

# 1 The Prisoners of War and the German Women

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## The French

Approximately 1.55 million French POWs came to Germany following the defeat of the western powers in May and June 1940. Close to one million of them were still in Germany in 1945.<sup>1</sup> The situation of French POWs in Nazi Germany was peculiar. As a part of the armistice agreement signed on June 22, 1940, France had to release all of its German prisoners while Germany kept its French POWs until a peace treaty was signed. The French government therefore had no direct reciprocity – the option to retaliate against POWs if the enemy mistreats its captives.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, the French government in Vichy adopted a policy of collaboration with Nazi Germany. The fact that Germany decided to retain its French POWs was crucial for this decision, and I have argued elsewhere that collaboration became a substitute reciprocity: major violations of the Geneva Convention would have threatened collaboration and involved a significant cost for Germany.<sup>3</sup> The importance of the POW question for Marshall Philippe Pétain and his government is evident in the fact that Pétain already in August 1940 selected Georges Scapini, a right-wing World War I veteran, as his special ambassador for POW questions. Scapini, blinded in battle in 1915, had been involved in Franco-German veterans' reunions and presided over a mutual friendship group directed by Otto Abetz, Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop's expert on

<sup>1</sup> For a brief survey of French POWs in Nazi Germany, see Overmans, "Kriegsgefangenenpolitik," 758–72. Most French POWs who returned home during the war benefited from the *relève*, an agreement that placed three civilian laborers at the disposal of German industry in exchange for one POW.

<sup>2</sup> For basic considerations on the role of reciprocity in POW matters (the "mutual hostage factor"), see Simon Paul MacKenzie, "The Treatment of Prisoners of War in World War II," *The Journal of Modern History* 66, no. 3 (1994): 495–7, 516.

<sup>3</sup> Raffael Scheck, "The Prisoner of War Question and the Beginnings of Collaboration: The Franco-German Agreement of 16 November 1940," *Journal of Contemporary History* 45, no. 2 (2010).

France. Abetz became *de facto* German ambassador in Paris. Scapini had met Hitler on two occasions before the war. According to Abetz, Hitler was deeply moved by his encounter with Scapini, perhaps on account of the temporary blindness that Hitler himself had experienced as a result of poison gas in 1918. Scapini, who spoke German quite well, became the key figure in French negotiations on POWs.<sup>4</sup>

The Geneva Convention arranged for a protecting power, normally a neutral country, to monitor the situation of the POWs and observance of the Convention (article 86). The first protecting power of the French (and also the Belgian and British) POWs was the United States. The American embassy in Berlin, under the direction of a chargé d'affaires – the United States had withdrawn its ambassador in protest against the anti-Jewish pogrom of November 9, 1938 – thus took over the inspection of the POW camps and the communication of grievances to the French government. The key official in this effort was the diplomat Jefferson Patterson. Patterson and the American consuls in the major German cities visited POW camps and worked hard to overcome the many shortcomings of the first months.<sup>5</sup>

As relations between Germany and the United States were deteriorating in the fall of 1940 because of the pro-British attitude of the American government, Hitler in early November 1940 demanded that the Vichy government itself take over the role of protecting power. This was a highly unusual arrangement, but the Vichy authorities knew that opposing it would be risky and hoped to use to their own advantage the more direct contact to the prisoners that the role of protecting power promised. Hitler indicated his willingness to reward Vichy's compliance with several concessions, among them the release of fathers and oldest brothers from poor families with four children. Scapini and Pétain expected that France could alleviate the situation of the prisoners through the more direct channels of communication open to representatives of a protecting power, and they also hoped to influence the prisoners politically and to win them over to the policies of Pétain. In the context of the personal meeting of Pétain and Hitler in Montoire at the end of October 1940, the Vichy authorities expected that collaboration would result in a series of liberations and improvements for the prisoners.<sup>6</sup>

With the Franco-German agreement of November 16, 1940, France assumed the role of protecting power for its own soldiers in German

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 367–8.

<sup>5</sup> Raffael Scheck, *French Colonial Soldiers in German Captivity during World War II* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 45–53.

<sup>6</sup> Scheck, "The Prisoner of War Question," 374–5.

captivity. Scapini, who already had headquarters in Paris, set up an office in Berlin and hired a group of camp inspectors who visited camps and labor detachments in Germany. Members of the Scapini Mission regularly met with German officials in Paris and Berlin to present grievances and to negotiate further liberations and improvements. Scapini developed a cordial relationship with the German official in charge of POWs, General Hermann Reinecke of the High Command, as well as with Reinecke's representative in Paris and the principal accompanying officer during camp inspections. Major new rewards from Germany did not materialize, however, although Hitler agreed to some limited liberations in exchange for French concessions (World War I veterans, for example). When French general Henri Giraud escaped from German captivity in April 1942, Hitler flew into a fit of rage and suspended all agreements benefiting French POWs and even some rights of the prisoners and the protecting power guaranteed by the Geneva Convention (such as camp inspections and the repatriation of sick prisoners). Scapini, deeply worried about the threat to the POWs, implored Giraud to return into captivity and offered himself as a hostage to Hitler until Giraud returned, but Hitler rejected the offer. Scapini noticed, however, that Reinecke and other German officials ignored or watered down many of Hitler's directives, and after a few months the usual contacts and inspections resumed. In March 1943, Reinecke told Scapini in confidence that he had quietly cancelled the last of Hitler's vindictive ordinances.<sup>7</sup>

The substitution of France for the United States as protecting power eased the handling of complaints and shortcomings and offered Vichy better and timelier access to information about the POWs, but it deprived French prisoners of the protection of a neutral power. Scapini eloquently defended the agreement during his postwar trials and in his memoirs.<sup>8</sup> Scapini was probably right in arguing that the direct contacts between the French and German POW officials offered some advantages and that there would have been no real alternative to Vichy taking over as its own protecting power, especially after the American entry into the war in December 1941. The French and Belgian POWs shared the disadvantage that their country was defeated and occupied by Germany. While the Belgian POWs retained the services of the American embassy in Berlin until December 1941, it is dubious that they fared better than the French. After Pearl Harbor, Germany refused to accept a new

<sup>7</sup> "Entretien Scapini-Reinecke," March 18, 1943, in Archives nationales, Pierrefitte-sur-Seine (AN), F9, 2176.

<sup>8</sup> Georges Scapini, *Mission sans gloire* (Paris: Editions Morgan, 1960), 31–2.

protecting power for the Belgians, and this might have happened to the French POWs had Vichy refused to take on this role.

The severe penalties for contacts between POWs and civilians irked French officials, given that the two governments were collaborating. In his talks with Reinecke and other German officials, Scapini repeatedly questioned the prohibition and sought to mitigate its effects, for example by suggesting milder sentences and by working to improve conditions for the sentenced POWs. State collaboration was clearly undermining Nazi propaganda, which sought to stigmatize all POWs as enemies who could never be trusted. As Gaullist and British forces repeatedly attacked Vichy-controlled colonial territories, the Vichy government appeared as a friendly neutral, if not an ally. The fact that some French volunteers joined a Waffen-SS Division in 1942 and fought on the eastern front further bolstered the perception that the French were no longer enemies.<sup>9</sup> The integration of 95 percent of the French prisoners into the German economy, largely completed by the end of 1940, led to widespread acceptance and often appreciation of the French prisoners by the German population. On countless farms, the French prisoner filled the role of the absent farmer or of male helpers drafted into the German army. In many factories, French POWs became an indispensable labor force. Small businesses such as bakeries, beverage distributors, and public services, for example the construction departments of little towns, could not survive without them either.<sup>10</sup>

Trials for forbidden relations involving French prisoners began in earnest during the spring of 1941. Given that the French POW authorities numbered the court martial cases, one can detect the numerical trends despite the fact that the records are incomplete. Whereas a little more than 1,000 court martial cases had been recorded before the end of March 1941, including trials for crimes committed during the fighting in the west, 500 new cases accumulated in the half-year between April 1 and October 1, and more than 500 new cases came to trial in the last quarter of 1941 alone, with forbidden relations being the overwhelming majority after April 1, 1941. The pace continued to increase, reaching number 11,000 by the end of 1943, which meant that at least 9,000 new cases had come to trial in the two calendar years 1942 and 1943. Record-keeping became more precarious by the end of 1943 because the offices of the French delegation in Berlin were destroyed by bombs, necessitating a move to the village Letschin an der Oder, seventy-five kilometers east of

<sup>9</sup> Philippe Carrard, *The French Who Fought for Hitler: Memories from the Outcasts* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

<sup>10</sup> Durand, *Prisonniers de guerre*, 79–94, 241–6.

Berlin. Everything indicates that the intensity of courts martial remained very high throughout 1944 and early 1945, although hearings in the last months of the war often had to be postponed due to bombings and chaotic traffic conditions. An internal memorandum of the Scapini Mission stated in March 1944 that on average 450–500 new trials against French POWs occurred every month, which indicates an average of 5,000–6,000 trials per year, mostly for love relations. The number was so large that the budget of the Scapini Mission had to be increased significantly because it had to pay the attorney fees.<sup>11</sup> Although not all of the trials concerned forbidden relations, one has to consider that some love-related trials involved more than one prisoner. Given that the proportion of love-related trials against French POWs was between 75 and 80 percent, one can estimate that approximately 15,000 French POWs had to stand trial for forbidden relations in 1942–4. There was still a very large number of cases under prosecution in 1945 that did not lead to a verdict. The total number of French POWs facing prosecution for a forbidden relationship therefore was likely between 17,000 and 19,000.

For French POWs, as for all others, the discovered cases leading to prosecution form only the tip of the iceberg. One has to assume the existence of an unknown number of love relationships that never came to trial, especially in remote villages where communal solidarity and the farmers' fear of losing vitally important laborers may have created a camouflage net.<sup>12</sup> As a French POW priest noted with disgust in August 1943: "I know that in a certain village where 35 Frenchmen are working there are only three who are not sleeping with their farmwoman or a maid."<sup>13</sup> Ambrière also claimed that a large number of undiscovered or unprosecuted relations existed. He had met quite a few prisoners whose amorous affairs remained undiscovered or unpunished.<sup>14</sup>

Although soldiers of non-European descent were generally held in German POW camps in occupied France, the French captives in Germany mirrored much of the ethnic and national diversity of the French army. They included men with Polish, Italian, Spanish, or German ancestry, and some Jews. Some of these soldiers had French citizenship, others did not. The German military tribunals, as the Geneva

<sup>11</sup> "Note pour l'Ambassadeur," March 16, 1944, in AN, F9, 2185 (Affaires judiciaires).

<sup>12</sup> Kundrus, "Forbidden Company," 209; Jill Stephenson, *Hitler's Home Front: Württemberg under the Nazis* (London and New York: Hambledon Continuum, 2006), 285; Gisela Schwarze, *Es war wie eine Hexenjagd: Die vergessene Verfolgung ganz normaler Frauen im Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Münster: Ardey, 2009), 45 and 165.

<sup>13</sup> Virgili, *Naitre ennemi*, 56–8, 250. For more testimonies about widespread tolerated relationships, even in industrial work detachments, see Durand, *Captivité*, 418.

<sup>14</sup> Ambrière, *Les grandes Vacances*, 197.

Convention required, treated the prisoners according to their uniform and made no significant differences in punishing them. In one case a French Catholic and a Hungarian Jew serving in the French army had an affair with an innkeeper's wife in southern Germany, one after the other. The military judge, although clearly biased against the Jew, gave both prisoners exactly the same punishment.<sup>15</sup>

For the majority of French POWs, captivity had little to do with large camps surrounded by barbed wire and watchtowers with mean and trigger-happy guards, although all prisoners experienced this setting in the first months. After distribution to work detachments, guarding of most rank-and-file French prisoners relaxed, and they dealt mostly with German civilians. Being a POW meant for many of them primarily a legal and administrative status. Work detachments in industry and public works would be housed in a school, a restaurant or hotel that made little business during the war, or a hall on the factory grounds. The prisoners, in groups of ten to fifty, would sleep in these buildings, guarded by one or two German soldiers who mostly had to make sure that all POWs checked in for the night. Many of these guards, usually older or disabled men, were friendly and supportive. The sleeping quarters of the French POWs were not secured well. Prisoners often found a window that could be opened, or they produced a picklock that could open the door while the guard was sleeping. In some cases, women were even able to sneak into the sleeping quarters of the POWs.<sup>16</sup> On Sundays, many French POWs could go out freely without a guard. Regulations for the guarding of French and Belgian prisoners became more relaxed in 1941 and even more in 1943, when the manpower shortage of the German army increased due to the high losses on the eastern front.<sup>17</sup>

On many farms, one or two French prisoners would move in and work like a German farm laborer. This was true especially in the western and southern parts of the Third Reich, where small family farms predominated. Legally, the farmer was the supervisor and substitute "guard" of the

<sup>15</sup> Feldurteil, Memmingen, January 9, 1942, in Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes, Berlin (PAAA), R 40908.

<sup>16</sup> For an example, see the case of Marie K., Wiener Stadt- und Landesarchiv (WStLA), Sondergericht, vol. 6995. Marie K. visited the POW in his sleeping quarters and spent the night with him. A similar case is Helene A., in Landesarchiv Schleswig-Holstein, Schleswig (LASH), Abt. 358, Staatsanwaltschaft beim Sondergericht Altona/Kiel, vol. 2760.

<sup>17</sup> "Auflockerung der Bewachung kf. gef. Franzosen." Memo of the German High Command (OKW), October 3, 1941, in Niedersächsisches Landesarchiv (NLA) Oldenburg, Best. 135 B, and *Handbuch für Arbeitskommandoführer Wehrkreis XIII*, in AN, F9, 3644.

prisoner, but many farmers were drafted into the Wehrmacht, and the French prisoner often worked alone with the farmer's wife or daughter and a few employees, including a milkmaid and girls aged sixteen to eighteen performing their mandatory service year (*Pflichtjahr*).<sup>18</sup> Once the bombings of German towns increased, many farms would also house an evacuee from a big city, normally a woman, and often a mother with children. There were also some male employees on the farm, usually older farm laborers or *Schweizer* (experts in the handling of cattle). In many places, French POWs also worked alongside laborers from eastern Europe, particularly Poles and Ukrainians, mostly deported forced laborers (both male and female). Except in the two military districts XX and XXI (Danzig and Posen), POWs would not be punished for relations with these laborers because the prohibition only outlawed contact with German civilians, but the foreign laborers would still be punished because contact with POWs was forbidden to every civilian. A POW on a small farm would often meet comrades working in the same village on Sundays or in the evenings, but his social circle normally consisted mostly of Germans, predominantly women. On many small farms, the French (or Belgian) prisoner, often a man with experience in agricultural work, replaced the farmer who had been drafted into the Wehrmacht and perhaps gone missing or been killed in action. Guarding often consisted of a soldier on a bicycle stopping by from time to time to ensure the prisoner was still there and to inquire whether the prisoner or his employer had any complaints.<sup>19</sup>

Many French prisoners and their German lovers wanted to marry after the war, but Free French military regulations, popular sentiment in liberated France, and often also rejection of the German bride by the prisoner's family made it extremely difficult to realize these plans. Often the former prisoner, once at home, showed no interest any more in his German fiancée. Still, a few couples did marry and stayed together either in Germany or France.<sup>20</sup>

### The Belgians

After the German army invaded Belgium on May 10, 1940, it captured approximately 225,000 Belgian prisoners. In July 1940, Hitler ordered the release of all Flemish (Dutch-speaking) prisoners except professional

<sup>18</sup> See OKW-Erlass, March 24, 1943, in NLA Oldenburg, Best. 135 B. This document reiterated earlier guidelines.

<sup>19</sup> Ambrière, *Les grandes Vacances*, 197.

<sup>20</sup> Virgili, *Naitre ennemi*, 248–61; Picaper, *Le Crime d'aimer*, 34, 104–5.

soldiers as part of a policy to attract the Flemish population of Belgium to Germany. This order was carried out inconsistently, however. German officials overlooked some Flemings and freed some French-speakers (Walloons). Some Flemish POWs did not bother to apply for dismissal because, like all other western prisoners, they at first expected a swift end of the war and prompt release. Quite a few Belgians had mixed ancestry, moreover. Especially for soldiers from Brussels and its surroundings, bilingualism was common, and identification as a Fleming or Walloon made little sense.<sup>21</sup> Still, the majority of the 85,000 Belgian prisoners who remained in captivity after the dismissals stopped in February 1941 were French-speaking Walloons. Approximately 90 percent of the Belgian POWs were assigned to work detachments and individual farms and businesses in the same way as the French, with whom they often shared accommodation. Most of the Belgians, close to 70,000, were still in German captivity in early 1945 although Belgian POWs had also benefited from dismissals similar to those agreed between Vichy and Berlin (for example fathers of four children and World War I veterans).<sup>22</sup>

The protecting power for the Belgian POWs was the United States – until December 1941. The Belgian prewar government had gone into exile in London, but King Leopold III remained in the country. He set up an organization taking care of matters relating to the demobilized army under the leadership of General Maurice Keyaerts, the *Office des Travaux de l'armée démobilisée* (OTAD), which organized aid shipments to the prisoners of war. While the Belgian government in London wanted the Swiss to take over as protecting power when the United States entered the war, the German foreign ministry, which did not recognize the Belgian government-in-exile, refused to accept a new protecting power for the Belgian POWs. For several months, the Belgian POWs relied on the inspections and supplies from the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in Geneva, but in June 1942 the Germans agreed to recognize a commission set up by the OTAD as a partner in matters relating to the Belgian POWs, the *Délégation du Service de liaison avec les prisonniers de guerre* (DSLPL).<sup>23</sup> The DSLPL was headed by the retired officer Count de t'Serclaes et Wammerson, a descendant of general Johann Tilly (1559–1632), Austria's famous military leader in the first phase of the Thirty Years War. The Belgian government-in-exile

<sup>21</sup> Gillet, "Histoire des sous-officiers et soldats belges," XXVIII, 48–51; Overmans, "Kriegsgefangenenpolitik," 776.

<sup>22</sup> Gillet, "Histoire des sous-officiers et soldats belges," XXVIII, 53; Buckinx, "Belgen in duitse Krijgsgevangenschap," 506.

<sup>23</sup> Gillet, "Histoire des sous-officiers et soldats belges," XXVIII, 136–8.



and King Leopold always denied that the DSLP constituted a protecting power in the sense of the Geneva Convention and in analogy to the Scapini Mission, and the DSLP, unlike the Scapini Mission, did not see itself in a diplomatic role. Yet Count t'Serclaes and his officials performed some of same functions as the Scapini Mission, inspecting camps and following up with German officials about problems and complaints from the prisoners, and the German High Command dealt with them on similar terms as with the Scapini Mission.<sup>24</sup> In judicial matters, the DSLP supplied defense attorneys to the prisoners and monitored their prison terms. The DSLP set up offices in the Adlon hotel in Berlin, deliberately avoiding the Belgian embassy building, which would have been available, in order to underscore the point that it did not act as a diplomatic agency.<sup>25</sup> In November 1943, the DSLP had to move to Bellin, a village across the Oder from Letschin, where the Scapini Mission had been relocated after the bombing of the city center of Berlin, which had also destroyed the Adlon hotel.

As an organization headed by the king and set up without the approval of the government-in-exile, the DSLP encountered some hostility from POWs, but it did help the prisoners effectively until it met with increasing German suspicion because of its pro-Allied sympathies in 1944. After the liberation of Belgium by Allied troops in September 1944, the DSLP fell into disarray because many of its officials remained in Belgium. The German defense attorneys could no longer be paid; some of them sent their unpaid bills to the Belgian government after the end of the war, but to no avail.<sup>26</sup> The ICRC protected the interests of the Belgian POWs as far as this was possible in the chaotic circumstances of the last months of Nazi Germany. After the liberation of Belgium, the Belgian government began holding German prisoners on its territory and therefore could ensure some reciprocity.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 135. "Note relative à la question posée et à l'avis émis par certains prisonniers, 'Quelle est notre puissance protectrice?'" CEGESOMA, AA 265; Overmans, "Kriegsgefangenenpolitik," 775–9.

<sup>25</sup> "Rapport du Lt. med. Van Doornick," in Musée Royal de l'Armée et d'Histoire Militaire, Evre, Dossier captivité, box 1, #12.

<sup>26</sup> See, for example, Dr. Hoge [attorney from Greifswald] to Belgian representative in Berlin, October 10, 1946, in Archives du Ministère des Affaires étrangères, Brussels, Film 409.

<sup>27</sup> Gillet, "Histoire des sous-officiers et soldats belges," XXVIII, 48–51. For more detail on the role of the DSLP, see CEGESOMA, AA 265, dossier IV (Aide et assistance aux prisonniers de guerre); Musée Royal de l'Armée et d'Histoire Militaire, Evre, Fonds Gillet, box 1, #7: La commission t'Serclaes; and "Rapport du Lt med Van Doornick," in Musée Royal de l'Armée et d'Histoire Militaire, Evre, Dossier captivité, box 1, #12. Van Doornick was the chief medical official of the DSLP.

Over time, Belgian prisoners appear to have been accepted in very similar ways as French POWs, especially in rural communities.<sup>28</sup> Georges Smets, reflecting on his experience as man of confidence of a big POW camp in East Prussia, explained in retrospect that the initially hostile and arrogant local population became friendlier and increasingly supportive after the tide of the war seemed to have turned. As the Belgian veteran and military historian Georges Hautecler wrote in a newspaper article in 1975 with allusion to the forbidden amorous liaisons: “The relations with the German population were good, sometimes too good.”<sup>29</sup> Although the Belgian government had left the country, the Belgian administration remained in place and collaborated. It was difficult for Germans to perceive the Belgians as real enemies, given that Germany had attacked Belgium in May 1940. Hitler suggested in his Reichstag speech of July 19, 1940, on the basis of captured French diplomatic documents that the Belgian government had plotted war against Germany, but it seems doubtful that these absurd claims were widely believed.<sup>30</sup> There were Belgians, including Walloons, in the Waffen-SS fighting alongside German forces in the Soviet Union, and it appears that the German population perceived the Belgians very much like the French – as friendly neutrals, if not allies. French and Belgian POWs were often mixed in the same camps and work detachments even though article 9 of the Geneva Convention required whenever possible separate housing for POWs of different nationalities.<sup>31</sup>

Court records from trials against German women often refer to Belgian prisoners. The share of trials because of forbidden relations was exactly the same for the Belgians as for the French, between 75 and 80 percent of all cases.<sup>32</sup> Georges Smets testified that 6 percent of his comrades in Stalag I-A had to stand trial for forbidden relations and that three-quarters of his time as man of confidence was devoted to helping prisoners accused of forbidden relations. If his figure can be

<sup>28</sup> Gillet, “Histoire des sous-officiers et soldats belges,” XXVIII, 128–9.

<sup>29</sup> Georges Hautecler, “Il y a trente ans le V Day: Les prisonniers de guerre,” *La Libre Belgique*, May 7–8, 1975. Copy in CEGESOMA, AA 265, dossier X (coupures de presse); see also Buckinx, “Belgen in duitse Krijgsgevangenschap,” 509.

<sup>30</sup> Max Domarus, ed., *Hitler: Speeches and Proclamations, 1932–1945*, vol. 3 (Wauconda: Bolchazy-Carducci, 1990–2), 2049–50.

<sup>31</sup> Durand, *Captivité*, 422–3.

<sup>32</sup> Jean Thisquen, “Poursuite pénales contre le P.G. en Allemagne,” in *S’Unir*, Stalag X-A. #13, Nov.-Dez. 1944, in CEGESOMA, AA 257. Buckinx writes that more than 80 percent of all trials against Belgian POWs in Germany concerned forbidden relations to a German woman, but he gives no source: Buckinx, “Belgen in duitse Krijgsgevangenschap,” 510.

generalized, it would place Belgians proportionally even above the French.<sup>33</sup> An official postwar survey of judicial matters directed by General Keyaerts concluded that more than 1,000 trials against Belgian POWs had occurred, the vast majority involving amorous relations, but this figure did not include the documents lost during or soon after the war.<sup>34</sup> An ICRC representative informed the Belgian government-in-exile in March 1944 that German courts martial opened between fifty and a hundred new judicial cases against Belgian POWs every month, which would suggest an average of 900 cases per year at least during the “busiest” period of 1942–4 and a total of 3,000–4,000 cases. This would be closer to Smets’s proportion (6 percent of an average of 77,500 Belgian POWs would be 4,650).<sup>35</sup> A study focused on Schleswig-Holstein confirms that, if one correlates the number of cases to the number of prisoners, the Belgians were proportionally the biggest “offenders”: there were always approximately eight times as many French POWs as Belgians in the area, yet the trial ratio between Frenchmen and Belgians was five and a half to one.<sup>36</sup>

Belgian rank-and-file POWs, like the French, experienced captivity as an alternative reality and developed a growing empathy with the German population. Many POWs were afraid that their wives were disloyal, and the men of confidence handled many divorce requests.<sup>37</sup> In 1945, some Belgian prisoners wanted to stay in Germany or Austria and marry their partners, particularly on farms where the POW might have taken the place of a killed or missing farmer. The military police forced most of them to go home, but a few Belgians did manage to marry their German partners after the war.<sup>38</sup>

## The British

More than 164,000 British (including Commonwealth) servicemen became POWs in Germany.<sup>39</sup> The first major group was the 44,000

<sup>33</sup> Georges Smets to Mr. Georges Paulus, January 11, 1976, in Musée Royal de l’Armée et d’Histoire Militaire, Brussels, Fonds Hautecler, Farde 34.

<sup>34</sup> “Affaires juridiques,” in Archives du Général Keyaerts, Musée Royal de l’Armée et d’Histoire Militaire, Evere, Box 6 (Affaires juridiques).

<sup>35</sup> Jean Cellerier (CICR London) to Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, London, March 15, 1944, in Archives du Ministère des Affaires étrangères, Brussels, Film 409.

<sup>36</sup> Colmorgen and Godau-Schüttke, “Verbotener Umgang mit Kriegsgefangenen,” 147.

<sup>37</sup> Gillet, “Histoire des sous-officiers et soldats belges,” XXVIII, 241–2. For examples, see the dossier “Affaires juridiques Stalag V-B Villingen,” in CEGESOMA, AA 252.

<sup>38</sup> Lt-col. Lescrauwaet to Baron de Guben, September 21, 1945, in Archives du Ministère des Affaires étrangères, Brussels, Film 408: Dossier général 1942–8. Gillet, “Histoire des sous-officiers et soldats belges,” XXVIII, 362. See also the notes in Musée Royal de l’Armée et d’Histoire Militaire, Evere, Fonds Gillet, box 1, #4 affaires juridiques, 301.

<sup>39</sup> MacKenzie, *Colditz Myth*, 41.

British servicemen captured during the campaign in the west, particularly in the area of Dunkirk in early June 1940. But unlike French and Belgian prisoners, who were almost all captured in May and June 1940, the British POWs kept arriving. In Greece, another nearly 10,000 British soldiers came into German captivity in April and May 1941, and in the fall of 1943, 52,000 (of 80,000) British POWs from the North African theater held in Italy were transferred to Germany after the Italian capitulation.<sup>40</sup> Approximately 10,000 downed British airmen also ended up in German captivity, mostly in the last two years of the war, and new prisoners came from the fronts in Italy after July 1943 and western Europe after June 6, 1944.

Most British POWs were sent to the eastern periphery of the Third Reich, a broad strip from Wolfsberg in southern Austria to Danzig on the Baltic Sea, including the former German–Czechoslovak borderlands and the prewar German–Polish border region. The largest camps with British POWs were in Upper Silesia (especially Stalag VIII-B headquartered in Lamsdorf and Teschen), West Prussia (Thorn and Marienburg), and Schubin near Posen (Stalag XXI-B), in areas that had partly belonged to Poland before the war. Another nexus of British POWs existed in Saxony around Torgau, and there were also large groups of British POWs in camps near Berlin (Stalag III-A Luckenwalde) and Munich (Stalag VII-A Moosburg).<sup>41</sup>

Many of the POWs in British uniform were not from the United Kingdom itself. Among the prisoners captured in mainland Greece and on Crete, for example, were many Australians, New Zealanders, and people from Palestine (Jews and Arabs), Cyprus, Malta, and British India. South Africans, Canadians, and Irish also formed part of the British forces. Germany generally followed the Geneva Convention by treating these prisoners as members of the British army without glaring discrimination. As with other POWs, the German army and German employers supplied rations that were too low, but generous packages from the British Red Cross and other aid agencies made the prisoners largely independent of the German rations as long as the deliveries arrived, although there were difficult phases owing to overcrowding. The last months of captivity were particularly harsh because of shortages caused by disruptions of the German transport system and because of poorly prepared evacuations of POWs from the eastern areas of the Reich.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>40</sup> Overmans, "Kriegsgefangenenpolitik," 786–8, 97–9.

<sup>41</sup> Kochavi, *Confronting Captivity*, 33–6, 54, 60; MacKenzie, *Colditz Myth*, 93–120.

<sup>42</sup> Vourkoutiotis, "What the Angels Saw," 691.

Given that German hostilities with Britain continued, the British prisoners were guarded more strictly and had less contact with German civilians, especially in the earlier years. Unlike the French and Belgians, moreover, the British authorities considered it shameful for POWs to get involved with enemy women. Section 40 of the Army Act forbade any interaction between prisoners of war and enemy civilians, and the British army urged its officers to warn soldiers not to approach German women. The British government was therefore not keen on protesting against the orders, although they did complain about the harshness of German military justice in general.<sup>43</sup>

Before 1943, there were almost no trials against British POWs for forbidden relations not only because of stricter guarding and separation from German civilians but also because, initially, some camp commanders mistakenly used mild disciplinary punishments rather than courts martial against the offenders. The disciplinary punishments did not require notification of the protecting power and therefore often left no trace in the archives. According to the historian Vasilis Vourkoutiotis, German camp commanders received an order in January 1943 no longer to use disciplinary punishments in cases of forbidden relations, and from then on the British POWs involved with a German woman also had to stand trial in front of courts martial.<sup>44</sup> The files of the Swiss Legation in Berlin contain 453 cases (349 POWs with court martials and 104 pending cases at the end of the war) beginning in 1943 and intensifying throughout 1944 and early 1945. The Swiss official Hans K. Frey, who was responsible for overseeing the trials against British POWs in the last year of the war, noted that on average thirty new love-related cases kept arriving on his desk every month, many of them involving more than one prisoner.<sup>45</sup> Of the 349 British and Commonwealth POWs who stood in front of a court martial because of forbidden relations, 317 prisoners were sentenced to penitentiary, prison, or prolonged arrest, and thirty-two were acquitted. In 1943 eighty-two POWs stood trial, with seven acquittals. The majority of POWs had to face a court martial in 1944 (234, with twenty-three acquittals), and there were still thirty-three POWs tried in 1945 (with two acquittals), almost all in January. In addition, 104 British POWs were under prosecution for a forbidden relationship in late 1944 and early 1945, but the records contain no

<sup>43</sup> National Archives, Kew, WO 32/15294: Trials and punishments of British POWs in Germany 1941–45, and Schweizerisches Bundesarchiv (BAR) Bern, Bestand Vertretung Berlin, 78a to 87b.

<sup>44</sup> Vourkoutiotis, *Prisoners of War and the German High Command*, 82–3.

<sup>45</sup> Frey, *Die disziplinarische und gerichtliche Bestrafung von Kriegsgefangenen*, 62.

sentence either because the trials could not take place in the chaotic circumstances (many British POWs were in the first areas of the Reich attacked by the Soviet army) or because the judgments never arrived.<sup>46</sup> The records of the Swiss Legation are incomplete even for the earlier period because of losses in war-ravaged Germany. For example, the prosecution of fifteen (!) Arab POWs from the British army who had amorous relations with twelve German women in a chair factory near Offenburg in early 1944 (discovered by Bernd Boll) left no trace in the Swiss records.<sup>47</sup> As with the other POWs, we of course have to assume an unknown number of relationships that were never discovered.

### Other Prisoners

Prisoners from other armies also had to appear in front of courts martial for a forbidden relationship. Although the German army captured nearly 95,000 American POWs, a little more than Belgians after the release of the Flemish soldiers, the Americans lacked the time and the opportunity to get close to German women in greater numbers. Three-quarters of the American POWs came to Germany after the Allied landings in Normandy on June 6, 1944, and more than a third of the American POWs were downed airmen (predominantly officers) who were guarded more strictly and toward whom the population felt particularly hostile because of the bombing attacks. An American survey completed on November 1, 1945, traced 92,965 American POWs in Germany. Of these, 60,235 were ground troops, with approximately 10 percent officers. Only 9,274 American ground troops were in German captivity before D-Day.<sup>48</sup> Given that ground troops (except officers) were the group most likely to come into contact with German civilians, it is relevant to note that 85 percent of approximately 54,000 American rank-and-file ground troops were captured after D-Day and therefore had very little time to become involved with German civilians.

Initially, American POWs came to the same camps as British prisoners (this arrangement facilitated translation services), but the German army soon reserved space in some special camps for Americans east and northeast of Berlin and near Vienna. After the start of the Soviet offensive in January 1945, the German army evacuated most American POWs

<sup>46</sup> BAR Bern, Bestand Vertretung Berlin, volumes 71–88.

<sup>47</sup> Boll, "... das gesunde Volksempfinden auf das Größte verletzt," 658–9.

<sup>48</sup> "American Prisoners of War in Germany," prepared by the Military Intelligence Department on November 1, 1945, in NACP, Record Group 389: Records of the Provost Marshal General, ID 893506, container identifier: 2197. See also Kochavi, *Confronting Captivity*, 71; Foy, *For You the War Is Over*, 42–3, 64.

from these areas and concentrated them near Magdeburg and Munich. These evacuations brought American POWs into contact with German civilians, but they were hardly conducive to amorous adventures because they involved long forced marches in extreme cold, insufficient shelter, overcrowding in the arrival camps, and inadequate food supplies. If forbidden relations with German women occurred on these marches, the conditions would have made prosecution nearly impossible. Even the Americans who arrived before January 1945 would have found it hard to engage closely with German civilians. It took several months to distribute POWs to the smaller work detachments and for closer relations to develop and to be discovered and prosecuted (this had taken approximately six months for the French and Belgian POWs under less strict guarding in 1940).

The memory of American POWs seems to be dominated by experiences with harsh guards or superiors and with hunger, not surprisingly given that most Americans experienced only the phase of captivity in which supplies were insufficient.<sup>49</sup> Trials against American POWs took place mostly for attacks against guards and foreman, disobedience, theft, and insults against the German state and army, which included insults against Hitler (§134 of the German law code). Only a few love-related trials against American prisoners occurred, and most involved relatively small matters such as the exchange of cigarettes and a quick kiss or hug. In his memoirs, for example, ex-POW Jack Dower reveals that it was possible for an American work detachment to get to work in German agriculture under relatively lax guarding, but his group of twenty POWs was sent to a big state domain in the village Benzin near Stolp (eastern Pomerania), where they worked together with German girls, Ukrainian women, and French POWs. Although the work detachment had only one (friendly) guard, German supervisors watched the POWs during work, and at night it would have been difficult, but not impossible, to leave the sleeping quarters. Dower admits some admiring looks at a German waitress and a flirtation with a Ukrainian woman across a fence, but he was apparently not interested enough to leave the American sleeping quarters to see either of them at night.<sup>50</sup> Yet, there were a few cases of Americans involved with German women, and there were more cases coming, considering the notifications of the protecting power regarding POWs who were formally accused of a forbidden relationship but never came to trial because of the chaos in early 1945. But most of the cases that did lead to a court martial hearing were relatively superficial and

<sup>49</sup> Kochavi, *Confronting Captivity*, 90–1, 97–102.

<sup>50</sup> Jack Dower, *Deliverance at Diepholz: A World War II's Prisoner of War Story* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2016), 61, 71, 102–3.

coincidental.<sup>51</sup> For the Americans, captivity never quite evolved into the alternative reality that it became for many French and Belgian POWs, who had been captured in 1940, when the outcome of the war was much less clear than in 1944–5, and who were increasingly left to their own devices surrounded by German civilians.

The German army also captured a large number of soldiers from the Royal Yugoslav Army in April 1941. Many of the prisoners were quickly released, but Serbs were kept in German captivity, and small contingents of them were deployed in various parts of the Reich. Serbia had a collaborating government, but Germany did not recognize the Geneva Convention in its dealings with this government (unlike in the case of western POWs). There were numerous trials against Serbian prisoners involved with German women. Although a study of this topic remains to be done, it appears that the courts martial treated Serbian POWs in similar ways to the western POWs. Convicted Serbian POWs generally had to go to the Wehrmacht prison in Gernersheim (south of Mannheim), not to the prison of Graudenz, where most convicted western POWs were sent. The case files of the court martial of Reserve Infantry Division 410 in Schleswig-Holstein indicate sentences for Serbian POWs tried for forbidden relations that seem to be in line with sentences against western POWs.<sup>52</sup> From the case files of the women involved with Serbs it emerges that they received the same punishments as women involved with western prisoners.<sup>53</sup> Although Serbs, as a Slavic people, occupied a low rank on the Nazi hierarchy, this did not affect the trials against the women involved with them.

After the capitulation of Italy to the Allies in September 1943, many Italian soldiers who did not want to fight for the puppet government under Mussolini installed in Salò were interned in Germany under harsh conditions. These so-called Badoglio Italians (after the name of the marshal who signed the agreement with the Allies) were considered to be traitors and stigmatized in Nazi propaganda and popular feeling. Germany denied them the status of POWs as defined by the Geneva Convention and categorized them as Italian Military Internees (IMIs).

<sup>51</sup> For these cases, see BAR Bern, Bestand Vertretung Berlin, 82a, 87a, and 88a, and NACP, RG 59, 711.62114A, Boxes 2219 and 2220.

<sup>52</sup> Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv, Freiburg im Breisgau (BA-MA), RW 60, vols. 1799–1811. Most of these files contain no details, however.

<sup>53</sup> For examples of women tried for a relationship with a Serb POW, see Brandenburgisches Landeshauptarchiv (BLHA) Potsdam, 12C, Sondergericht Berlin, 221; Sondergericht Frankfurt an der Oder, 926, and WStLA Wien, Sondergericht, vols. 3385, 4194, 7949. See also Helmut Irmen, *Das Sondergericht Aachen 1941–1945* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018), 79.



Nevertheless, the prohibition of contacts with civilians applied to them as if they were regular POWs. A few cases of IMIs involved with German women came to trial. These trials led to punishments that seem to have been similar to punishments against Serbian and western prisoners.<sup>54</sup> The convicted IMIs often came to military prisons, including Graudenz, where most western POWs sentenced to prison had to go, but conditions were worse for them than for other convicted POWs. Historian Michela Ponzani has explored the experience of IMIs with German women in the framework of a larger project on children of enemies during World War II. She shows that loving German women, and some humane guards, often helped underfed and mistreated Italians. Some of the couples wanted to marry after the war, but widespread resentment against Germans in Italy made it very difficult for them. The relationships were quickly forgotten because loving German women did not fit the notion of brutal Nazis prevalent in postwar Italy.<sup>55</sup>

Polish prisoners involved with German women were treated much more harshly. Nazi Germany transformed most Polish rank-and-file prisoners into civilian forced laborers in the course of 1940, arguing that the Geneva Convention was no longer binding for Poles because the Polish state no longer existed and because Sweden, the protecting power for the Polish POWs, had decided to end its role in November 1939.<sup>56</sup> Polish prisoners were placed under a harsh statute specifically formulated for Poles and Jews. Whether a Pole involved with a German woman was still a POW or a civilian worker did not matter. He was usually handed over to the Gestapo and hanged, often in front of comrades and other foreign laborers. The only chance to save his life was inclusion on the German people's list (*Deutsche Volksliste*), but this involved a complicated procedure in which the SS was the arbiter.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>54</sup> Gerhard Schreiber, *Die italienischen Militärinternierten im deutschen Machtbereich 1943–1945* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1990), 99, 339–41, 444–74, and 499–500; Dokumentationszentrum NS-Zwangsarbeit der Stiftung Topographie des Terrors, ed., *Zwischen allen Stühlen: Die Geschichte der italienischen Militärinternierten 1943–1945/Tra più fuochi: La storia degli internati militari italiani 1943–1945* (Berlin: Spree Druck, 2016). For examples of trials against women involved with Italians, see sentence against Marie S., Sondergericht Darmstadt, September 1, 1944, in HStAD Fonds G 24, Nr. 955/2 Mitteilungen in Strafsachen, and HStAD, G 27 Darmstadt, vol. 1419.

<sup>55</sup> Michela Ponzani, *Figli del nemico: le relazioni d'amore in tempo di guerra, 1943–1948* (Rome: Laterzo, 2015), 95–110.

<sup>56</sup> Overmans, "Kriegsgefangenenpolitik," 749.

<sup>57</sup> Thomas Muggenthaler and Jörg Skriebeleit, *Verbrechen Liebe: Von polnischen Männern und deutschen Frauen. Hinrichtungen und Verfolgung in Niederbayern und der Oberpfalz während der NS-Zeit* (Viechtach: Ed. Lichtung, 2010); Dietmut Majer, "Non-Germans" under the Third Reich: *The Nazi Judicial and Administrative System in Germany and Occupied Eastern Europe, with Special Regard to Occupied Poland, 1939–1945* (Baltimore

The woman involved with a Pole could face deportation to a concentration camp, often prefaced by public humiliations and shaming rituals inspired by Nazi officials – until Hitler forbade them in response to negative public reaction. Yet, there were some trials against women involved with Polish and Soviet POWs that led to penitentiary or prison sentences. The court files do not reveal why some women were put on trial while others were directly sent to a concentration camp, and it appears that other researchers have also not found a compelling explanation for the inconsistency.<sup>58</sup> Scholars disagree on the question as to whether the courts sentenced women involved with Polish or Soviet POWs more harshly (if they did come to trial) than women involved with western POWs.<sup>59</sup> My sample indicates that the legal practice of the German courts in cases involving relations with Polish or Soviet POWs was indeed harsher. These trials show that the courts criticized and punished these relations most severely. The standard formulations in the sentences stated that Poland had planned to annihilate Germany and had committed atrocious bestialities against the German people during the campaign, an allusion to the attacks on ethnic Germans by Poles at the time of the outbreak of war. The fact that a woman had become involved with a Polish or Soviet prisoner seemed to indicate to the judges that she was a “criminal type,” sometimes leading to the conclusion that they could soften the usual standards of proof. Yet, in rural Catholic regions, Polish POWs often encountered a friendly German population and were widely accepted into the social circle of the farmers employing them.<sup>60</sup>

and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 369. See also Rolf Hochhuth, *Eine Liebe in Deutschland* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1978), translated into English as *A German Love Story*, tr. John Brownjohn (Boston: Little and Brown, 1980).

<sup>58</sup> Löffelsender, *Straffjustiz an der Heimatfront*, 306, note 58.

<sup>59</sup> Michael Löffelsender argues for an inconsistent but not always worse practice based on (as he admits very few) cases in Cologne and Bonn, whereas Hans-Ulrich Ludewig and Dietrich Kuessner do see a harsher practice in Braunschweig: Löffelsender, *Straffjustiz an der Heimatfront*, 306–8; Ludewig and Kuessner, “*Es sei also jeder gewarnt*,” 146, 148–9.

<sup>60</sup> In the case of Anna W., sentenced to three years of penal servitude in October 1941, her brother had invited the Polish POWs working on the family farm to his wedding, including the prisoner with whom Anna had a relationship: Bayerisches Staatsarchiv (BStA) Nürnberg, Akten der Anklagebehörde beim Sondergericht, 1273. For other examples, see BStA Nürnberg, Akten der Anklagebehörde beim Sondergericht, 1088 and 2777, and BLHA Potsdam, 12 C, Sondergericht Berlin, 232, 232/1, 232/2, 302, 302/1, 302/2, 320, 320/1, 320/2, and 6187, 6187/1, 6187/2. See also Ela Hornung, Ernst Langthaler, and Sabine Schweitzer, “Zwangsarbeit in der Landwirtschaft,” in *Das Deutsche Reich und der Zweite Weltkrieg: Die deutsche Kriegsgesellschaft 1939 bis 1945* (Munich: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 2005), 614–15.

Nazi policies toward Soviet POWs were extremely brutal and recognized no legal restraints.<sup>61</sup> More than half of the prisoners perished or were murdered in German captivity, mostly in the first months of the German campaign against the Soviet Union. Despite Hitler's initial refusal to allow Soviet POWs on German soil, labor shortages led to their large-scale deployment in Germany, albeit under strict surveillance and brutal conditions. Germans and non-Germans were severely punished for giving bread or cigarettes to the often-starving Soviet prisoners. In February 1942, for example, fifty-nine-year-old German worker Hermann Gabriel from Wilhelmshaven was sentenced to five months in prison for having given a Soviet prisoner some buttered bread and cigarette butts; the grateful prisoner gave Gabriel a watch in return.<sup>62</sup> Only a few love relations came to trial, but they were among the most tragic. Some women committed suicide when the affair was discovered.<sup>63</sup> The prisoners were often executed.

A comparison of the sentences against women involved with Soviet POWs and the punishments of women involved with western prisoners shows that the former suffered significantly harsher punishment. Two women who had a relationship with a Soviet POW in Nürnberg (one of them was pregnant from the POW) received five years of penal servitude in 1943, while the usual punishment of this special court for a relationship with a western POW at this time ranged from eighteen months to three years of penal servitude. The fate of the POW is only known in the second case: he was shot to death by a guard who ambushed him when he walked to the fence of his camp to meet the woman. He had been denounced by fellow prisoners.<sup>64</sup> In August 1944, a woman who had a

<sup>61</sup> A widespread misunderstanding is that the Geneva Convention obliged all signatories to observe its provisions also in conflicts with non-signatory states. Article 82 of the Geneva Convention only demands that the convention remain in force between signatory states in case the parties in the war involve a non-signatory state, but this does not mean that Nazi Germany had an obligation to observe the Geneva Convention for Soviet POWs. Still, they should have been treated according to The Hague Regulations of 1907, which had become customary law even though the Soviet Union had refused to observe any treaty the tsarist government had signed. Although The Hague Convention is less specific on POWs, it does contain many humanitarian principles of the Geneva Convention. See Rüdiger Overmans, "The Treatment of Prisoners of War in the Eastern European Theatre of Operations, 1941–56," in *Prisoners in War*, edited by Sibylle Scheipers (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 127–8, and Neville Wylie, "The 1929 Prisoner of War Convention and the Building of the Inter-war Prisoner of War Regime," in *Prisoners in War*, edited by Sibylle Scheipers (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 103.

<sup>62</sup> Tagesmeldung 6 of Wilhelmshaven office for the Reichssicherheitshauptamt (RSHA), February 1942, in NLA Oldenburg, Best. 136, Nr. 2886b.

<sup>63</sup> Tagesmeldung 1 of Wilhelmshaven office for the RSHA, June 1943, in NLA Oldenburg, Best. 136, Nr. 2886b.

<sup>64</sup> BStA Nürnberg, Akten der Anklagebehörde beim Sondergericht, 2419 and 2423.

love affair with the Soviet POW who worked on her parents' farm was sentenced to two years of penal servitude by the special court in Frankfurt an der Oder, which at this time punished relations with western POW with fifteen to eighteen months of penal servitude. The prisoner was sent to a Gestapo penal labor camp and was slated to be transferred to the Mauthausen concentration camp in Austria to receive "special treatment" (murder), but the state prosecutor urged postponement at the end of October 1944 because he might still be needed as a witness because of a mysterious barn fire that had killed a Swiss farmworker who was also in love with the woman. The police suspected that the woman and the prisoner might have started the fire to cover up the murder of the Swiss farmworker. What ultimately happened to the POW is not clear.<sup>65</sup>

### The German Women

The notion that war is men's business, that men fight to protect women, and that women have little to do with war except as victims has long been discarded. Already in the 1960s, studies showed that women played very active roles in both world wars, although the prevailing notion was that the greater latitude for women during war was always meant to be exceptional, meaning that postwar social discourse sought to reaffirm prewar gender hierarchies and social roles, albeit not always successfully. The introduction to the edited book *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars* (1987) states with admirable clarity that gender relations in the world wars tended to reproduce traditional hierarchies insofar as the greater role of women on the home front always remained subordinate to the frontline struggle, which highlighted masculine virtues. Although women's situation objectively changed during war, the relations of subordination and domination remained.<sup>66</sup> Women's role in sustaining and supporting military culture, even their participation in atrocities, has also received due attention. At the same time, with respect to World War II, the notion of women as victims remains highly significant in light of the dangers and deprivations on the home front. Moreover, the ideological aspect of the war as a fight for democracy and against fascism or, conversely, for a fascist system and racial exclusivity, also affected women's thoughts and actions. German women became witnesses and

<sup>65</sup> BLHA Potsdam, 12 C, Sondergericht Frankfurt an der Oder, 849.

<sup>66</sup> Margaret Randolph Higonnet et al., eds., *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1987), 4, 6.

even to a degree participants in Nazi discrimination and violence.<sup>67</sup> With respect to women in Nazi Germany, the debate has long moved beyond the question as to whether German women were victims or perpetrators, showing that they often appeared in variations of both roles.<sup>68</sup>

The Nazi regime placed racial hierarchies above gender hierarchies, although there is no doubt that it promoted pro-natalism among the racially valued population groups and favored a traditional patriarchal gender order.<sup>69</sup> The German women who during the war became involved with POWs had all heard admonishments to be racially mindful when selecting a marriage partner and to produce many children. Women considered hereditarily ill were targeted for sterilization and forced abortion.<sup>70</sup> But while the regime prized the role of “racially acceptable” women as mothers and housewives, it also pressured them into the working world with increasing force, as labor shortages began to afflict an economy running in high gear after 1936 and even more drastically during the war.<sup>71</sup> The labor shortage was most severe in agriculture because low wages and profits had promoted migration to the cities during the 1930s. Family farms had to manage with few or no employees, and women shouldered a large burden of unpaid or poorly paid labor on these farms. A Nazi scheme forced nearly a quarter of a million unmarried women under twenty-five who wanted to work in industry to first perform a year of service in agriculture or domestic service (*Pflichtjahr*), but not all drafted women were useful laborers on the farms. The regime resisted the idea of labor conscription for all German women, and generous payments to soldiers’ wives and widows ensured that many of them did not need employment. When the regime finally did decide to conscript German women under the age of forty-five, it allowed for so many exceptions as to make the effect of the measure marginal.<sup>72</sup>

<sup>67</sup> Nicole Ann Dombrowski, ed., *Women and War in the Twentieth Century: Enlisted with or without Consent* (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1999), 3, 8–12. See also Elizabeth Harvey, *Women and the Nazi East: Agents and Witnesses of Germanization* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003); Wendy Lower, *Hitler’s Furies: German Women in the Nazi Killing Fields* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2013).

<sup>68</sup> Angelika Ebbinghaus, ed., *Opfer und Täterinnen: Frauenbiographien des Nationalsozialismus* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1996); Adelheid von Saldern, *Victims or Perpetrators? Controversies about the Role of Women in the Nazi State* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994).

<sup>69</sup> Matthew Stibbe, *Women in the Third Reich* (London: Arnold, 2003), 50–4.

<sup>70</sup> Gisela Bock, *Zwangssterilisation im Nationalsozialismus: Studien zur Rassenpolitik und Frauenpolitik* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1986); Gisela Bock and Pat Thane, eds., *Maternity and Gender Policies: Women and the Rise of the European Welfare States, 1880–1950s* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991).

<sup>71</sup> Stibbe, *Women in the Third Reich*, 84–96. <sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 91, 94–5.

The fact that Nazi Germany refused to exploit the full potential of German women's labor increased the dependence of enterprises and farms on foreign laborers over the course of the war. Already in 1939, a large number of Poles, including POWs, had been forced to work in Germany. The German victory in the West brought new POWs and increasingly also civilian workers to Germany, first voluntary workers and later recruited or forced laborers. The vast German conquests in the Balkans and the Soviet Union until 1943 led to mass deportations of men and women from these regions for labor in the Reich, so that by 1944 six million foreign civilians including two million women worked in Germany, most of them under harsh conditions.<sup>73</sup> To this labor force must be added more than two million POWs, the vast majority rank-and-file soldiers, and of course the hundreds of thousands of concentration camp inmates. The presence of foreign POWs is therefore indirectly connected to a policy that sought to spare middle- and upper-class German women, especially the married, from employment.

One salient feature of German women's experience of the war was the growing absence of German men in their age group. As Elizabeth Heineman states: "In many ways, the Second World War created a generation of German women standing alone."<sup>74</sup> The Wehrmacht drafted nearly eighteen million men over the course of the war, and already by the end of 1944 almost two million were confirmed dead and one million seven hundred thousand missing in action or taken prisoner. The drafting of men went through several waves, but it meant that more and more German women were largely on their own. In the countryside, the farmer's wife had to manage the family farm, supervise the workers, decide which cow to slaughter, and fulfill the ever more pressing demands of a state-imposed system of quotas, prices, and rationing. Military husbands had home leaves, but the time between leaves tended to grow longer as the war progressed, and it was not unusual for spouses not to see each other for a full year or more. Although millions of letters circulated between the homes and the front, husbands could not manage everything from distance, and this led to much conflict during home leaves.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 91, 96; Herbert, *Hitler's Foreign Workers*, 278–82; Mark Spoerer, "Die soziale Differenzierung der ausländischen Zivilarbeiter, Kriegsgefangenen und Häftlinge im Deutschen Reich," in *Das Deutsche Reich und der Zweite Weltkrieg*, edited by Jörg Echternkamp (Munich: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 2005).

<sup>74</sup> Elizabeth D. Heineman, *What Difference Does a Husband Make? Women and Marital Status in Nazi and Postwar Germany* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), 44–5.

As labor shortages in agriculture persisted despite the large-scale deployment of POWs and foreign laborers, women working in German agriculture experienced the war as an extremely stressful period. The same might be said for urban women, even though some of the challenges of everyday life were different for them. Urban women suffered from growing rationing, rising prices, and shortages of food and heating fuel, although food was usually available in sufficient quantities until almost the end of the war owing to the massive exploitation of resources in the occupied countries. Employed urban women had to work long hours. In most cities, their homes and workplaces were increasingly threatened by bombs. Their apartments might be damaged or destroyed, and they might have to move in with neighbors, family, or friends. Daily survival required ever more improvisation and sacrifice. Some women with young children were evacuated to the countryside, but this could involve a culture shock. The urban woman might encounter suspicions from her rural neighbors, and in many cases mentalities and lifestyles clashed.<sup>75</sup> For all German women, but particularly for those living in the eastern areas, the looming German defeat became a nightmarish thought. Fear of Soviet revenge led to mass flights in the eastern areas in late 1944 and early 1945, and the encounter with Soviet troops often meant massive sexual violence, murder, or deportation to labor camps in the Soviet Union.<sup>76</sup>

Many Germans began to resent the war, which had not been popular when it started and which lasted so much longer than expected.<sup>77</sup> The distress of German women sometimes exploded in unexpected ways. In April 1943, a spontaneous demonstration of several hundred women occurred in Dortmund after the ill-treatment of a soldier by an officer, prompting the women to scream that they wanted their drafted husbands or sons back.<sup>78</sup> Several of the women on trial for forbidden relations in court blamed their “crime” on the enforced separation from their husbands. As a soldier’s wife on trial for a forbidden relationship with a French POW in Nürnberg said in response to moralizing reproaches

<sup>75</sup> Julia S. Torrie, *“For Their Own Good”: Civilian Evacuations in Germany and France, 1939–1945* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2010), 73–6.

<sup>76</sup> Heineman, *What Difference Does a Husband Make?*, 81–2; Ingo von Münch, *“Frau kommt!” Die Massenvergewaltigungen deutscher Frauen und Mädchen 1944/45* (Graz: Ares, 2009); Norman Naimark, *The Russians in Germany: A History of the Soviet Zone of Occupation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995); Miriam Gebhardt, *Crimes Unspoken: The Rape of German Women at the End of the Second World War*, trans. Nick Somers (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016).

<sup>77</sup> Nicholas Stargardt, *The German War: A Nation under Arms, 1939–1945: Citizens and Soldiers* (New York: Basic Books, 2015), 30–4 and chapter 12.

<sup>78</sup> Stübbe, *Women in the Third Reich*, 151.

from the judge: “just let our husbands come back to us.” She had not seen her husband in a year.<sup>79</sup>

The long enforced separation put marriages to a test. The outbreak of war had triggered a sudden increase in marriages, especially if the man had received a draft notice. The newly weds usually had little time to settle in before being separated. When a husband came home after an increasingly long tour of duty, the precious few days the couple could spend together often failed to live up to the high expectations. The husband, who might be traumatized or brutalized, was difficult to reach and seemed to have become a different person. He might be irritable and resent the fact that his wife seemed to be coping without him. She herself might be frustrated by his meddling with everything that she had more or less under control while living alone. Infidelity was of course not uncommon among married soldiers. Soldiers stationed in occupation units often had affairs with local women, particularly in France, and rest days on the frontline also offered opportunities to visit a brothel or engage with local women. Paris and other French cities were popular destinations of German soldiers, partly for these reasons.<sup>80</sup> Although the Wehrmacht prosecuted and punished rape, German soldiers could use pressure and incentives to obtain sexual favors in areas where the local population was desperate.<sup>81</sup> Meanwhile, German soldiers’ wives (and widows) found themselves under increasing public scrutiny. A nonchalant or promiscuous lifestyle produced resentment and could easily trigger a denunciation, especially if the woman’s partner was a foreign man. Beginning in 1943, the state could impose retrospective divorce for war widows considered to be leading immoral lives, depriving them of the pensions and benefits to which they were entitled. Although

<sup>79</sup> Case of Käthe P., BStA Nürnberg, Akten der Anklagebehörde beim Sondergericht, 1278. The response angered the judge, who sentenced her to fourteen months of penal servitude even though no sexual intercourse was proven. The prisoner, Fernand R., received only three months in prison because the military tribunal saw the woman, who was ten years older, as the seducer: *Feldurteil Nürnberg*, January 6, 1942, in PAAA, R 40905.

<sup>80</sup> Julia S. Torrie, *German Soldiers and the Occupation of France, 1940–1944* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 83–7.

<sup>81</sup> Snyder, *Sex Crimes under the Wehrmacht*, 138; Beck, *Wehrmacht und sexuelle Gewalt*, 290; Regina Mühlhäuser, *Eroberungen: Sexuelle Gewalttaten und intime Beziehungen deutscher Soldaten in der Sowjetunion, 1941–1945* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2010); Mühlhäuser, “Between ‘Racial Awareness’ and Fantasies of Potency: Nazi Sexual Politics in the Occupied Territories of the Soviet Union, 1942–1945,” in Herzog, *Brutality and Desire*, 197–220; Maren Röger, *Kriegsbeziehungen: Intimität, Gewalt und Prostitution im besetzten Polen 1939 bis 1945* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2015), 108–14; Dagmar Herzog, *Sex after Fascism: Memory and Morality in Twentieth-Century Germany* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2005), 60.



German soldiers had considerable sexual freedom, their wives were expected to remain faithful. The Nazi authorities believed that a correlation existed between marital loyalty (of the woman) and the morale and fighting spirit of the husband, and therefore put a high premium on the social control of soldiers' wives.<sup>82</sup>

Wars tend to provide rich opportunities for sexual encounters.<sup>83</sup> These encounters often contradicted desires to preserve or upgrade what Nazi ideologues considered to be racial purity because they involved partners from different countries and from populations and races taken to be inferior. The double morality of the Nazi regime in dealing with this challenge did not go unnoticed. Some women on trial for forbidden relations openly confronted their judges by pointing out for example that while they would be sentenced to years of penal servitude for having slept with a Frenchman, German men were not punished for sleeping with a French woman. The fact that relations with western civilian workers were not forbidden while relations with POWs were severely penalized also struck many Germans as a glaring contradiction, especially considering that many western POWs were increasingly living and working like foreign civilian laborers. Although much of the literature on forbidden relations claims that relations with civilian laborers were also illegal, this is true only for Polish and Soviet workers. Of course, the Nazi police could intimidate and threaten western foreign laborers and German women even if their relations were not expressly forbidden. A Nazi law on analogy (1935) gave judges flexibility in prosecuting actions that did not openly violate a law but which resembled an illegal act.<sup>84</sup> But even though the SS considered a comprehensive ban on sexual relations with all foreign laborers desirable, it was never enacted for pragmatic reasons, including concerns for the image of Nazi Germany abroad and the fear that such a ban would strengthen the aversion of western and northern Europeans to working in Germany.<sup>85</sup>

<sup>82</sup> Stibbe, *Women in the Third Reich*, 158; Kundrus, *Kriegerfrauen*, 369–73; Heineman, *What Difference Does a Husband Make?*, 44 and 54–6; Löffelsender, *Straffjustiz an der Heimatfront*, 54–5, 57–8.

<sup>83</sup> Matthias Reiss, *Controlling Sex in Captivity: POWs and Sexual Desire in the United States During the Second World War* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), 2; Dagmar Herzog, "Introduction: War and Sexuality in Europe's Twentieth Century," in Herzog, ed., *Brutality and Desire*, 2 and 11; Herzog, *Sex after Fascism*, 62; Dagmar Herzog, *Sexuality in Europe: A Twentieth-Century History* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 47.

<sup>84</sup> *Reichsgesetzblatt* 1935, I, No. 70, 839–43, at: [https://de.wikisource.org/wiki/Gesetz\\_zur\\_%C3%84nderung\\_des\\_Strafgesetzbuchs\\_\(1935\)](https://de.wikisource.org/wiki/Gesetz_zur_%C3%84nderung_des_Strafgesetzbuchs_(1935)) (last visited December 19, 2019).

<sup>85</sup> Herbert, *Hitler's Foreign Workers*, 130; Löffelsender, *Straffjustiz an der Heimatfront*, 57.

German women during the Third Reich perceived contradictory messages about sexuality. As Dagmar Herzog has shown, the older notion of Nazism as simply anti-sex does no longer hold, nor does the idea of Nazism merely manipulating “racially” accepted people into sex without pleasure for the purpose of racial hygienic procreation. Although Nazi physicians and publicists often espoused conservative sexual values (for example premarital abstinence and marital fidelity, at least for women) and bemoaned the allegedly demoralizing “Jewish” influence on sexual mores before 1933, other Nazi publications and especially youth organizations accepted sexual satisfaction for its own sake and encouraged sex before marriage and promiscuity, as long as it happened in strictly heterosexual and racially conscious ways. The brutalization of the fighting front and the increasing moral perversion of a popular and brutal regime further loosened sexual mores over the course of the war, while also creating a backlash from the churches, parents of teenagers, and frontline soldiers worried about the infidelity of their wives.<sup>86</sup> As Herzog concludes:

No regime before or since did so much to intervene violently in the bodies and intimate relationships of its citizens, and of citizens of all the conquered and occupied and collaborating nations – while at the same time promising rapturous enjoyment and the right to break taboos to its own followers.<sup>87</sup>

<sup>86</sup> Herzog, *Sex after Fascism*, 10–63, in particular 55–63.

<sup>87</sup> Herzog, *Sexuality in Europe*, 66.