comes as no surprise that on 2 June 1941 Hitler confided to Mussolini that “[among] the French, Darlan was undoubtedly the most reliable...Laval was an opportunist, while Pétain was an old man, who was entirely under the influence of his retinue.”³⁵

In 2010 Carolyn J. Dean published *Aversion and Erasure: The Fate of the Victim After the Holocaust*. In a chapter somewhat provocatively entitled “The Surfeit of Jewish Memory,” she deployed the arguments of Henry Rousso to the effect that while the Holocaust was important, it was not the only thing that happened during the Second World War:

Rousso famously outlined the collective symptoms of a nation, France, which had not worked through its relation to its collaborationist past. He later denounced the stubborn persistence of one of those symptoms, too much memory, and noted that the surfeit of memory about the Vichy period had become increasingly “Judeocentric.” He maintains that this “Judeocentrism” is a problem, because it “seeks to reread the entire history of the [Nazi] Occupation [of France] through [sic] the prism of anti-Semitism: While in our eyes, the anti-Jewish policy is a major aspect of the Occupation, it was at the time of the Occupation only one among many others, since the Jews were victims just like the others who had been persecuted or condemned. The fact that it may shock our conscience is one thing, but the notion that it should lead us to remake history is another; the anachronism consists of confusing the morality of posterity with the reality of the past.”³⁶

This dissertation has not been an attempt to vilify the French navy by overemphasizing a single part of its wartime experience. Rather it has been an attempt to restore the navy to a place in the

³⁴ Omer Bartov “The Proof of Ignominy: Vichy France’s Past and Presence,” *Contemporary European History* 7:1 (March 1998):117.

³⁵ *Documents on German Foreign Policy* (DGFP), series D, vol. XII (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1962), 943.

³⁶ Éric Conan and Henry Rousso, *Vichy: An Ever-Present Past*, trans. Nathan Bracher (Hanover, NH: University of New England Press, 1998), 202. Quoted in Carolyn J. Dean, *Aversion and Erasure: The Fate of the Victim After the Holocaust* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2010), 48-49.

narrative of the Vichy regime from which it has been conspicuously absent. That the navy may not have been more conservative or anti-Semitic than many of its civilian French counterparts is true. The problem arose however when it abrogated the power of civilian government and began, in the context of military defeat, to implement the ideas of the National Revolution without any civilian oversight. This was the obverse of the problem identified by Ian Roxborough:

In a complex political system, in which organizational actors such as the military necessarily have considerable bureaucratic autonomy, it is far from obvious how civilian political leaders can ensure that the military carries out their wishes.

He continues:

As Cohen, Feaver, Biddle and others demonstrate, we have been only too willing to allow a misconceived distinction between “politics” and “technical military matters” to dominate our thinking about war. This pernicious distinction has enabled the military – by claiming to be professionals – to assert a right to the monopolization of thought and action in this sphere. It is time that we stopped being complicit in this. The military monopoly on thinking about military matters would matter less if we could be assured that they would always act for the best. But this is a dangerous illusion.³⁷

How much more dangerous it was when civilian oversight of the military was replaced by a militarization of civilian society, as happened in Vichy under Darlan’s direction.

In 1955 Herbert Luethy observed: “Never was France more completely occupied with herself than during this period, when the future was sealed, the national fabric seemed to have been smashed to pieces, and every individual was left alone with himself and his picture of France...The object of France’s soliloquy during that pause in history was not the harsh fact of military defeat, but her own dreadful interior collapse; and so complete was the collapse of everything that had seemed to count that even contemplation was difficult.”³⁸ This is perhaps the climate Churchill had in mind when he wrote that Darlan “did not wholly comprehend the

³⁷ Ian Roxborough, “Thinking About War” *Sociological Forum* 19:3 (September 2004): 512, 526.

³⁸ Herbert Luethy, *France Against Herself* (New York: Praeger, 1955), 88-89.

moral significance of much that he did.”³⁹ No one was more aware than Churchill, however, that history had not paused but was surging forward under the malevolent direction of Nazi Germany. If the political climate of the times suited the navy, the very act of thinking that it was in charge of events, then, reveals that the French Navy was ill-equipped to take on the governing task it set itself. Adapted for the administration and defense of an Empire, it brought those experiences back to metropolitan France, even as it assisted in exporting racist authoritarianism to the colonies. It forgot that it was not the navy’s place to assist the German war effort. It forgot that it is not the purpose of a navy to organize government, to run the police, or to set up internment camps. It forgot that it is not the purpose of a navy to facilitate the genocidal tendencies of a victorious enemy. It forgot that it is not the purpose of a navy to decide who is a citizen. These are not the responsibility of sailors. It was in forgetting that they were ordinary sailors that they did so much harm.

³⁹ Winston S. Churchill, *The Hinge of Fate* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1986), 580.

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