



WER IST WALTER?

International Perspectives on
Resistance in Europe during
World War II

Edited by

Elma Hašimbegović, Nicolas Moll and Ivo Pejaković

Between Legalism and Convictions: The Langres' Section of Gendarmerie and the Resistance in 1944

Marius Hutinet

In recent decades, studies of French law enforcement's role during the German occupation have tended to partially omit the Gendarmerie's position in the Franco-German repression scheme.¹ Rural gendarmes, due to their profession and geographical situation – mainly operating in the countryside – had a vastly different experience of the war than the police. Intermingled amongst the local population, the men, living in brigades within villages, became the only representatives of the state's law enforcement in remote areas of the French countryside. Therefore, they inhabited a dualism between a collaborating hierarchy and the pressures exerted by the Resistance.

The case of the Langres' section of Gendarmerie, located in the Haute-Marne,² is a startling example of this balance, particularly in 1944. Its location in eastern France and the late liberation of the area in September 1944 imbued these gendarmes with unique historical characteristics and showcased several types of gendarmes' behaviours regarding the development and affirmation of organised resistance. The available sources for studying the Langres' gendarmerie section are both private and public. The official Gendarmerie certification files stored in the French Defence archives gather all forms filled after the war by gendarmes to justify their resistant past and obtain financial aid. Those files, linked to private archives and published – or unpublished – accounts of the history of the Haute-Marne's Resistance, allow us to build a typology of the gendarmes' engagement with the Resistance in 1944.

1 See: Claude Cazals, *La Gendarmerie sous l'Occupation* (Paris: La Musse, 1994).

2 Located on the road between Paris and southern Alsace, this rural department of 6.211 square kilometres was divided from 1940 to 1944 by the demarcation line between the occupied zone and the so-called German settlement area, in northeastern France, where the return of French evacuees was prohibited.

As well as looking at what it meant to be a gendarme during World War II in France, this paper looks at what commitment the Resistance represented for the profession and for these men as individuals. By focusing on one section of the departmental Gendarmerie, we will be able to investigate the complexity of defining the gendarmes' position related to the Resistance and collaboration.

The French Gendarmerie under German occupation

Before focusing on the gendarmes' involvement in the Resistance, it is crucial to highlight the gendarmes' professional culture and the dilemmas they faced as a result of the events of 1944.

On the eve of war: General organisation of the French Gendarmerie

As officially part of the army, the French Gendarmerie was under the War Ministry's direct authority through the National Gendarmerie Headquarters (*Direction Générale de la Gendarmerie nationale*). Those law enforcement forces were divided into several main groups, each of them with their own functions and missions throughout the territory. However, this paper's main focus is on a section of gendarmes belonging to the departmental Gendarmerie. These gendarmes were permanently settled in the heart of rural communities, including the ones covered by other types of police forces.³

Speaking in hierarchical terms, departmental Gendarmerie was divided on a geographical scale, each level being headed by an officer or a non-commissioned officer. This geographical division is represented by the below pyramid diagram, depicting the minister as head and gendarmes as the bottom of the hierarchy (*Fig. 1*).

This simplified diagram voluntarily omits the *Direction Générale*, which was directly affiliated with the Ministry of War and represents this authority on top of the pyramid. This hierarchical modelling appears as it would on all reports' headers, helping chiefs distinguish provenances and gendarmes identify their command chain, mainly for communication purposes.

3 Jean-Marc Berlières, "La gendarmerie en question au début du XX^e siècle", in *Gendarmerie, État et Société au XIX^e siècle*, ed. Jean-Noël Luc (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2002), 101.

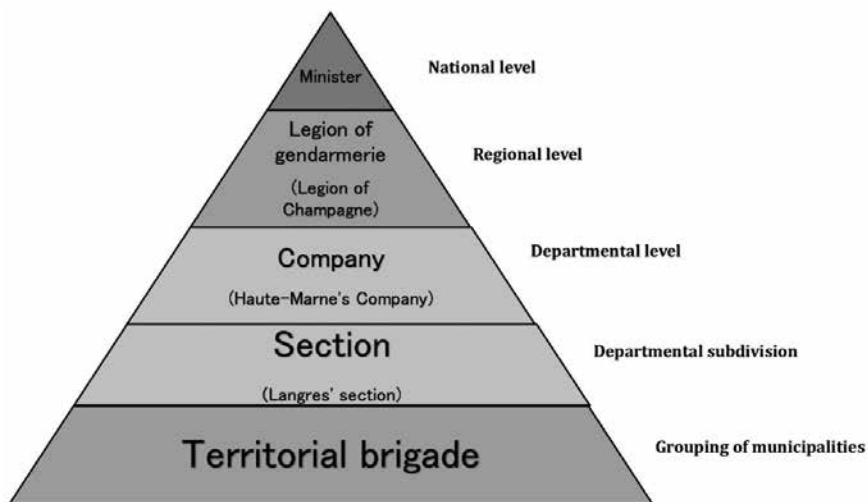


Fig. 1: Hierarchy of departmental Gendarmerie, based on geographical and authority criteria (before 1940). (Source: Author's elaboration, based on official archives, *Service Historique de la Défense*, Vincennes, France.)

In rural areas, gendarmes accomplished common law enforcement missions, all coordinated by brigade commanders holding either *Adjudant* or *Maréchal des logis-Chef* ranks, responding to the authority of their section superior and so on. In the field, they managed to ensure security among communities and inhabitants of their definite areas, operating road assignments, executing economic control, investigating acts of violence and routine patrolling. Despite their daily duty, gendarmes lived in a social and physical sphere distinct from the village or city community in which they were officially stationed. They had to keep a social distance from the latter to maintain relative objectivity during their investigations for the sake of legitimacy. Based on that social model, gendarmes had to minimise contact with external people and maintain, with their family, a rigid regimen of rules. Life inside barracks (*casernes*)⁴ was akin to lock-up for gendarmes and their families, leading historians to describe those places as true phalansteries.⁵ The ambivalent relationships between gendarmes and their social

4 *Caserne* is the common name used to describe the gendarmes' houses.

5 Marc Bergère, "Épouser un gendarme ou épouser la gendarmerie? Les femmes de gendarmes entre contrôle matrimonial et contrôle social", *CLIO, Histoire, femmes et sociétés*, n°20 (2004/2). Developed by the French philosopher Charles Fourier in the 19th century, the term phalanstery (*phalanstère* in French) means a large building structure conceived as self-contained living space for a community.

milieu, torn between institutionally imposed social isolation and visual exposure for all to see, made them both spectacle, subject and object of order.

The Gendarmerie, as previously presented, reveals itself as a tool for the French government to assert its influence on the national territory. However, this law enforcement group's structural organisation suffered the consequences of the 1940-1944 German occupation of France. As far as occupation is concerned, the conditions of the Gendarmerie's survival under Vichy's collaborating government and German authorities were constantly under negotiation, as gendarmes proved themselves useful in implementing Nazi and collaborationist policies in the country. This period was therefore marked by numerous changes in the corps' organisation.

New transformations

The German invasion of France in 1940 drastically changed the fate of law enforcement units. After the Armistice Commission held in Wiesbaden in 1940 and 1941, the agreement on keeping the departmental Gendarmerie effective both in the occupied and the non-occupied zones led to a wave of re-settlement of gendarmes in rural brigades, which had been cleared during the German invasion of May-June 1940. Limited in number – on a national level, around 40.000 men were allowed after the Commission, compared to 54.000 in August 1939⁶ – for strategic and security reasons, they experienced constant changes in their command chains from their return to *casernes* to the German withdrawal of 1944 summer.

During four years of occupation, a hierarchical struggle occurred between the German and Vichy administrations to control the departmental Gendarmerie. Firstly, concerning the Vichy government, the negotiations on keeping this unit effective led to an agreement to transfer the authority from the War Minister to the Ministry of the Interior, thus erasing all direct links between gendarmes and the army. On 2 June 1942, Vichy's chief of government, Pierre Laval, decreed the attachment of the Gendarmerie to his office.⁷ He therefore became the new head of police forces, including the Gendarmerie, which remained under his control until the end of

6 Jean-François Nativité, "La gendarmerie durant la Seconde Guerre mondiale: le piège d'un engagement légaliste", in *Le soldat volontaire en Europe au XX^e siècle. De l'engagement politique à l'engagement professionnel*, eds. Hubert Heyriès and Jean-François Muracciole (Montpellier: Presses de la Méditerranée, 2007), 3.

7 Cazals, *La Gendarmerie sous l'Occupation*, 101.

1943. However, Joseph Darnand's arrival as the head of the General Secretariat for Law Enforcement (*Secrétariat général au maintien de l'ordre*)⁸ on 1 January 1944 marked the ultimate fascist turnaround of Vichy's forces and deepening collaboration between German and French security units. This new title, specially created for the fanatical French Waffen-SS, allowed Darnand to lead the entire French police and Gendarmerie corps.

Secondly, German occupying forces placed themselves above the whole French hierarchical scheme. On the French side, at a local level, prefects became the direct superiors of their departmental gendarme's units, bringing them to refer all activities to the state official. More directly, gendarmes had to report to the German administration, depending on the case they investigated, addressing their documents to both the Military Commander in France (*Militärbefehlshaber in Frankreich*) and Security Police (*Sicherheitspolizei*).⁹ This link allowed the German Intelligence and administration to gather a maximum of information about their "enemies", French public opinion and all elements that might have allowed them to secure their position and if needed, to strengthen repression. Gendarmes experienced double hierarchical pressure – triple if adding their proper direct superiors (section commander, company commander and so on) – considering that other law enforcement units such as the *Milice*¹⁰ defied them increasingly.

These changes in how the departmental Gendarmerie engaged with German forces impacted public perception of the gendarmes. As the Vichy regime's popularity declined, especially from 1943, so did that of the gendarmes. From the end of 1942, the sending of young French men to Germany as forced labourers under the Compulsory Labour Service (*Service du Travail Obligatoire* – STO) laws – officially adopted in February 1943 – resulted in a significant drop in people's confidence in the Vichy regime. This measure led many of those men to enter clandestine lives, hiding in forests and farms, thus initiating the appearance of secret camps known as *maquis*. This increase in desertion forced police forces to intervene and searching for fugitives became one of the gendarme's main activities. Gendarmes' participation in such actions led to the development of a general defiance

8 The General Secretariat for Law Enforcement was head of all French repression forces from January 1944.

9 These organisations represented the heads of German repression forces in occupied France.

10 The French *Milice*, initiated by Joseph Darnand in January 1943, were fascist law enforcement troops tasked with tracking enemies of the Vichy regime and German occupying forces, such as Resistance members or even Jewish people.

towards them, given how unpopular those laws were. Consequently, some agents decided to slow down investigations or divert the attention of overzealous colleagues. Such defiance gradually became a general pattern in 1943-1944 France. As a result, their superiors, especially Joseph Darnand in 1944, became more and more suspicious of gendarmes and doubtful of their ability to follow increasingly fanatical orders.

To raise the impacts of the occupation on a departmental scale, working on the Langres section of Gendarmerie illustrates those changes at a microhistorical scale. It also provides insights, at an individual or a brigade level, into the gendarme's position towards their hierarchy and their social environment.

At the departmental level: The Langres' Gendarmerie section under the occupation

The German occupation's impacts did not bypass the Langres' section gendarmes, individually or as a group. German meddling in the Gendarmerie's internal affairs profoundly reshaped the professional attitudes and habits that the institution used to teach to its men. At a local level, this influence can be seen by studying gendarmes' professional activities in 1944.

Adding the occupier's administration to the equation highly weakened the institution in the field. From then on, men became trapped between, on the one hand, Germans and their thirst for information about their "enemies" and on the other hand, Vichy's administration, which accentuated the surveillance over men who became less and less inclined to carry out the most compromising missions in the public eye. The hardening of rules and controls by the occupier and the Vichy regime resulted in the progressive weakening of the gendarme's power on the field. In southern Haute-Marne, several incidents caused by German soldiers, either killings, stealing, or other kinds of violence, led to investigations of the gendarmes. Between 28 March and 25 August 1944, 25 reports were written by the section's personnel.¹¹ Considering that these reports were sent to German services, gendarmes, in that case, acted more as informants than police agents, considering that they directly sent these reports to German services. This

11 Data obtained from a self-elaborated database gathering reports found at Defence Historical Service/ *Service Historique de la Défense* (Vincennes) – SHD, GD 52 E and at the Haute-Marne's departmental archives/ *Archives départementales de la Haute-Marne* (Chamarandes-Choignes), 342 W.

situation at a brigade level can also be seen at the section level. When studying the section commander's registers, it appears that gathering information transmitted by the brigadiers¹² remained the main subject pointed out.

As such, the Gendarmerie experienced a loss of capacity. On Vichy's side, the pressure over gendarmes appears pivotal to the war's end in France. As a distrust progressively developed between gendarmes and the *Secrétariat général*, the latter reduced and/or seized the provision of resources needed to operate a reliable service. For example, on 9 June 1944, Captain Pierre Stanguennec, leading the section, pointed out that at Chalindrey's brigade, only five pistols were available between eight men.¹³ In a context of extensive sabotages and attacks in the lead up to the summer of 1944's fights for liberation, scenarios such as these prevented gendarmes from defending themselves against better armed partisan groups.

Adopting a new lens to studying the gendarmes' informative mission leads to the next point about how to understand some gendarmes' involvement in resistance. Reading registers written by Stanguennec or brigade heads shows that agents tended to become spokespersons for the villagers, highlighting their concerns and opinions on various subjects. It is easy to imagine that, to get all that information, gendarmes had to take part in discussions and that they established contact with their fellow citizens. In some cases, the captain reported that most of Langres brigade's gendarmes stayed at locals' houses in March 1944.¹⁴ Those hypothetical relationships between them and their neighbours or landlords probably led them to, consciously or not, be aware of the wide range of opinions, not to mention the Resistance. There is no doubt that this, along with other factors, led, for example, to an apprehension of obeying some orders by Germans or Vichy's regime such as tracking the *réfractaires*, as people dodging STO draft orders were called. The main question, then, is for a gendarme, was disregarding orders a concrete act of resistance at any point?

12 In this context, another name is used to define the gendarmes.

13 SHD, GD 52 E 46, section de Langres – registre de correspondance confidentielle au départ – 5 novembre 1940 au 7 juillet 1944, le capitaine Stanguennec (Pierre) commandant la section aux commandants des brigades de la section, 9 juin 1944.

14 SHD, GD 52 E 46, section de Langres, registre de correspondance confidentielle au départ, 5 novembre 1940 au 7 juillet 1944, rapport du Capitaine Stanguennec, (Pierre), commandant la Section de Langres sur l'état d'esprit du personnel de la section, 29 mars 1944.

Being a gendarme in the Resistance: Implications and levels of involvement

Before narrowly focusing on the Langres' Gendarmerie section, it is important to study and consider the different levels of gendarmes' involvement with the Resistance. These levels ranged from active to rather passive engagement. When faced with the choice of supporting the Resistance or not, it appears that these men wrestled with several problems of conscience, torn between professional obligations and sometimes, personal convictions.

Breaking a professional vow

For this point, it is necessary to focus on the personal and professional implications of gendarmes' involvement. The first factor to consider when studying gendarmerie and the Resistance is the strong opposition between these two elements. When a gendarme decided to join the Resistance, his choice implied a brutal rupture between him and his institution. One of the first consequences was abandoning the inherent notion of "corps". From the beginning of their career as interns, gendarmes learned to live as a particular group and developed forms of solidarity and group consciousness of their own. Belonging to the institution as a group was constantly remembered and officially settled by an oath.¹⁵ Considering that most gendarmes began their career at an early stage of their life, it strengthened the difficulty of changing their lifestyle and choosing a path diametrically opposed to the one they had previously followed: obedience.

In addition to breaking their oath, involvement with the Resistance led them to dispute and reconsider the missions they regularly undertook. From its creation, the Gendarmerie had an important role in "the dissemination of the national idea, in the construction of the State and the permanent exercise of its authority".¹⁶ As such, gendarmes were in charge of establishing standards in remote areas where they were assigned.¹⁷ The German occupation structurally disorganised the previous missions, as well as the state's principles and standards. Stating this, in the case of a desertion in

15 Nativité, "Gendarmerie Guerre", 6.

16 Alain Corbin, "Un objet historique aux multiples facettes", in *Gendarmerie, État et Société au XIX^e siècle*, ed. Jean-Noël Luc (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2002), 486.

17 Ibid.

favour of the Resistance, those gendarmes who had to ensure the political continuity of the regime were finally denying it and participating in its falling, constituting the ultimate defiance to their home institution.

Further reflection on the implications of desertion deals with a more personal dimension, considering the gendarme as a citizen and not a member of his professional group. On a private level, breaking with the institution meant several consequences, each underscoring the idea of professional and personal risk-taking. Quitting a prestigious institution to live a clandestine life, in addition to being considered an act of treason, represents a risky decision, often compared to “crossing the Rubicon”.¹⁸ This idea of a point of no return is particularly applied to the family situation of the gendarmes who, as well as leaving their institution and colleagues, abandoned their families. This left the families in growing danger of possible arrest by German troops or French police.¹⁹ Adopting a clandestine lifestyle implied periodic visits and inquiries by the occupiers, leaving families in permanent fear of repression measures against them.²⁰ It shows how their professional situation interfered with their personal lives, as deserting a brigade was not discreet and was quickly notified by the authorities, leading to a series of actions, even against family members, like investigations, search raids and interrogations.

Previous research, seeking to point out those keys to understand the implications of gendarmes' involvement, focused on professional consequences, leaving out one crucial factor of desertion: the weight of public opinion.

The weight of public opinion

Since the 19th century, as most French regimes were centralised, rural communities rarely established contact with the state's representatives, who mainly remained in an external social position. The gendarme's absence during the slaughter in the village of Hautefaye in 1870 exemplifies the lack of law enforcement presence in remote areas such as, in this case, Périgord, in southwestern France.²¹ In this situation, representatives of the

18 Nativité, “Gendarmerie Guerre”, 6.

19 Ibid.

20 “Certificate from Madeleine Hutinet,” 8 mars 1948, Hutinet family archives.

21 Alain Corbin, *Le village des cannibales*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Flammarion, 2009). In his work, Alain Corbin asked the question of the role of law enforcement forces in the slaughter of a young noble by local peasants in the village of Hautefaye. Apparently, gendarmes of this area did not intervene as they were unable to react effectively due to a lack of communication and means.

state's legitimate violence did not directly operate in front of the rural population. However, these relationships between rural people and authorities were entirely reconsidered and transformed during the occupation.²² The strong presence of German soldiers in remote areas led the inhabitants to develop a consciousness about a political situation that, this time, directly concerned them. Through this involvement process within the wartime context, rural communities' thoughts on the Resistance formed and spread. Measuring the actions of German troops and Vichy's regime – who, from 1942, forced young men to work in Germany – public opinion started to evaluate the potential of armed struggle, amplified by an increase in reprisals against the population.²³ From then on, a form of solidarity was silently settled between resisting groups and rural communities, leading to the establishment of a supportive network of good exchanges and concealment of information.²⁴ The popular defence of clandestine groupings fighting against the occupier or those who hid from the STO's recruitment logically did not go along with the tracking operated by French and German police, including gendarmes. However, this defiance is not the only factor to understand the complexity of relationships between gendarmes and people living in rural areas. Thus, studying historical representations of gendarmes in French society and confronting it with the evolution of Vichy's regime image in public opinion can constitute a new mode of understanding.

The image of the Gendarmerie is central to the force's concerns. Since the 19th century, its military aspect helped to differentiate it from the "obscure" French police.²⁵ However, this situation changed during World War II and the Gendarmerie's role in the repression overturned this status. As the regime sank deeper into fascism and collapsed, the negative representation of the Vichy regime spread to its representatives on the field. The increase of the Resistance's actions in 1944 against gendarmes or other state

22 Despite the increase in the number of gendarmes – from 24.000 in 1870 to 40.000 in 1940, an increase of 66.67% – the occupation imposed new difficulties on the ex-Third Republic Gendarmerie. Challenges included a lack of communication between villages and authorities, which can be seen in Hautefaye's case.

23 Harry R. Kedward, *In Search of the Maquis: Rural Resistance in Southern France 1942-1944* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 117.

24 Pierre Laborie, *L'opinion française sous Vichy*, 2nd ed. (Paris: éditions du Seuil, 2001), 308. This assertion is, of course, nuanced by betrayals and denunciation that these types of groups often experienced.

25 Jean-Pierre Chaline, "L'image du gendarme", in *Gendarmerie, État et Société au XIX^e siècle*, ed. Jean-Noël Luc (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2002), 485.

institutions strengthened the feeling that the state was dying. This is partly why, progressively, the Resistance tried to isolate gendarmes from the rest of the regime's forces.²⁶ Nevertheless, other reasons encouraged gendarme recruitment within clandestine forces, linkable with their position as militaries.

Isolating and recruiting members from Gendarmerie's ranks benefited the Resistance, who gained access to new information and limited weaponry. For dissemination, clandestine press and brochures were used extensively in order to carry out recruitment. For this purpose, the National Front for the Liberation of France (*Front National de lutte pour la libération de la France*)²⁷ published, from 1942 onwards, a leaflet entitled "Aux Gendarmes!", calling them to join the Resistance. In this document, writers established a list of possible resisting acts doable by Vichy's law enforcement men:

Turn away when the patriots act: warn those you know when a danger (search, investigation, arrest) threatens them; help those who are arrested to flee; avoid carrying out rigorous controls; let the peasants deliver nothing to the requisitions; let the townsfolk stock up freely. On the contrary, look for every opportunity to harm the collaborators; tear off their masks of false honesty; arrest their leaders who steal petrol, drive without an S.P., and indulge in black-market activities.²⁸

This list emphasises the gendarmes' potential integration into the Resistance's ranks. On the one hand, gendarmes would allow resisting forces to interfere with the ongoing repression against them and other "enemies" of the Germans. On the other hand, they were asked to directly attack Vichy's supporters in the field, using the legitimate power to "harm" them. The rest of the flyer, filled with threats about consequences of collaborating acts for

26 Laborie, *Opinion Française*, 309-310.

27 The National Front for the Liberation of France was a resistance organisation created by the French Communist Party.

28 Departmental Archives of Haute-Marne/*Archives départementales de la Haute-Marne* (Chama-randes-Choignes) – ADHM, 342 W 298, inscriptions et tracts de propagande des mouvements de Résistance ou des armées alliées: instructions, procès-verbaux d'enquêtes et correspondance avec les autorités françaises et allemandes (24 octobre 1940-14 juillet 1944), tract " Aux Gendarmes ! ", undated. S.P. stands for *permis special*, special authorization, which was necessary for driving a car.

gendarmes who would follow Pétain's regime until the end, constitutes a pamphlet against those "traitors and cowards". This document is a vector of the Resistance's ambivalent thoughts on gendarmes. The Resistance considered gendarmes to be perfect recruits, but at the same time, threatened those who would refuse to join their ranks.

This non-exhaustive list remains, however, optimistic, observing that most French gendarmes did not get involved in direct fights before the summer of 1944.²⁹ However, it provides the researcher with information on the several degrees of involvement in the Resistance between 1940 and 1944.

Levels of commitment

"We are not talking about the resistance of the Gendarmerie but the resistance of a certain number of gendarmes".³⁰ This quote sums up the situation of Gendarmerie and clandestine fighters during the war and settles the difference between those men's individual and collective involvement in the Resistance. Gendarmes resisting as a group represented a minority of those involved, as most of these cases were observable during the last fights of the liberation on a national scale.³¹ Before this period, gendarmes decided to get involved individually, joining groups or as informants or helping the *maquis*. Among 267 fighting networks registered among the Fighting French Forces (*Forces Françaises Combattantes*),³² none were specific to the Gendarmerie.³³ However, to nuance this monopoly of individual commitment, it must be specified that brigades tended to react collectively about the STO situation and largely ignored the presence of *réfractaires* in their constituency. This reaction was heterogeneous and depended on many contextual factors.³⁴ Brigades were told to begin the surveillance of young men in 1943. Some brigadiers, however, decided to prevent arrests of

29 Cazals, *Gendarmerie sous l'Occupation*, 237.

30 Jean-Marc Berlières, *Polices des temps noirs, France, 1939-1945* (Paris: Perrin, 2018), 443.

31 Emmanuel Chevet, "Gendarmerie et maquis en France sous l'Occupation (1943-1944): Force est faiblesse" (PhD dissertation, Université de Bourgogne, 2001).

32 The Fighting French Forces gathered the Free French Forces (*Forces Françaises Libres* – FFL), organised outside France, and clandestine networks of the French Forces of the Interior (*Forces Françaises de l'Intérieur* – FFI), in occupied France.

33 Berlières, *Polices*, 443.

34 Limore Yagil, *Désobéir: des policiers et des gendarmes sous l'occupation* (Paris: Nouveau monde éditions, 2019), 279.

réfractaires and facilitate their placement in farms or other safe places, such as the brigade of Beaumont-Hague in Normandy.³⁵ In this way, some gendarmes began slowing down investigations.³⁶ Concerning armed Resistance, some contacts were established between gendarmes and clandestine groups, allowing direct information sharing between them. Near Limoges, the Eymoutiers and Châteauneuf brigades built an informational network with nearby *maquis*, thus settling a *modus vivendi* between both groups.³⁷

Another type of action in favour of the Resistance was, paradoxically, inaction. As resisting groups were founded and started to develop, armed attacks against gendarmes became more and more frequent. As mentioned before, the lack of resources prevented brigadiers from reacting and defending themselves, which incited them to surrender to those groups, sometimes before the first shot. The recurrence of these events brought the *Secrétariat général* to adopt new measures to avoid normalising such acts. On 31 January 1944, Joseph Darnand published a circular defining sanctions applied to gendarmes who did not defend themselves.³⁸ The sanctions ranged from formal warnings to imprisonment. Additionally, on 15 June 1944, special courts were created to judge such passive actions.³⁹

The Langres' Gendarmerie section in the Resistance: Convictions and obligations

As mentioned in the introduction, the sources collected to study the Langres' Gendarmerie section allow us to establish a typology of the gendarmes' behaviour, divided into two main attitudes, reflecting individual and collective involvements. This tool helps analyse the paths of those men in the Resistance and interrogate the concept of the "grey zone" of Resistance linked to this chapter.

35 Yagil, *Désobéir*, 279.

36 Berlières, *Polices*, 440.

37 Fabrice Grenard, *Une légende au maquis: Georges Guingouin, du mythe à l'histoire* (Paris: Vendémiaire, 2014), 183.

38 ADHM, 342 W 171, Guerre 1939-1945 1928-1948 – Etat Français 1938-1948 – Ordre public 1938-1948 – Police 1940-1945 – Instructions et correspondance générale (22 février 1940-2 août 1944), le Secrétaire Général au maintien de l'ordre à Monsieur le Directeur Général de la Gendarmerie, 31 janvier 1944.

39 Chevet, "Gendarmerie et maquis", 537.

A minority of precursors

A distinct part of the gendarmes participated in the Resistance before the fights for the department's liberation in September 1944. Such participation included both direct actions and less significant or direct ones. Without judging which behaviour is better than the others, it is possible to designate three categories among them. The notion of silence frames the first category. As previously written, STO's laws had a national effect on gendarmes, including in the Haute-Marne, where many Parisian *réfractaires* were hiding in farms, establishing the first *maquis* of the department, as for example near the commune of Plesnoy. After the war, assisting *réfractaires* or blocking information about their presence was one of the main arguments used by the gendarmes to try to demonstrate their action in favour of the Resistance and thus to secure their future within the post-war *épuration* process.⁴⁰ On 7 December 1944, Adjudant Pointot, commander of Chalindrey's brigade, wrote a report on his and his men's activity before their general desertion to the *maquis* at the end of August 1944.⁴¹ Of the 22 activities listed by Pointot, half consisted of assistance to *réfractaires* by dissimulating their presence to German authorities. Between 11 April and 6 June 1944, the brigades of the section redacted eight investigative reports about the presence of fugitives, all concluded by unsuccessful searches. Despite this general tendency, one brigade remained under serious suspicion after the Liberation, as gendarmes of Laferté-sur-Amance reported the arrest of many fugitives in 1944, thus making it impossible to establish a general conclusion about a shared role in helping the *réfractaires*.

As rumours of a close liberation spread, some gendarmes progressively established contact with the Resistance in the area, fearing direct fights with the latter. This case is pointed out by Captain Stanguennec, who stated on 28 June 1944 that the weakening of the gendarmerie implies, in case of a direct fight with an armed group, that "if there is a reaction, it may be an unequal fight, one against ten".⁴² The case of individual gendarmes participating

40 France experienced a wave of legal and extra-legal cleansing after liberation to punish and judge those who, during the war, collaborated with the German occupier.

41 SHD, GD 52 E 136, brigade territoriale de Chalindrey (section de Langres), registres de correspondance courante au départ, 1 février 1944 au 4 août 1945, compte rendu de l'Adjudant Pointot commandant la brigade sur les services rendus à la Résistance par le personnel avant d'aller au maquis, 7 décembre 1944.

42 SHD, GD 52 E 46, *Ibid.*, rapport du Capitaine Stanguennec (Pierre) Commandant la Section sur l'état d'esprit du personnel de la Section, 28 juin 1944.

in meetings organised by the Resistance remained rare. George Erard from Chalindrey was the first gendarme of the section who participated in sabotage actions. On 10 June 1944, he and other resistance members destroyed Heuilley-Cotton's railway lines.⁴³ The certification files of the section's gendarmes⁴⁴ show that only five of them were officially recognised as resisting before 28 August 1944. However, according to the testimonies gathered for certification purposes, the 32 gendarmes registered in the Resistance Office's files mentioned actions before the collective defection to the *maquis*. Those fragile and unbalanced numbers can also be nuanced through "unofficial", i.e. personal testimonies, made by gendarmes of the area. Throughout the documents and readings, it becomes clear that not all men decided to demand compensation and thus never declared their actions to the state. For example, considering the two gendarmes arrested for hiding refractories and weapons possession on 23 May 1944, only Paul Bauduret officially registered for official certification after his return from deportation in Germany. In contrast, the second one, Gilbert Faucher, cannot be found within those files.

A collective movement?

On 17 August 1944, the first signs of potential group participation in the Resistance appeared. The arrest of ten gendarmes of the section, including the captain, by the German military police (*Feldgendarmarie*), marks the initiation of a link between the Resistance and the section's men. According to Stanguennec's report, this event led him to establish contacts with Lieutenant Henry, the leading commander of the Resistance in the southeast of Langres.⁴⁵

From this moment, the section remained under the Resistance's influence and waited until 28 August to collectively join the *maquis* in Bussières-lès-Belmont, following Henry's orders.⁴⁶ Thus, they adopted a

43 SHD, GR 16 P 210169, dossiers individuels du bureau Résistance, dossier individuel de Georges Énard.

44 Those certification files, compiled after the war, allowed the ex-members of the Resistance to obtain financial compensation as veterans.

45 SHD, GD 52 E 42, section de Langres, registre de correspondance courante au départ, 18 septembre 1944 au 22 juin 1945, rapport du capitaine Stanguennec, Pierre, commandant la section sur la participation de la section à la Résistance, 28 décembre 1944.

46 *Maquis* designs resistance groups in rural areas, often hiding in forests. Members of these resistance groups were called *maquisards*.



Fig. 2: The Bagnotte's forest house, prison of the *maquis* (around 1980).
(Source: Hutinet family archives, Paris.)

clandestine lifestyle, living in the Bussières forest and facing the social and political heterogeneity of the *maquisards'* community.⁴⁷ Their integration within the *maquis* provoked mixed reactions from members of the latter and gendarmes were dispatched in specific sectors, most of them placed in the periphery of the camp. Two missions were devoted to the gendarmes from their arrival. The first mission, linked to their professional skills, was the area's surveillance and prisoner custody, which mobilised most of the gendarme's force in the *maquis*.

After the prison's relocation from Bagnotte's house (*Fig. 2*) to another place outside the forest, gendarmes remained separated from the rest of the clandestine army. They thus constituted their proper organisation and built an annex of the main camp. Some took advantage of the situation to reconnect with their professional habitus by leading preliminary enquiries about their convicts to facilitate their official judgement after the Liberation and further their legitimacy in the clandestine world. The gendarmes' second task in the *maquis* was participating in armed attacks against the German troops stationed in the region. This concerned only a tiny minority of

⁴⁷ Stéphane Simonnet, *Maquis et maquisards. La Résistance en armes, 1942-1944* (Paris: Belin, 2017), 82.

gendarmes, but because of their military past, these gendarmes were often placed as leaders of the FFI fighting units.⁴⁸

Those two missions tend to show a partial integration of the gendarmes in the clandestine society in Bussières. The case of the last-minute switch of the Langres section to the Resistance emphasises the complexity of the gendarmes' collective involvement in the Resistance. On the one hand, it is necessary to point out that, as long as Allied troops remained far from the area, gendarmes were more useful within their brigades and allowed FFI organisations to collect precious information about the occupier or even about the activities of French law enforcement forces. The ambiguity remains in the small number of men who provided those elements to the Resistance and in those who were in direct and confident contact with the latter. On the other hand, the general decision to join a resisting group can also be considered as a moral switch between two legal authorities. As the Vichy regime and German troops were openly overwhelmed by events following the Normandy landing, the gendarmes were left to reconsider their legal hierarchy. On 21 July 1944, the Provisional Government (*Gouvernement Provisoire*)⁴⁹ created a new Gendarmerie's Direction, directly under its command. This official statement allowed law enforcement personnel to embrace a new legitimate institution. In that case, their shift under the De Gaulle administration's ruling can be seen as an official switch and not a statement in favour of the Resistance. This interpretation reflects the difficulty of labelling gendarmes as *Résistants* or collaborators. For those of the Langres section, the real motivation seems to have stemmed more from a group effect, led by men close to the Resistance groups, than from the concrete patriotic impulse that some individuals expressed.

Dealing with the “grey zone”: The case of Captain Pierre Stanguennec

As said above, it seems impossible to categorise this group if seen as a whole. This difficulty exemplifies Primo Levi's concept of the “grey zone”.⁵⁰ The profiles' plurality and complexities prevents the construction of a definite

48 For FFI, see footnote 32 above.

49 After the end of the Vichy regime, a provisional government was created in order to restore the Republic.

50 Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, 2nd ed. (New-York: Summit Books, 1988).

conclusion about behaviours as, in most cases, they were subject to evolution depending on general and local contexts. Establishing contact with the Resistance before the collective passage of the section to the *maquis* did not mean that those men always tended to support it, as shown in the case of Captain Pierre Stanguennec. Studying his actions demonstrates the complexity of that type of profile regarding his position during the Occupation.

Captain Stanguennec's 1944 can be divided into four phases based on his behaviour *vis-à-vis* the Resistance. The first phase, encompassing the first six months of this year, can be defined as a professional period marked by devotion and obedience to his hierarchy. Thus, a report addressed by the captain to the legion commander assessed the "beautiful" and successful operations led by the brigades, leading to the capture of five individuals affiliated with the Resistance in January 1944.⁵¹ Completing this report, he mentioned that the general activity of the brigades has been essentially centred on "terrorist" investigations.

Is it during the second phase, between June and August 1944, that the complexity appeared. During those months, some elements make the historian believe that the officer began to build links with the Resistance. In a report to his hierarchy from 28 December 1944, Stanguennec mentioned that he established contacts with the chief of Resistance in August 1944, probably after his own arrest by German police, alongside some gendarmes. However, this story can be reconsidered through Stanguennec's certification files compiled after the war to prove his actions in favour of the Resistance. Inside this file, the first document mentions that he participated in the Resistance starting in July 1943. However, his official certification file recognises his acts as a resistor from his desertion to the *maquis* from 28 August to 13 September 1944. About his arrival in the *maquis*, it is also mentioned in many accounts by his former clandestine comrades that he ordered his men to join the *maquis* in Bussières as a group on 27 August. As these sources are contradictory, it is most probable that after his arrest, he established contact with the Resistance to secure both his own position and that of his men.

The third phase corresponds to his life in the *maquis* and his actions as a commander, from 28 August to 14 September, instilling military discipline

51 SHD, GD 52 E 41, section de Langres – registre de correspondance courante au départ – 18 février au 25 août 1944, rapport du capitaine Stanguennec, commandant la section de Langres, sur la physionomie de la circonscription, 18 février 1944.

inside the clandestine group. As such, his authority brought him to a position close to the one he had when he commanded the section. In doing so, it is arguable that utilising the Resistance as a bridge, Stanguennec aimed to secure a passage between one legal authority, the Vichy government, to another, the *Gouvernement provisoire*, as explained above. As such, he managed to secure the actions of his men from accusations of collaboration by suggesting that they always followed the path of legalism.

The last phase corresponds to his return as the section commanding officer in the newly restored republic. During the *épuration* period, investigations regarding his acts were launched without negative conclusions for his position.

The Stanguennec case raises the question of the “grey zone” in the particular context of late participation in Resistance – a bit more than 15 days actively in the field. It also shows the difficulty in defining what can be considered patriotic or not, especially in the case of this profession, which demanded blind obedience to the orders and the chief of state. However, it is possible to state that, through his relationship with the chief of the local Resistance, Stanguennec managed to obey a new legitimate authority and, in doing so, he did not break the gendarmes’ vow of obedience.

Conclusion

The rural Gendarmerie’s position during World War II reveals itself to be paradoxical and the role of gendarmes in the Resistance is constantly thrown into doubt. Unlike other law enforcement units, this group adopted a general behaviour that largely depended on the context of the ongoing war, as the case of the Langres’ section shows. However, the Langres’ section’s case points out a new challenge in studying French law enforcement forces under the German occupation. This chapter, despite using the “grey zone” concept as a basis, reveals the complexity of applying such a reflection to a subject in which the studied group reveals itself as heterogeneous as a clandestine society can be, mixing a tiny minority of staunch patriots with a majority of unconvinced followers. As such, this paper should be a start to a complete redefinition of Primo Levi’s concept to find a new notion that would better be applied to the history of this type of actor.

WER IST WALTER?

Resistance against Nazism, fascism, occupation and collaboration occurred throughout Europe during World War II. But how much do we know about this history in other European countries? Gathering 32 contributions and case studies on the history of this resistance, as well as on its transmission after 1945, especially in museums, the present book is an invitation to look at resistance in Europe in an interdisciplinary, international, transnational and comparative perspective. It is the result of the international research project “Wer ist Walter? Resistance against Nazism in Europe” which gathered historians, curators and other researchers mainly from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, France and Germany.



HISTORIJSKI MUZEJ
BOSNE I HERCEGOVINE

crossborder
factory



cife

SPOMEN PODRUČJE **jasenovac** MEMORIAL SITE

Funded by:



Federal Ministry
of Finance



Foundation
evz Remembrance
Responsibility
Future

on the basis of a decision
of the Bundestag



9 789958 956980