

This is an Open Access document downloaded from ORCA, Cardiff University's institutional repository: <https://orca.cardiff.ac.uk/id/eprint/162352/>

This is the author's version of a work that was submitted to / accepted for publication.

Citation for final published version:

Passmore, Kevin 2025. The drôle de guerre on the Maginot Line: Soldiers and civilians in Alsace-Lorraine, September 1939 to June 1940. *French Historical Studies* 48 (1) , pp. 101-137. 10.1215/00161071-11503592

Publishers page: <https://doi.org/10.1215/00161071-11503592>

Please note:

Changes made as a result of publishing processes such as copy-editing, formatting and page numbers may not be reflected in this version. For the definitive version of this publication, please refer to the published source. You are advised to consult the publisher's version if you wish to cite this paper.

This version is being made available in accordance with publisher policies. See <http://orca.cf.ac.uk/policies.html> for usage policies. Copyright and moral rights for publications made available in ORCA are retained by the copyright holders.



The drôle de guerre on the Maginot Line: Soldiers and Civilians in Alsace-Lorraine, September, 1939 to June, 1940

On September 1-2, 1939, church bells gave civilians living near the Maginot Line a few hours' notice to assemble for evacuation to southwest France. Some 688,000 people, 45 percent of Mosellans and 31 percent of Alsatians, including every inhabitant of Strasbourg, departed the "Red Zone," stretching from the rear of the fortifications to the German border eight to ten kilometers away. Another 120,000 younger Alsace-Lorraine men were mobilized, mostly outside the province.¹ The remaining 1.1 million women, children, and older male civilians shared space with around one million soldiers, including the equivalent of ten divisions of Régiments de Infanterie de Forteresse (RIFs).^{*} Non-evacuated Rosheim, for instance, with 2,744 peacetime inhabitants, lodged over 2,000 soldiers in homes, barns,

¹ I use the obsolete term "Alsace-Lorraine" without forgetting that it was then embraced by autonomists, used reluctantly by the French administration, and rejected by nationalists. The term was especially problematic in Moselle/Lorraine, where Francophone nationalists disliked "Strasbourg rule" and wanted full assimilation into the department system. However, Germanophone Mosellans, including nationalists such as Robert Schuman, were attached to "Alsace-Lorraine" as a guarantee of their culture. I particularly emphasize the existence of autonomism and regionalism in Northern Alsace and contiguous Moselle, which shared a dialect and a Lutheran minority. Indeed, the deputy of Forbach referred to his constituency as "Alsatian" (AN C14982, Chamber Army Commission, 7 December 1932).

^{*} Fortification troops in Alsace-Lorraine also included Régiments d'artillerie de position (RAPs) and Régiments de mitrailleurs d'infanterie colonial (naval machine-gun regiments, or RMICs).

and fields.² The troops' mission was to seal the border with Germany and defend Alsace-Lorraine, which had returned to France in 1919 after five decades of German annexation.³

Yet the Maginot Line was almost entirely sited within Germanophone districts with multiple cross-border ties (Figure 1). In 1919, around 96 percent of adults in Bas-Rhin and 94 percent in Haut-Rhin were first-language German and/or German dialect speakers. In Moselle, 47 percent reported French as their mother tongue, but on the Germanophone side of the language line, the situation resembled that in Alsace.⁴ Although by the mid-1930s, French-language schooling ensured that younger conscripts knew French, they still spoke dialect among themselves. Many backed regionalism, autonomism, or even separatism, while even nationalists defended their province's "particularities."

The "Interior French" (Innerfranzosen/Français de l'intérieure) were torn between idealization of Alsace-Lorraine and fear of the "enemy within." The RIFs embodied this ambivalence. To counter a surprise attack, the army relied on their rapid reinforcement by local reserves. Therefore, 15 to 60 percent of their soldiers were Alsace-Lorrainers. The older reserves were, the less likely they were to speak French.⁵ The army counted on their "frontier patriotism," but doubted their loyalty.

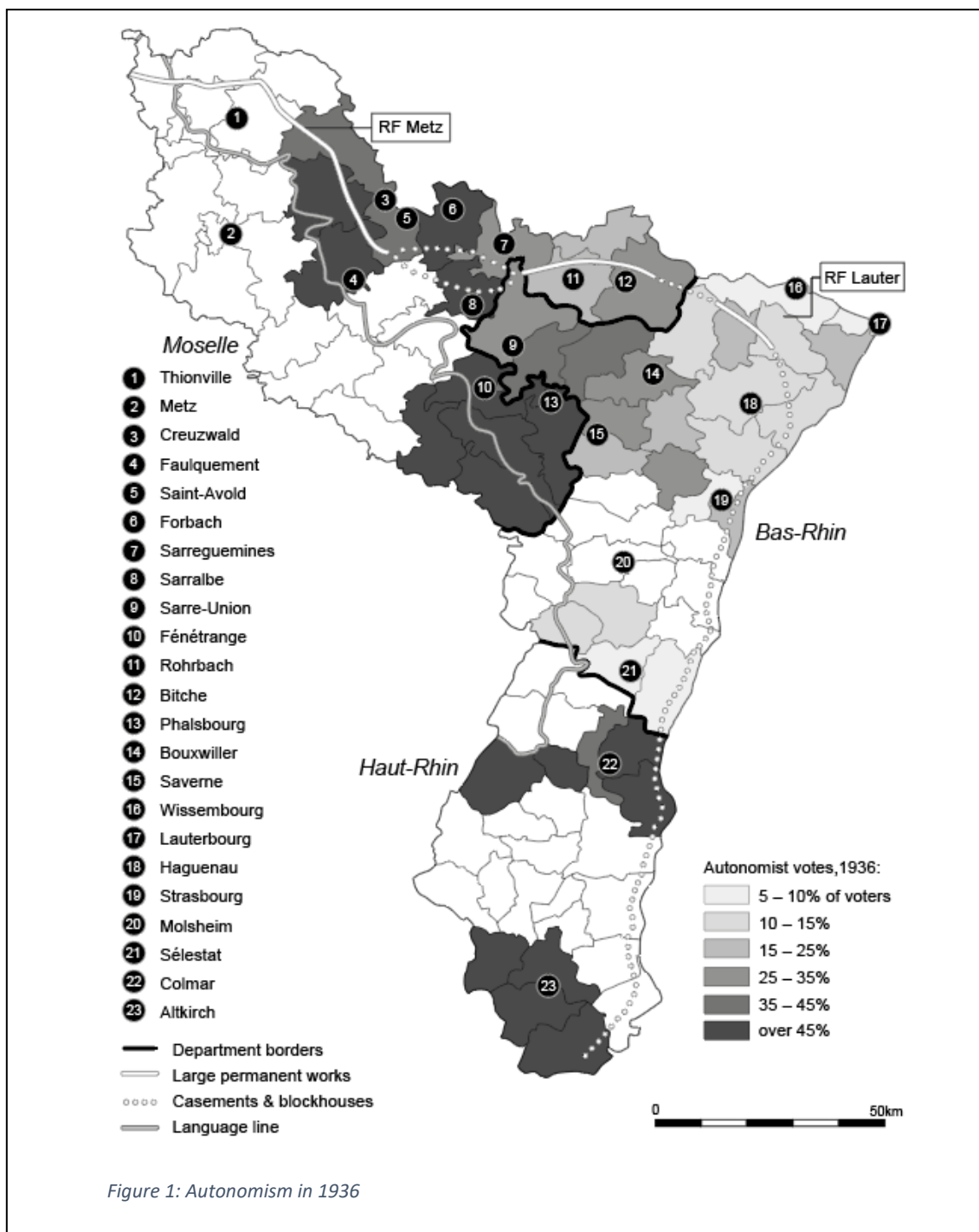
Problems soon arose. Alsace-Lorraine soldiers heard that evacuated friends and relatives had endured a hellish journey to the Southwest, where accommodation was inadequate, employment was lacking, and some locals insulted the "Boche." They also witnessed the pillage of evacuees' vacant homes. The authorities minimized problems and

² Archives départementales (AD) Bas-Rhin, 98AL649, Institut d'études Européennes (IEE), September 1, 1939.

³ The border from Luxembourg to Lauterbourg was defended by two fortified regions (RFs), comprising powerful individual underground *ouvrages*: RF-Metz mostly in Moselle and RF-Lauter in Bas-Rhin. The banks of the Rhine were defended by machine-gun casements. By 1940, thousands of small casements and blockhouses had also been constructed.

⁴ Carrol, *Borderland*, 144–45.

⁵ Passmore, "La Ligne Maginot," 265–66.



treated complaints as evidence of sympathy for the enemy.⁶ Insofar as historians of “mainstream” French history notice the “periphery,” they too minimize difficulties.⁷ They

⁶ SHD 27N12, ‘Note sur la situation en Alsace’, November 10, 1939 ; Hochstuhl, *Zwischen Frieden und Krieg*; Boswell, “Franco-Alsatian Conflict”; Dubois, Forcade, and Großmann, *Exils intérieurs*.

⁷ Crémieux-Brilhac, *Les Français de l’an 40*, 2. *Ouvriers et soldats*:439–42.

assume that democratization, free schooling, conscription, market exchange, and the experience of the Great War completed the work of monarchies and the Revolution in realizing national unity.⁸

Yet historians of Alsace-Lorraine show that the province did not fit easily into this national narrative. Loyalty to France had been strong in Alsace-Lorraine prior to German annexation, especially among the elites, and persisted afterwards. Yet the province experienced German, not French, nation-building and democratization. By 1914, French culture contributed more to a sense of difference within the federal German state than to separatism. Contestation was largely limited to Catholic demands for rights equal to those of other German provinces, for the “Reichsland Elsaß-Lothringen” was directly ruled by the Protestant, Prussian, militarist Reich.⁹ Most young men fought on the German side during the Great War. Afterwards, Alsace-Lorraine Catholics rarely contested French rule, but they opposed republican linguistic assimilation and secularism. In 1924, the government’s plan to introduce all secular legislation in Alsace-Lorraine provoked massive protest. It spread to Protestants, for assimilation threatened their language and culture, too. The communists, for whom minorities were allies of the proletariat, were frankly separatist. A cross-party autonomist alliance formed. During the last years of peace, conflict between the Popular Front and extreme-right leagues and the rise of Nazism disrupted this front, but autonomism did not disappear.¹⁰

Although the pro-Nazi minority was discredited, Kurt Hochstuhl argues that during the phoney war, repression, evacuation, and pillage sustained widespread attachment to Alsace’s difference. Whether this belief is labeled “regionalist” or “autonomist,” it challenged the Jacobin state on its military frontier—even more so as in practice the French saw Alsace-Lorrainers as ethnically alien.¹¹ Laird Boswell adds that evacuees’ experience triggered a “crisis of national sentiment” in Alsace-Lorraine, underlying which were different

⁸ Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen*.

⁹ Roth, *Les Lorrains entre la France et l’Allemagne*; Baechler, *Le Parti Catholique*; Fischer, *Alsace to the Alsatians?* In 1911, a limited constitution was granted.

¹⁰ Colas, “Les droites nationales,” 336–46; Fischer, *Alsace to the Alsatians?*, 195–200.

¹¹ Hochstuhl, *Zwischen Frieden und Krieg*.

conceptions of the state/region relationship. For the French, love of the *petite patrie* was necessary for love of the *grande patrie*, but subordinate because all citizens must assimilate to French culture and language. This assimilationism shaded into suspicion that Alsace-Lorrainers were unassimilable. Alsace-Lorrainers, in contrast, saw speaking German as compatible with citizenship.¹²

Although Maude Williams and Bernard Wilkin are concerned primarily with the military history of the 1940 defeat, their research implicitly challenges this picture of Alsace-Lorraine patriotism in crisis.¹³ In the letters of soldiers read by the military postal censor, they show that positive accounts of relations between Interior French and Alsace-Lorrainers greatly outweigh negative.¹⁴ Furthermore, Nicholas Williams's account of the evacuation is more positive than Boswell's.¹⁵ Focusing on Alsace-Lorraine itself rather than evacuees, this article aims to reconcile these readings by recognizing the conditional and dialogic nature of national loyalty in both borderlands and the "center."

Previous interpretations, although conflicting, arguably share the debatable assumption that social cohesion requires common values, i.e., patriotism, especially in the supposedly ultimate test of war.¹⁶ Instead, I develop Tara Zahra's argument, as applied to Alsace-Lorraine by Alison Carrol, that national loyalty in border populations is often pragmatic—as the accommodation of Alsace-Lorrainers to successive regimes amply confirms.¹⁷ I add that patriotism is conditional and contested in the center, too. I also

¹² Boswell, "Franco-Alsatian Conflict"; Hochstuhl, *Zwischen Frieden und Krieg*, 391, note 90.

¹³ In "Should France Be Ashamed of Its History?", Boswell presents a more nuanced picture of Alsace-Lorraine political culture.

¹⁴ Williams and Wilkin, *French Soldiers' Morale*, 17–20; Morin, "Paroles de « défaitistes »" shows widespread antiwar sentiment, including in Alsace-Lorraine.

¹⁵ Williams, "Les Évacuations de 1939 En Moselle et En Sarre."

¹⁶ Abercrombie, Hill, and Turner, *The Dominant Ideology Thesis* is a still relevant critique, using historical examples, of the idea that societies have or require shared values.

¹⁷ Zahra, *Kidnapped Souls*; Carrol, "Paths to Frenchness National Indifference and the Return of Alsace to France, 1919–1939."

problematize Boswell's assumption that internalized concepts of identity alone determined French attitudes towards Alsace-Lorrainers and thus reduced them to the passive other. I treat relations instead as unequal dialogues, in which national identity was not necessarily the primary stake.¹⁸ Individuals were also situated in multiple social relations, notably, class, gender, family, and religious relations. Interactions in Maginot Line bunkers therefore differed from those in Alsace-Lorraine homes. Consequently, complicity and conflict were both possible. And views could be modified through exchange.

This method informs the structure of the article. It begins with historical French and Alsace-Lorraine dialogues concerning national and regional identity. I argue that French views of Alsace-Lorraine were entangled with representations of Germany as both enemy of liberty and icon of order and military prowess, in which the province sometimes legitimated admiration of the hereditary enemy. Alsace-Lorrainers shared these clichés, and saw themselves as synthesizing German authority and French liberty. Interactions were further complicated by divisions on both sides, notably between communists and anticommunists, and among Alsace-Lorrainers by the presence of a substantial Protestant minority.

The article then explores interactions between "interior" French and Alsace-Lorrainers in different contexts during the war. It moves from pillaged villages at the front, through relations between soldiers and civilians in non-evacuated villages and homes, to military units. The final section explores the brief combats on the Maginot Line. Social and political historians usually avoid battlefield history. Consequently, they fall back on the assumption that combat performance depended directly on internalized patriotism—as the army then thought it did. Drawing on research showing that people weigh priorities even when making instantaneous decisions in extreme situations, I show that even in combat morale as conventionally understood had little impact on performance, but that relations

¹⁸ This specific formulation relies on Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, who sees any utterance as an implicit dialogue with preceding ideas and with the interlocutor, including with imaginary interlocutors who are not physically involved in the conversation. More generally the article is informed by the critique of functionalist sociology in Dobry, *Sociologie des crises politiques*; His notoriously difficult ideas are most accessible in the response to critics in "Éléments de réponse."

within units did matter.¹⁹ In defeat, the usual routines broke down, but historically situated rationality still shaped behavior. Many Alsace-Lorrainers returned home. The Interior French scapegoated Alsace-Lorrainers to counter the charge that they had themselves proved unworthy of their country and to cover shame at surrender.

An obstacle to this analysis is that sources privilege Interior French (male) voices. The intelligence services' obsession with German instrumentalization of autonomism exaggerates its extremism and underestimates what it shared with mainstream opinion. The briefings of the Institut d'Études Européennes (IEE), a state-subsidized intelligence agency run by Alsace-Lorraine nationalists, are more nuanced.²⁰ The Germanophone press—read by the vast majority—gives a more rounded view. Extracts from soldiers' letters in military censors' reports include Interior French and Alsace-Lorraine voices mediated through censors' choices, but Alsace-Lorrainers had more reason to fear prosecution for what they wrote. While numerous Interior French soldiers' letters and diaries have been published, there are no Alsace-Lorraine equivalents. However, mapping positive and negative interactions between Alsace-Lorrainers and Interior French against electoral geography shows that political and religious divisions within towns and villages were often entangled with attitudes towards the French.

Alsace-Lorraine, France, and Germany

As Laird Boswell argues, Interior French attitudes towards Alsace-Lorrainers were shaped by assimilationist and even ethnic conceptions of national identity.²¹ Indeed, the apparently assimilated were sometimes regarded as especially dangerous: the IEE cautioned that “the more suspect natives of Alsace-Lorraine are, the less they appear as such, for instance

¹⁹ Excellent starting points are Kugel et al., “Psychology of Physical Bravery”; Frisk, “What Makes a Hero?”; “The Psychology of Heroes: Antecedents and Consequences of Combat-Decorated Heroism.”

²⁰ The IEE was founded by the nationalist, Protestant Senator Frédéric Eccard. *Le Livre de ma vie*, 312–31, 330–32.

²¹ Boswell, “Franco-Alsatian Conflict,” 554–55, 580.

linguistically.”²² But that was not the whole story. Republican universalism was not meaningless, and views on both sides were mixed.

A dialogical approach allows us to see that while the French conventionally contrasted their liberties with German authoritarianism, they were sensitive to the objection that excessive liberty permitted disorder. It is therefore possible to detect in French discourses covert admiration for German qualities and to see that Alsace-Lorraine’s “Germanic” qualities functioned as an acceptable way to admire the hereditary enemy.²³ In fields from social insurance to pronatalism and military doctrine, Germany and/or Alsace-Lorraine were portrayed as exemplary.²⁴ In particular, Alsace-Lorrainers were thought to share Germanic military qualities. The IEE for instance stated that “depending on his linguistic level, the man of the recovered region furnishes a somewhat passive soldier, whose obedience is somewhat fearful but willing.”²⁵ These stereotypes were not confined to elite circles. Two of the most successful feature films of the immediate pre-war years, *Double Crime sur la Ligne Maginot* (1937) and *Deuxième Bureau contre Kommandatur*, based on novels authored pseudonymously by a serving officer, Pierre Nord, feature model Alsatian officers who are potentially disloyal. The months before the war witnessed a wave

²² AD Bas-Rhin, 98AL649, IEE, September 8, 1939. The analyst added that Alsatian officers who appeared French and “affected zealotry” were over-promoted, while others’ “timidity and poor French made them less interesting.”

²³ Noblemaire, *Carnet de Route*, 9–11.

²⁴ SHD 1N25/5, PV CSG, July 13, 1922: in the Conseil supérieure de la Guerre, General de Maistre mocked obsession with German methods. Paul Haury, in “Sous le signe de l’inquiétude,” *Revue de l’Alliance nationale pour l’accroissement de la population*, January 1934, regards Germans as both danger and example; Smith, *Creating the Welfare State* shows the importance of German legislation in Alsace-Lorraine in the genesis of the Social Insurance Laws of 1928 and 1930.

²⁵ AN Fonds Moscou, 19940500/73/1413, undated note, likely November 1939. SHD 7/N/3766/3, IEE, ‘Remarques récentes sur la situation le long de la Ligne Maginot’, January 19, 1939.

of spy fever centered on Alsace-Lorraine, in which the socialists and even communists participated.²⁶

In July 1938, Commander-in Chief General Maurice Gamelin informed defense and prime minister Daladier that while most Alsace-Lorrainers were loyal, they constituted 50 percent of spies, and that the many conscripts with relatives in Germany were suspicious.²⁷ Conscripts assigned to the RIFs were therefore vetted and their proportion limited to 10 percent in Alsace and 20 percent in Moselle.²⁸ In July 1939, the Conseil supérieure de la guerre rejected as “contrary to the national interest” a proposal to improve the speed of mobilization by increasing the proportion of Alsace-Lorrainers in the RIFs.²⁹ In practice vetting was rigorous for the minority of soldiers assigned to the huge individual *ouvrages* and lax for those who manned the “intervals” between them—with consequences we shall discover.

Alsace-Lorrainers too contrasted French liberty with German order, and held that their province’s culture countered the excesses of French liberty while avoiding Prussian authoritarianism.³⁰ Many shared clichés about the French systematized in the German Friedrich Sieburg’s widely-read *Gott in Frankreich* (1929). The title echoes the expression “wie Gott in Frankreich,” meaning living in luxury. According to this view, whereas the French were lazy, disorganized, and dirty, Germans were hard working and dynamic.³¹ One evacuee ironically recalled her experiences as living “wie Gott in Frankreich.” Another

²⁶ *Humanité*, December 7, 1938 ; Baechler, “L’autonomisme Alsacien Dans l’entre-Deux-Guerres.”

²⁷ SHN 7/NN/2131/2, Gamelin to Daladier, July 1938.

²⁸ SHD 1/N/55/1/3, 4 April 1934, Note of Weygand’s remarks; note État Major, April 7, 1934; 33N95/5, Instruction, May 19, 1938.

²⁹ SHD 7/N/3770/3, September 30 to October 4, 1938 ; 1N38/4, July 11, 1939.

³⁰ AN C15164, Chambre, Commission de l’Armée, Correspondance 1940, Unsigned, Colmar, October 16, 1939 to prefect ; Carrol, *Borderland*, 143–44.

³¹ Boswell, “Franco-Alsatian Conflict,” 560.

described southwesterners as “300 years behind,” as “savages,” who know only turnip soup, bread, and wine.³²

This belief in Alsace-Lorraine superiority extended well beyond autonomists. The future French Prime Minister Robert Schuman had no sympathy with autonomism. Yet his family and education straddled Moselle, Luxembourg, Strasbourg, and various German universities, and before 1918, he had never contested German rule. Now, he thought that forty-seven years of annexation left “an imprint that we neither can nor should allow to be erased from one day to the next,” and asked rhetorically, “How many French have told me how beneficial Alsace-Lorraine can be for France if it remains firm and devoted?”³³ Schuman’s beliefs both provided a bridge to French Catholics and showed that even nationalists defended the province’s particularities.

Alsace-Lorrainers’ views of the French were further complicated by political and religious divisions among them. We saw that during the annexation, Catholics, who formed the overwhelming majority in southern Alsace and all but a few Moselle cantons, condemned “Prussian” authoritarianism without contesting the German state. After 1919, they pragmatically accepted the French state, too, but the government’s religious and linguistic policies caused many to turn towards autonomism and regionalism. The autonomist deputies, Joseph Rossé and former German officer Marcel Stürmel, probably dreamed of a neutral Alsace-Lorraine, perhaps including the Catholic Rhineland.³⁴ Their major opponents in Southern Alsace were Catholic nationalists. They nevertheless uneasily co-existed within the same party (the Union populaire républicaine/Elsässische Volkspartei). Compromise was possible because autonomists protested loyalty to France while nationalists defended local particularities.

In Northern Bas-Rhin and contiguous Moselle as far as Forbach, politics were polarized by class and religion. First, in Strasbourg and Moselle mining and steel towns, both

³² AD Bas-Rhin 98AL292 (I), contrôle postal, April 1940, quoted in *ibid*.

³³ Roth, *Robert Schuman*, loc 1072, 1132; Lawrence, Baycroft, and Grohmann, “Degrees of Foreignness,” 65.

³⁴ Dreyfus, *La vie politique*, 131, 270; Fischer, *Alsace to the Alsations?*

orthodox Communists and the dissidents who allied formally with autonomists advocated self-determination. Secondly, rural villages were marked by a historic struggle for influence between Catholics and a strong Lutheran minority, the latter divided between secular nationalists, anti-clerical, left-wing, pro-French autonomists, the pro-German *Landespartei*, and the pro-Nazi *Jungmannschaft*.³⁵ Here, the bitter legacy of denunciation of Francophiles to the German authorities during the Great War and of Germanophiles to the French authorities thereafter persisted during the phoney war.³⁶

The Decline of Autonomism?

Some historians exaggerate the displacement of autonomism during the final years of peace by conflict between the far-right leagues and Popular Front.³⁷ Yet the Popular Front proved impossible in Alsace-Lorraine because the ultra-assimilationist socialists could not agree with the communists, who only gradually abandoned their view that French rule in Alsace-Lorraine was “imperialist.” In the second round of the 1936 elections, communist voters often preferred autonomists to socialists. On the other side, the largest league, the *Croix de Feu* (from 1936 the *Parti Social Français*), was divided between nationalists and autonomists.³⁸ In Alsace, five openly autonomist deputies were elected in 1936.³⁹ Two candidates backed by the autonomists and *Croix de Feu* were elected in Moselle, and autonomist leader Antoni came second with 46 percent of the vote in heavily-fortified

³⁵ AN 20030515/1, *Autonomisme Alsacien*, Inspecteur Mayer, November 6, 1946; Klein, *Camille Dahlet*; Bankwitz, *Alsatian Autonomist Leaders*, 23–32; Dreyfus, *La vie politique*, 266; Zanoun, “Interwar Politics,” 122–23; Colas, “Les droites nationales,” 336–43; Metzger, “Relations Entre Autonomists Lorrains.”

³⁶ Boswell, “From Liberation to Purge Trials.”

³⁷ Colas, “Les droites nationales,” 336–46; Fischer, *Alsace to the Alsations?*, 195–200.

³⁸ SHD 31N63, “Incidents,” manuscript note, 15 January 1937; *Echo de Paris*, 3 Mai 1936; ‘Les votes Croix de Feu’, *Echo de Paris*, May 3, 1936 ; *Le Flambeau de l’Est*, April 9, 1938, “Das neue Detschland und wir”, cited in Goodfellow, *Between the Swastika and the Cross of Lorraine*, 146–47; Zanoun, “Interwar Politics,” 150, 214.

³⁹ Dreyfus, *La vie politique*, 259; Baechler, *Le Parti Catholique*, 495–500; Carrol, *Borderland*, 102–30.

Boulay.⁴⁰ In the 1936 parliament, seven or eight autonomists from both Alsace and Moselle sat in a parliamentary group with eight or nine deputies elected against them. The status of the province remained a live issue as France went to war.

Attitudes to the Third Reich were more ambiguous than some have allowed. For Catholics, Nazism appeared to revive hated Protestant militarism, while many Lutherans too denounced Nazi persecution.⁴¹ In 1938-9, the revelation that Stürmel and Antoni had received money from Germany embarrassed them.⁴² Yet there was much sympathy for Nazi anticommunism and antisemitism.⁴³ Above all, the Nazis' contradictory promotion of German minority rights and acceptance of French rule in Alsace-Lorraine resonated. Nationalists and autonomists alike gave credence to Hitler's reassurances and minimized Nazi expansionism. In September 1938, during the Munich crisis, Interior French appeasers opposed war on the grounds that it benefitted communism, while Alsace-Lorraine counterparts, autonomist or anti-autonomist, saw the Sudeten crisis as proof of the danger of denying minority rights.⁴⁴

In March 1939, the German destruction of the rump Czechoslovakia, an obvious breach of the Munich agreement, undermined Appeasement. Alsace-Lorraine nationalists concluded that Germans only understood force, yet still insisted that "Partikularismus" was "as essential to the spiritual defense of the country as the Maginot Line is to material defense."⁴⁵ Autonomists never abandoned hope that war could be avoided.⁴⁶ An IEE

⁴⁰ Zanoun, "Interwar Politics."

⁴¹ Storne-Sengel, *Les Protestantes*, 81–82, 265–73.

⁴² Baechler, *Le Parti Catholique*, 546–47; Hochstuhl, *Zwischen Frieden und Krieg*, 161–62.

⁴³ *Jung Lothringen* July 29, 1933, November 3, 1935; *ELZ*, "Vor einer internationalen Lösung der Judenfrage," November 19–20, 1939; Goodfellow, *Between the Swastika and the Cross of Lorraine*, 82–84; Storne-Sengel, *Les Protestantes*, 265–73.

⁴⁴ *Der Elsässer*, September 30, 1938.

⁴⁵ *Straßburger Neuste Nachrichten*, April 8, 1939.

⁴⁶ *Elsasser Kurier*, March 18 and 20, 1939; *Die Heimat*, March 1939, p. 65; *Elsaß-Lothringer Zeitung*, March 17, 1939; Hochstuhl, *Zwischen Frieden und Krieg*, 146–47.

informant claimed to have heard at least twenty-five people repeat Rossé's view that French interests were not at stake in Eastern Europe.⁴⁷

Appeasement was reinforced by the province's history of antimilitarism. It dated back to Catholic antipathy to the militarists around the Kaiser, who allegedly treated Alsace-Lorraine as a glacis—the killing ground in advance of fortifications.⁴⁸ From 1928, thanks to construction of the Maginot Line, antimilitarism spread to Protestants and even nationalists. Brawls between Innerfranzosen conscripts and Alsace-Lorrainers were frequent. Around the fortifications, there were bothersome restrictions, and the 1934 anti-espionage law permitted hundreds of arrests and prosecutions for encroaching on military terrain or taking photographs in their vicinity. Furthermore, this law was used to arrest autonomists such as the former Landespartei leader Karl Roos. There was little sympathy for him personally, but prosecution was widely regarded as politically motivated and proof that Alsace-Lorrainers were second-class citizens.⁴⁹

On the eve of war, there was considerable potential for antagonism between Interior French and Alsace-Lorrainers. Autonomists remained more significant than some historians have suggested, and their opponents too were attached to the region's special culture. Yet the ambiguity of stereotypes on both sides, coupled with the view that Alsace-Lorraine linked France and Germany, permitted understanding, too.

Mobilization and War

In September 1939, historians agree, the French accepted war as the unavoidable alternative to German hegemony.⁵⁰ That was true also of Haut-Rhin, where the IEE contrasted the "seriousness and calm" of the present with the near panic of the Munich crisis. Patriotic demonstrations happened in Northern Alsace, too: on hearing that Britain had declared war, infantry officer René Balbaud reported, German-speakers were singing

⁴⁷ AD Bas-Rhin 98AL647, IEE, April 27, 1939.

⁴⁸ Passmore, "La Ligne Maginot," 258.

⁴⁹ Passmore, 267–70. *L'Elssässer*, April 26, 1939; AD Bas-Rhin, 98AL648, IEE. July 1939; AD Bas-Rhin, 98AL156, IEE, February 8 and 20, 1940.

⁵⁰ Crémieux-Brilhac, *Les Français de l'an 40*, 2. Ouvriers et soldats:425–27.

‘God Save the King.’⁵¹ While explicit antiwar sentiment was exceptional in the North, the IEE thought that in Lauterbourg-Wissembourg, separating mothers and children for evacuation harmed already frayed nerves.⁵² It saw the firing of a Moselle postman for refusing to distribute mobilization papers as proving “microbial proliferation” of autonomism.⁵³ The future Resistance leader Raymond Aubrac, stationed north of Strasbourg, recalled that on learning of the declaration of war, older reserves, speaking an “incomprehensible language,” were overcome by great anxiety and got roaringly drunk.⁵⁴

It is well established too that troops’ morale declined during the eight months of the exceptionally cold winter, as boredom and drunkenness became endemic. Interior French and Alsace-Lorrainers alike saw suffering as pointless, and many expected a compromise peace. Generally, morale recovered in spring.⁵⁵ However, the botched evacuation, pillage of refugees’ homes, and the authorities’ weak response provided Alsace-Lorrainers with additional grievances. The absence of bombardment and the failure of German propaganda to exploit Alsace-Lorraine discontent apparently substantiated Hitler’s claim to have no quarrel with France.⁵⁶ The arrest in October of 300 autonomists, including three deputies (Rossé, Stürmel, and the autonomist-communist Jean-Pierre Mourer) and the Mosellan autonomist Antoni, was seen by Alsace-Lorrainers as another attack on political liberty. In February, Roos was executed. The IEE again urged the government to stress that his crime

⁵¹ Balbaud, *Cette drôle de guerre*, 14.

⁵² AD Bas-Rhin 98AL647, IEE, August 25, September 1, 5, 6, 1939; Hochstuhl, *Zwischen Frieden und Krieg*, 151–52.

⁵³ *Der Elsässer*, August 31, 1939; AD Bas-Rhin, 98AL649, September 8, 1939; Hochstuhl, *Zwischen Frieden und Krieg*, 170–72.

⁵⁴ Aubrac, *Où la mémoire s’attarde*, 57–58.

⁵⁵ Crémieux-Brilhac, *Les Français de l’an 40*, 2. Ouvriers et soldats:425–76; Williams and Wilkin, *French Soldiers’ Morale*.

⁵⁶ SHD 5/N/588, Rapport Miellet, October 12-13, 1939.

was not “opinion,” but espionage, “permitting the Germans to wage a bloody war against the Maginot Line.”⁵⁷

The authorities remained ambivalent about Alsace-Lorraine soldiers. In October, parliamentary inspectors over-estimated their proportion in the RIFs at 60-90 percent. They concluded that morale was generally good, but required “surveillance so that the warrior mentality of Alsatians in particular is not lost in the current inaction.” They feared that German propaganda would create doubts about the necessity of the war, especially as the evacuation had undermined morale.⁵⁸ In February 1940, the Chamber Army Commission proposed transferring Alsace-Lorrainers to the North, but Daladier’s office reiterated that speedy mobilization required local reserves with specialist skills.⁵⁹ General Georges, Gamelin’s deputy on the northeastern front, nevertheless ordered use of an impending exchange of personnel between fortress and line regiments to distance Alsace-Lorrainers from the fortifications.⁶⁰ Eighteen autonomists, mostly Alsace-Lorrainers, among the 527 soldiers listed by the army as “revolutionary propagandists,” were excluded from sensitive positions and could not become corporals.⁶¹ Vetting was more extensive, yet haphazard, in interval units: even Hermann Bickler, leader of the Jungmannschaft, served in a Sarre blockhouse for a few weeks.

The army also worried that Interior French soldiers saw Alsace-Lorrainers as un-French. Officers were ordered to explain that Alsace-Lorrainers “conserve preciously their dialect, which surprises and shocks many soldiers of the “interior” who are badly informed.”⁶² This circular implicitly acknowledged that prejudice legitimated looting

⁵⁷ *L’Elssässer*, 26 April 1939; AD Bas-Rhin 98AL647, IEE, February 20, 1939 and 98AL156, IEE, February 14, 1940.

⁵⁸ SHD 5/N/588, Rapport Miellet, October 12-13, 1939.

⁵⁹ SHD 5/N/585, Daladier to President of Chamber army commission, February 22, 1940.

⁶⁰ SHD 7/N/150, Georges, ‘Note’, March 1, 1939.

⁶¹ SHD 5/N/602/1/2, April 30, 1940.

⁶² SHD 27/N/69/1/1b GQG Note pour les armées, November 30, 1939.

evacuees' homes. This is the first context in which we may examine interaction between Interior French and Alsace-Lorrainers—with a partially absent interlocutor.

Pillage

Because pillage often compensated for serious supply problems, the army emitted contradictory signals, increasing penalties for looting while ordering soldiers to requisition essentials. Officers often turned a blind eye or looted themselves.⁶³ As Williams and Wilkin show, soldiers honestly condemned pillage. Yet they took “necessities” themselves while condemning “pillage” by “others”—often said to be colonials or southerners.⁶⁴ Notwithstanding, some soldiers admitted stealing. One promised his parents “souvenirs like those I’ve already sent.”⁶⁵

Yet neither supply issues nor opportunism can provide the whole explanation, for pillage varied geographically. Homes on the Swiss border were untouched. Moving north along the Rhine, pillage was sporadic, as parliamentary inspectors concluded.⁶⁶ Well-guarded Strasbourg property was intact, but from the Rhine to the Moselle, looting was the rule. On the Luxembourg border, it was again rare.⁶⁷ Pillage, then, was restricted to the German border, but in different degrees.

⁶³ Hiegel, *La drôle de guerre en Moselle*; Boswell, “Franco-Alsatian Conflict,” 161–64.

⁶⁴ SHD 27/N/69/2/2a, CP, 24 October 1939. Typically, a soldier in 79 RIF wrote that a trip to Nimmling [sic] to search for a blanket would be his last, for it was depressing to see houses in which everything had been pillaged.

⁶⁵ SHD 27/N/69/2/2d, CP, January 29, 1940 (279 RI). Another admitted stealing old engravings (January 18, 1940, 78 RI). Various sources suggest that Alsace-Lorrainers also looted. Given the level of antagonism in some communities, it is possible that there was a political dimension to it.

⁶⁶ AD Bas-Rhin, 98AL283 for the draft reports ; Crémieux-Brilhac, *Les Français de l’an 40*, 2. Ouvriers et soldats:441, note 1.

⁶⁷ AN C15160, Rapports 1939-40 including Mazerand, November 29, 1939; AD Bas-Rhin, Préfet Bas-Rhin to Vice-Présidence du Conseil, October 18, 1939; Préfet Bas-Rhin to

Pillage was intermittent on the militarily calm Rhine frontier, where the border was obvious. It was most common on the ill-defined forest border from the Lauter to the Moselle, where, in September 1939, the Forbach salient witnessed the German Saar offensive. Thereafter, soldiers manning advance-posts on freezing, wet, nights lived in fear of German patrols.⁶⁸ And there were rumors that locals who had crossed the frontier to avoid evacuation guided German raiders.⁶⁹ In this specific context, the potential disloyalty of the Germanophone population may explain pillage.

Soldiers' letters and diaries do confirm Hiegel's and Boswell's suggestion that soldiers treated Alsace-Lorraine as conquered territory. Gaston Folcher, a southerner mobilized in 12 Zouaves, claimed improbably that on its way to Lorraine his train encountered an evacuee train with swastika-adorned bedspreads hanging from its windows, which soldiers attempted to rip down.⁷⁰ Once in the Red Zone, soldiers rarely met civilians, but Germanic residential architecture (less common in Moselle) and above all contents of houses supposedly proved sympathy for the enemy.⁷¹ Captain Loustaunau-Lacau wrote, "If the photographs in the albums [of Wissembourg inhabitants] are to be believed, they live as a patriarchal tribe and display pro-Hitler sentiments."⁷² Adjutant Lavergne (162 RIF) encountered gunners who thought they were in Germany because they saw pictures of

Vice-Présidence du Conseil, October 13, 1939; SHD 27/N/69/2/2e, CP, February 23, 1940; Giroud, *Le Journal*, 156–58, January 21, 1940; Hiegel, *La drôle de guerre en Moselle*, 1: 3 septembre 1939-10 mai 1940:338–44; Sartre, *Carnets*, February 18, 1940; Jean Vetel (71 RIA), Deroo and Taillac, *Carnets de Déroute*, 339–44; Lavergne, *Journal de guerre du Hackenberg*, 10, September 5, 1939.

⁶⁸ For multiple expressions of fear, see censors' reports, SHD 27/N/69.

⁶⁹ SHD 27/N/69/2/25, March 17, 1940 (96 RIA); AN C15160, Mission aux armées, September 1939; Dufilho, *Mon lieutenant*, 55–56, November 1, 1939.

⁷⁰ Folcher, *Les Carnets*, 24–25 There is no trace of this incident in any other source.

⁷¹ Hiegel, *La drôle de guerre en Moselle*, 1: 3 septembre 1939-10 mai 1940:345–46.

⁷² Loustaunau-Lacau, *Mémoires d'un Français rebelle*, 1914-48, 143–44; See also Nicolle, *Comme tant d'autres*, 55–62, who reports that antisemitic under-officers in 4 DINA sacked Jews' houses on the grounds that Léon Blum was responsible for the war.

German soldiers on the walls.⁷³ Others knew perfectly well where they were: one claimed that men vandalized houses because they “smell of Germany and more or less disguised attachment to that country. How else to explain all those photos in field grey carefully conserved in cupboards along with German brochures?”⁷⁴

Furthermore, pillage denied the absent inhabitants’ humanity. In January 1940, sapper André Giraud (4 Génie) remarked on the intimate objects and memories profaned in pillaged houses: “So many loving touches trampled and soiled!”⁷⁵ Though sometimes the work of roaming pigs, defecation recalled the propaganda of the last war, in which Germans were attributed a foul odor. Where Giraud politely mentioned “soiling,” an Alsatian under-officer lamented that in his boudoir, “they sat my lovely dolls in a circle and crapped in the middle.”⁷⁶ Several soldiers commented on the stink of manure in Lorraine village streets, and sometimes linked it to the character of the locals. A captain in 47 DI claimed that people were “filthy beyond imagination,” adding that “the smell of manure, people, and livestock penetrates everywhere and makes the atmosphere nauseating. The people wear filthy rags.”⁷⁷ The notion of Germans as barbarians, another Grande Guerre theme, echoes, too. One wrote, “Here in Moselle, the elderly speak only German; they are savages.”⁷⁸ Sartre explicitly connected vandalism to prejudice: soldiers complained about everything from the language to Alsatian sausages. Everyone had met someone who claimed to be Alsatian first, French or German second. “Obviously,” Sartre sarcastically concluded, “this righteous indignation easily leads to shitting in evacuees’ beds.”⁷⁹

⁷³ Lavergne, *Journal de guerre du Hackenberg*, September 11, 10 and 15, 1939. See also Gousset, *Dites à la Kommandantur*, 34; Jamet, *Carnets de dérouté*, 24–27, 13 October ? 1940.

⁷⁴ SHD 27/N/69/2/2c, CP 8 December 1939.

⁷⁵ Giroud, *Journal d’un sapeur rebelle*, 119–21, December 22, 1939.

⁷⁶ Sartre, *Carnets*, February 18, 1940. See also Didelot, *Drôle de guerre*, 23–25; SHD 27N69/2/2a, 6 October 1939.

⁷⁷ SHD 27/N/69/2/2e, CP, February 23, 1940.

⁷⁸ SHD 27/N/69/2/2e, CP, February 23, 1940.

⁷⁹ Sartre, *Carnets*, 217, 23 November 1939.

Notwithstanding, pillage did not derive entirely from anti-Alsace-Lorraine prejudice, for as Williams and Wilkin show, many condemned it in principle if not practice. Furthermore, others besides Interior French pillaged. German troops looted Forbach, while British troops maltreated the Metz sector.⁸⁰ Most relevant is that some Alsace-Lorraine civilians looted empty homes. Though the sources are silent, antimilitarism and class conflict were both a source of antagonism within local society and of potential collusion with the Interior French. The fact that military property and officers' homes were looted suggests that Alsace-Lorrainers and Interior French might have shared antimilitarist and class resentments, and acted in parallel if they did not collude.⁸¹ Most often, however, the absence of the interlocutor allowed free reign to prejudice or at least provided a convenient legitimization for theft. In non-evacuated villages, understanding was more common.

Soldiers and Civilians

In letters and diaries, soldiers often expressed republican views of citizenship, with all their ambiguities. Many saw Alsace-Lorrainers as patriotically French, despite their language. Jean-Louis Barrault met "fantastic Alsations, who spoke French with difficulty but precisely." He gave them Gérard de Nerval's *Sylvie*, a product of the "pure French language"—they seemingly required further education.⁸² Others saw assimilation as incomplete. Sartre encountered a sergeant who thought that allowing Alsace-Lorraine to keep its traditions was "soft."⁸³ A soldier in SF-Bas-Rhin saw Alsations as "not completely foreign," but thought it good for children to learn French.⁸⁴ Still others regarded difference as deeper. Giroud, no nationalist, expressed surprise at the otherness of Bettborn: "One would think oneself in invaded territory. Only children speak French correctly. On the town hall, the inscription

⁸⁰ Pflanz, *Geschichte Der* 258, I: 1939 und 1940 Aufstellung und Frankreichfeldzug:45. National Archives (UK) WO 167/968, War dairy 1st battalion Coldstreams, 5 February 1940.

⁸¹ SHD 27 N 69/2/2f, CP, 2-8 March 1940, 57 GRDI; 33/N/114/6, Regard to SF - Vosges, 7 November 1939; Regard to commandant 37 RIF, 11 December 1939; 34/N/51, Rapport Branchard, undated 1945.

⁸² Barrault, *Souvenirs*, 158.

⁸³ Sartre, *Carnets*, 217, 23 November 1939.

⁸⁴ SHD 27N69/2/2a, October 26, 1939.

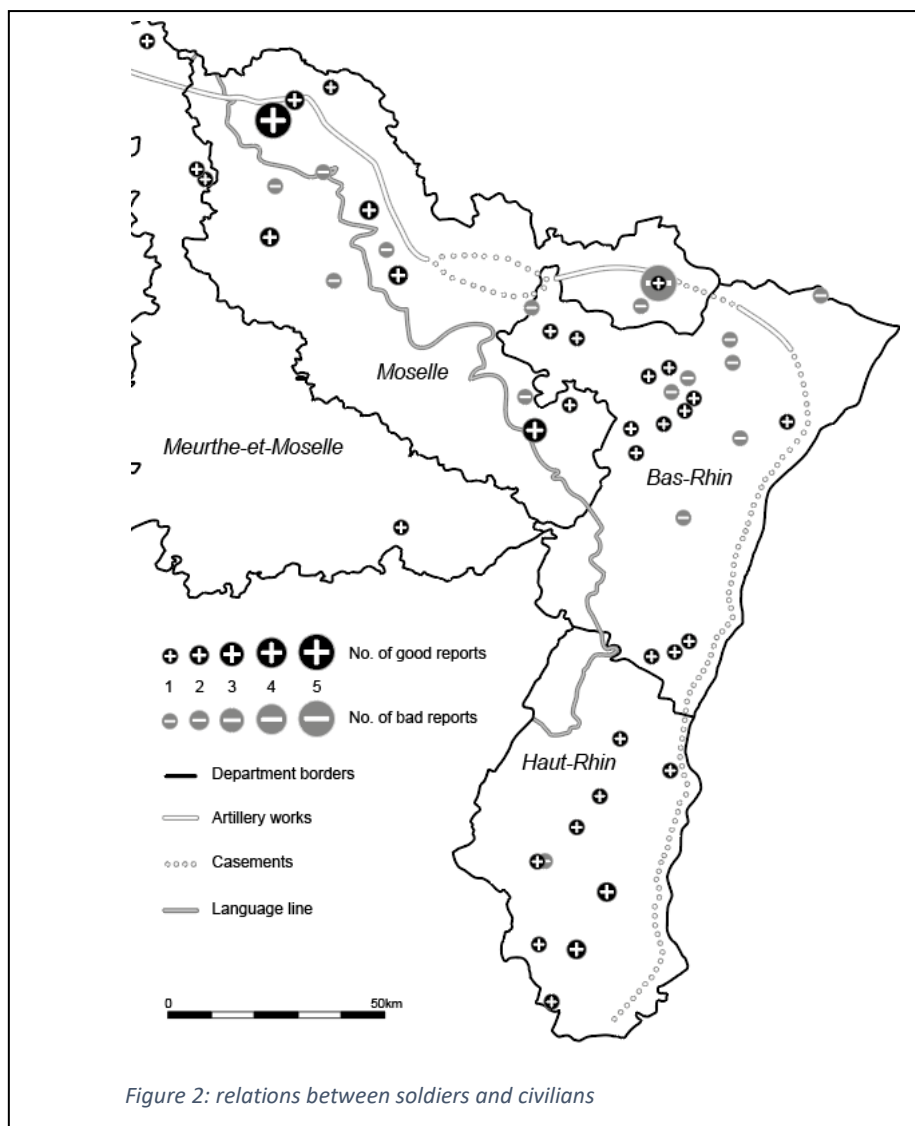


Figure 2: relations between soldiers and civilians

“Ecole – Mairie” only just covers ‘Knabenschule.’” A lieutenant in Giroud’s unit reluctantly accepted fighting for “this dirty race,” for it was the only way to defend his own home.⁸⁵ Outright use of ethnic criteria was rare, but one soldier thought that “some Alsatians bear the indelible mark of the Boche.”⁸⁶ These views are only part of the story, for their practical meaning depended on interaction in different contexts.

Interaction varied geographically. Figure 2 maps troops’ opinions of Alsace-Lorrainers culled from references to specific locations in censors’ reports and diaries. There is too little data for precise conclusions, for soldiers were forbidden to reveal their locations.

⁸⁵ See page 33; SHD 27/N/69/2/2d, CP, January 10, 1940; Giroud, *Journal d’un sapeur rebelle*, 119–21, December 22, 1939.

⁸⁶ SHD 27N69/2/2a, October 26, 1939.

However, the broad pattern is clear. Positive reports dominate southern Alsace, while in northern Alsace and contiguous Moselle, reports were mixed. Yet geography too is insufficient to understand relations. Closer examination suggests that everywhere relations were complex.

Take first the positive reports. They are found in both pro- and anti-autonomist areas: Mulhouse was known for its Francophilia, but there was one positive report in Rossé's Colmar and three in Stürmel's Sundgau, and several in the north. Officers sometimes displayed sympathy for Alsace-Lorrainers' high religious practice. One painted an idealized picture of Christmas mass.⁸⁷ Another excused Alsatian men who left for home on Saturday evenings until after mass on Sunday morning as "largely good soldiers."⁸⁸ Anti-Nazism also permitted understanding. A soldier stationed in the Colmar area said that locals worried about the evacuation, but were "excellent French people, who detest Hitler and fear attachment to the Reich."⁸⁹

Notwithstanding, Interior French soldiers might have too readily seen anti-Nazism as proof of French nationalism. Take for instance Giraud's account of his Fleisheim host's eyes shining with anger as he described a gamekeeper who had refused soldiers permission to gather wood as a "Prussian" veteran of the German army.⁹⁰ Did the old man's hyper-patriotism counter fear of being seen as disloyal? Did condemnation of "Prussia" cover sympathy for autonomism? That pillagers were sometimes compared to "Prussians" suggests moral equivalence between the two.⁹¹ The point is that then as now the response is ambiguous. Another case confirms that calling other Alsatians "Boche" did not necessarily imply patriotism. In September 1939, Monsieur Peter called three Alsatian officers who attempted to requisition his firm's construction material "pillagers," "swine," and "Boche," and invited them to go to Germany where such methods were acceptable. As the affair escalated, Feger, one of the Alsatian officers, expressed outrage that Peter should insult

⁸⁷ Dufilho, *Mon lieutenant*, 62–64.

⁸⁸ SHD 33N114/5, Regard to SF Vosges, October 4, 1939.

⁸⁹ SHD 27/N/69/2/2d, CP, February 23, 1939.

⁹⁰ Giroud, *Journal d'un sapeur rebelle*, 169–72, March 2, 1940.

⁹¹ SHD 27/N/69/2c, CP December 21, 1939.

French officers, Alsatians to boot; for him, Peter was the “German.” Feger’s Interior French superior added that Peter seized any opportunity to demonstrate his animosity towards France.⁹²

Likewise, Interior French soldiers billeted in Alsatian homes too hastily saw warm welcomes as proof of unconditional loyalty to France. In fact, in this context, family mattered more than national identity, or politics was set aside. Many soldiers remarked on being treated as part of the family. They extolled comfy beds, milky coffee and buttered bread for breakfast, convivial dinners with families, Christmas presents and parties, despite the language divide.⁹³ There were also many relationships between soldiers and local young women.⁹⁴ Doubtless, young soldiers reminded hosts that their own relatives were mobilized, too. A medical officer reported that in Alsace-Bossue, men were treated as family members in return for help with farm work. That officers’ relations with locals were “icier” suggests, however, that locals responded to conscripts as young men deserving of sympathy, but to officers as symbols of French authority.⁹⁵

Other evidence suggests reservations on both sides. It is possible that soldiers who presented an idyllic picture to families expressed different views to their comrades in units. Sartre thought double standards were common: soldiers were “lodged free by bourgeois, pampered [*mignonnés*] by pretty girls, and applauded by children, yet they severely criticize Alsatians.⁹⁶ That was true of Folcher, the previously mentioned Zouave, who despite denigrating the Lorraine helped farmers in return for milk.⁹⁷

Perhaps family motifs in letters masked the reality of infidelity, harassment, and paid sex in an Alsace-Lorraine from which local young men were largely absent—as the sexual

⁹² SHD 14 P 8, Fager, Compte-rendu, September 27; Simon to Commander SF-Bas Rhin, September 28, 1939.

⁹³ SHD 27N69/2/2a, CP, November 10, 1939.

⁹⁴ Sartre, *Carnets*, 634; Laumonier, *Mémoires d'un Prisonnier de Guerre*, 29.

⁹⁵ Dufilho, *Mon lieutenant*, 58–62.

⁹⁶ Sartre, *Carnets*, 217, November 23, 1939.

⁹⁷ Folcher, *Les Carnets*, 24–25.

connotation of Sartre's invented verb "mignonner" suggests. Cafés and dances played a vital role, for they are always ritualized spaces, segregated by age, sex, gender, and, in Alsace-Lorraine, by language.⁹⁸ Prior to the war, they witnessed clashes between Interior French and Alsace-Lorraine young men over women and who was entitled to drink where. Incidents continued in Bitche during the phoney war, where on one occasion, civilians clubbed soldiers as they left a bistro. The soldiers replied with their belts and beat up the civilians, who fled.⁹⁹ With Alsace-Lorraine men mobilized, cafés became places of sexual domination of Alsace-Lorraine women in conditions of quasi-occupation. Furthermore, the unofficial sex trade flourished in bistros alongside regulated 'maisons closes' (though thanks to the strength of the abolitionist movement in Alsace-Lorraine, several had been shut).¹⁰⁰

Private diaries are more honest than letters home. In Balbaud's, scenes of family life are juxtaposed to others in cafés, where one "flirts and dances," where girls from the Paris cabarets say that they have come to "visit boyfriends." Balbaud admitted to a "troubling frisson" with another man's wife, provoked, he thought, by the possibility of death."¹⁰¹ Sartre wrote of "flattered and bold waitresses at the Écrivisse restaurant, who rub against men and suddenly call them to the cellar, from which they emerge tousled." The "unconventional" Sartre did not mention this in letters to Beauvoir. Even in his notebooks, he expressed misogynous attitudes: waitresses were "stupid and loose."¹⁰²

Visiting Sartre in Brumath, Beauvoir twice experienced unwanted sexual attention. In the first case, she was grabbed by a tall *chasseur* who assumed she was a "professional."

⁹⁸ Vulic, "La sociabilité du bistrot: Approche anthropologique de la culture populaire," 701; Passmore, "La Ligne Maginot," 263–64.

⁹⁹ SHD 27/N/69/2/2a, CP, October 24, 1939 : 6. SHD 33/N/14/5, André, Note de Service, September 29, 1939.

¹⁰⁰ AD Moselle, 304 M 196; AD Bas-Rhin 98AL635, Prefect Haut-Rhin, January 23, 1940.

¹⁰¹ Balbaud, *Cette drôle de guerre*, 14, 24–27, 33–35 14; Giroud, *Le Journal*, 167–68, 29 February 1940 mentions soldiers so hungry on arriving at Petite-Pierre (Bas-Rhin) that they put food before "girls looking for love."

¹⁰² Sartre, *Carnets*, March 16, 1940; Ernst, "Sartre et l'alsace En 1939-1940," : 187.

Rebuffed, he asked whether she was “French or Alsatian,” and left apparently satisfied that she was “French.”¹⁰³ Sartre told the story differently—on rejection, the *chasseur* said “well, you must be Alsatian—are you for or against us?”¹⁰⁴ Either way, domination and distrust of Alsace-Lorraine women were connected—after all, army posters warned that “loose women” were potential spies.¹⁰⁵

On the Alsace-Lorraine side, too, even those who welcomed guests may have had political reservations. The IEE suggested that “sympathy for France, polite silences, semi-mutism, and mental reservations hide mixed and worrying sentiments.”¹⁰⁶ A soldier stationed in Haut-Rhin thought that, “although locals looked happy with us, they don’t like us, for they sympathize with autonomism.” Another thought that exaggerated chauvinism hid sympathy for Hitler.¹⁰⁷ Even Moselle autonomist leader Antoni got on well with three officers billeted in his home. Each afternoon over a Glühwein, they discussed “this and that and naturally the war.” One of the officers, to whom Antoni’s daughter had given up her bedroom, turned out to be a police informer.¹⁰⁸ Antoni spoke French well, but usually relations were only superficial. Many soldiers reported positively on their interactions with civilians in their letters, despite an inability to converse with their hosts. Others communicated only through children. Giraud lodged with a family at Fleisheim. At dinner, they formed two linguistic groups: the daughter interpreted, and everyone had fun.¹⁰⁹

Negative remarks on Alsace-Lorrainers are largely confined to Northern Bas-Rhin and Germanophone Moselle. They correspond with the estimations of the IEE, which reported that in northern Bas-Rhin (and Colmar), there was a potentially dangerous “muted anxiety”

¹⁰³ Beauvoir, *La Force de l’âge*, 427–29, 423–24.

¹⁰⁴ Sartre, *Carnets*, 217, November 23, 1939.

¹⁰⁵ SHD 29/N/69/2b, CP November 24, 1939.

¹⁰⁶ AD Bas-Rhin, 98AL156, IEE, February 8, 1940; SHD 27N69, CP 3rd Army, October 26, November 13, 1939.

¹⁰⁷ SHD 27/N/69/2c, 8th Army, CP December 8, 1939.

¹⁰⁸ Antoni, *Grenzlandschicksal*, 155.

¹⁰⁹ Giroud, *Journal d’un sapeur rebelle*, 169–72, March 2, 1940.

and antiwar feeling stirred up by German radio.¹¹⁰ However, positive reports are interspersed with negative ones in the same or adjacent communities, a fact reflecting the entanglement of attitudes towards the French with conflicts among Alsace-Lorrainers. In northwest Moselle, positive remarks concern towns with Francophone populations, including Metz, Thionville, and Faulquemont where communism and anti-communism divided the population.¹¹¹ Mixed reports are also found in linguistically divided small administrative centers. Above all, they characterize villages in politically and religiously split Alsace-Bossue and contiguous Moselle, where the Jungmannschaft was strongest.

Soldiers' explicit criticisms of autonomism were almost exclusively confined to areas where its pro-German tendency was influential. Bitche's poor reputation with troops was long-standing, and in 1937-8, the army had struggled to recruit volunteer frontier guards there.¹¹² The censor reported that in "unlovely and fairly autonomist" Bitche, relations between soldiers and civilians were bad. He quoted a soldier who said that inhabitants' manners were "disagreeable" and that shops and cafés refused to serve soldiers."¹¹³ Giraud wrote that, while his squad discussed what to do about a comrade's theft of 50 Francs from a Bettborn bistro, the old woman behind the bar vomited insults, fortunately in German, about "ces Franzoses, sale race"; the autonomist candidate had scored 65 percent there in 1936.¹¹⁴ Two soldiers wrote that the inhabitants of Obermodern preferred those who wanted "living space" to French soldiers. They expected relations with civilians to collapse.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁰ AD Bas-Rhin, 98AL156, IEE, 8 and February 14, 1940; Dufilho, *Mon lieutenant*, 58–62.

¹¹¹ SHD 27/N/69/2e, CP February 23, 1940; 33N21 /6, Ferroni to Lt Colonel Commandant, 15 September 1939.

¹¹² *Lothringer Journal*, January 20, 1931. AD Bas-Rhin, 98 AL 244, Commissaire spécial Sarreguemines to Directeur des services généraux de police d'Alsace et Lorraine, January 25, 1931. SHD 33 N 95/6, Rapport, 25 October 1938; 95/8, Vielliard to RFL, 8 November 1937.

¹¹³ SHD 27/N/69/2/2a, CP, October 24, 1939 : 6.

¹¹⁴ Giroud, *Journal d'un sapeur rebelle*, 125–26, December 26, 1939.

¹¹⁵ SHD 27/N/69/2/2b, CP, November 24, 1939.

As Williams and Wilkin show, many more soldiers expressed positive than negative views of Alsace-Lorrainers, but everywhere, Interior French interaction with civilians remained superficial and ambiguous, limited by language in shops and homes and the search for sex in cafés. Relations within units, where younger Alsace-Lorrainers did speak French, were poorer.

Relations in Units

A few Interior French soldiers got on with Alsace-Lorraine comrades. Sartre did, perhaps because he knew German and had relatives in Alsace-Lorraine. Sapper Reignier in Grand-Hohékirkel *ouvrage* became friendly with an Alsatian who gave him presents for his daughter. Sergeant Guizard liked the Alsatian sergeant who shared his bivouac but remarked on his accent. We shall see that as circumstances changed, Reignier and Guizard expressed less positive views.¹¹⁶

Indeed, negative Interior French opinions of Alsace-Lorraine soldiers far outnumber positive. The censor concluded that in certain units, after nearly seven months of living together, French and Alsations did not mix, thanks to the latter's "lack of élan." Language was sometimes a barrier, as Georges Sadoul said of his engineer unit. In outlying bunkers, French-speakers were often a minority.¹¹⁷ Bickler thought that two "Altfranzösischen" men in his fifteen-man bunker "must have felt curiously lost" as we spoke German among ourselves¹¹⁸ Some did feel that way: one wrote that two Frenchmen visited for dinner each evening, because the Alsations in their own blockhouse did not speak French.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁶ Bruneau, *A demain*, 101, July 10, 1940; Déhu, *La drôle de guerre*, 141–43, 1 March 1940. See below, p. 50.

¹¹⁷ SHD 27/N/69/2/2b, November 28, 1929; 27N69/2/2f, March 17, 1940; A soldier in 60 RAMF (SF-Vosges) penned a description of life in his battery, in which French and Alsatian were clearly separate (SHD 27N69/2/2b, CP, November 26, 1939: Sadoul, *Journal de guerre*, 22–28, 6 September 1939.

¹¹⁸ Bickler, *Ein Besonderes Land*, 275.

¹¹⁹ SHD 27N69/2/2f, CP, March 17, 1939.

In units, as in villages, French soldiers espoused both assimilationist and ethnic views of identity. Either way, they were harsh toward their Alsatian comrades. An artilleryman wrote that the Interior French saw the “illiterate” Alsatis in his regiment as imbeciles who ought to be sent to school. Otherwise, things would end badly. There were six similar letters.¹²⁰ A soldier in 79 RIF thought it impossible to get on with Alsatis because they were so unlike the French, and fights were frequent. The censor remarked, “Camaraderie does not reign among Alsatis and other provincials in this regiment.”¹²¹ A correspondent in 307 DI compared Alsatis negatively to southerners, the more traditional target of prejudice.¹²²

In long, drunken hours on the Maginot Line, there was more opportunity for misunderstanding than in homes or cafés. Older men were resented for their inability to speak French. Young men spoke French with varying proficiency. Often, it would seem, Interior French soldiers attributed anti-French sentiment to any Alsace-Lorrainer who somehow annoyed them. For instance, Sergeant Kuntz (172 RIF), clearly a difficult character, was reduced to the ranks for expressing “anti-French views,” despite having protested his “ardent patriotism.”¹²³ Apparently positive views of German methods irritated Interior French soldiers, even though they probably derived from pride in Alsace-Lorraine as a synthesis of French and German. One soldier complained about those who saw everything done by the French as bad and everything done in Germany as good—“I sometimes ask whether I’m still in France.”¹²⁴ In 43 DI, soldiers complained of Alsatis’ tendency to “criticize everything in French organization.”¹²⁵

¹²⁰ SHD 27N69/2/2e, CP, March 2, 1940, 159 RAP.

¹²¹ SHD 27N69/2/2g, CP, April 15, 1940.

¹²² SHD 27N69/2/2g, CP, 2nd week April 1940.

¹²³ SHD 33N114/6, Regard to SF -Vosges, November 8, 1939.

¹²⁴ SHD 27N69/2/2f, CP March 17, 1940.

¹²⁵ SHD27N69/2/2f, March 17, 1940; 69/2/2g, Contrôle SHD 27N69/2/2e, CP, March 2, Soldier 159 RAP. 3rd batterie postal, second week April. Jamet, *Carnets de dérouté*, 24–27, October 13, 1940.

Whereas Interior French did not refrain from passing judgement on Alsace-Lorraine comrades, the latter rarely ventured views on French soldiers, probably because they feared prosecution. What they did say suggests that abstract France was more appealing than its flesh-and-blood incarnation. Thus, only one soldier regarded French comrades as his "brothers," but many others expressed patriotic sentiments: on learning that Alsace-Lorrainers were to be granted special leaves, twenty soldiers wrote comments such as "Vive la France!"¹²⁶ Often, however, patriotism was accompanied by expressions of Alsace-Lorraine superiority and/or resentment of French prejudice. A gunner (5th Army) could not understand why evacuees were called "Boche," given that "we are more sincerely and patriotically French than those of the Interior."¹²⁷ A soldier wrote, on finding the desk in his house broken into, "That's what they do to soldiers ready to sacrifice their lives."¹²⁸ Another said that treatment of evacuees undermined the morale of the best soldiers.¹²⁹ Few went as far as the Lorrainer in 133 RIF who wrote that his Alsace-Lorraine comrades complained of pillaging "hordes," "savages," "bandits," and "Indians," and posed as victims of the war.¹³⁰

Not surprisingly, few soldiers expressed autonomist or anti-French sentiments. There is a hint of "national indifference" in an Alsatian artillery lieutenant's view that the men in his mostly Germanophone regiment in SF-Vosges did not ask whether they should be French or German, and that enemy propaganda had no effect. Yet, he thought, "the blunders over months disgust their hearts."¹³¹ More explicitly, another soldier wrote to an evacuated friend that freedom depended on chasing the Jews from Alsace and that he could not regard

¹²⁶ SHD 27N69/2/2a, CP, November 13, 1939 (35 RI); 27/N/69/2c, CP, January 2, 1940.

¹²⁷ SHD 27N69/2/2a, CP, November 13, 1939.

¹²⁸ SHD 27N69/2/2c, CP, December 21, 1939.

¹²⁹ SHD 27N69/2/2a, Controle postal, October 2, 1939, Soldier 70 RI, Similar letters reported in 172 RIF.

¹³⁰ SHD 27N69/2/2c, CP, December 28, 1939.

¹³¹ SHD 27/N/69/2/2g, CP April 12, 1940.

the French as liberators.¹³² A soldier in 60 RAMF (SF-Vosges) wrote that treatment of evacuees caused him to lose all respect for France. He dreamed of leaving the country.¹³³ More optimistic for the future of autonomism, a bombardier* thought that the ignoble treatment of refugees would reinforce Alsace-Lorrainers' "ties and feeling." with positive results after the war. A gunner agreed that his Alsatian comrades had had enough, and that autonomism would revive, even from zero.¹³⁴ No soldier expressed pro-German views, but Alphonse Vollmer was reported to have said, while on leave in the Southwest, that German soldiers were better, and that if they were ordered to attack, he'd put a bullet in his own leg.¹³⁵ What impact did such attitudes have on willingness to fight?

Combat and Defeat

Although the question of morale has exercised historians since 1940, they have rarely attempted to compare the performance of specific units.¹³⁶ In practice, historians have accepted the army's assumption that willingness to sacrifice one's life followed automatically from internalized patriotism. Without denying the emotional charge of patriotism, I argue instead that socially constructed rationality continued to matter in combat.

Given that research shows people are more likely to take risks for those they know and like, relations within units plausibly did affect combat performance, as did a sense of responsibility to comrades, subordinates, the unit, and/or the cause.¹³⁷ Yet assessing such

¹³² AD Bas-Rhin 98AL283, Contrôleur-Général de la sûreté nationale to Directeur-général sûreté nationale, December 22, 1939. This carton contains several similar expressions of autonomism.

¹³³ SHD 27N69/2/2b, CP, November 26, 1939.

* Artillery corporal.

¹³⁴ SHD 27N69/2/2d, CP, January 6 and February 2, 1940.

¹³⁵ AD Bas-Rhin, 98AL288, DGSN, February 15, 1940; Morin, "Paroles de « défaitistes »,» 116.

¹³⁶ Crémieux-Brilhac, *Les Français de l'an 40*, 2. Ouvriers et soldats:518–24 is the exception. He sees poor morale as largely confined to B divisions comprising older reserves.

¹³⁷ See Footnote 19.

relations during the Phoney War is not straightforward, for Alsace-Lorrainers and Interior French alike expressed pro- and antiwar sentiment. Furthermore, while deficient relations within units might have undermined cohesion in battle, they could equally likely have provoked emulative bravery. The latter is possible given that Alsace-Lorrainers often viewed themselves as more patriotic and/or better soldiers than the Interior French. Even nationalists may have felt the need to prove their patriotism to the skeptical French. Matters beyond the scope of this article count, such as prevailing ideas about masculinity, the nature of training, and the role of leaders also count. Nevertheless, some conclusions can be drawn about the effect of intra-unit relations on performance in battle.

The first step is to use military postal censor reports to assess individual units' morale. Censors somewhat haphazardly singled out regiments for assignment to two categories: "good/very good" or "poor/mediocre," the wording varying with the censor's taste.¹³⁸ The results mapped in Figure 3 confirm patterns already observed. Morale was usually good or normal in units recruiting from and stationed in southern Alsace and along the Moselle–Luxembourg border. It was poor in northern Bas-Rhin and contiguous Moselle, which had been heavily pillaged, where soldiers were engaged in low-level combat, and where Interior French soldiers were most likely to encounter sympathy for Germany and Nazism. Within the north, a distinction must be made. The RIFs defending the Sarre Gap had been unhappy in November, but mood improved or did not attract attention thereafter. Morale was consistently poorer in SF-Vosges and SF-Haguenau, and did not recover in the spring. Alsatians in SF-Vosges were said to keep to themselves; some hoped for a "prompt solution to the present war."¹³⁹ Unusually, certain *ouvrages* in these sectors were singled out as problematic too.¹⁴⁰

Although these are precisely the areas in which pro-German autonomism was strongest, we cannot assume that Alsace-Lorraine defeatism contrasted with Interior French

¹³⁸ Censors reports in SHD 27/N/69

¹³⁹ SHD 27N69/2/2b, November 27, 1940.

¹⁴⁰ SHD 29/N/290 Morale des RIFs/Rapports, Lescanne to commander 5th Army, March 1, 1940. The ouvrages in questions were Schiesseck, Ottebiel, Grand Hohékirkel, Lembach, and Four à Chaux.

patriotism.¹⁴¹ RFs Metz and Lauter recruited significantly from the Paris and Northeast regions, where communism was influential (whereas regiments in southern Alsace recruited from more conservative regions). Some soldiers accepted the new communist line that the workers of neither France nor Germany had an interest in an “imperialist struggle” between Berlin and London.¹⁴² Interestingly, only in the Vosges is there evidence that French soldiers initiated fraternization with the Germans: responsibility lay with two Interior Frenchmen, while Alsatians “hung back.”¹⁴³ An under-officer in Michelsberg *ouvrage* arrested for distributing communist tracts turned out to be linked to the clandestine circulation of German and French propaganda in nearby Anzeling. Yet in the latter, manned by younger Moselle reserves and older men from the Paris “red belt,” everyone did their duty.¹⁴⁴ Anzeling was never tested in combat, but other parts of the Maginot Line were.

On June 10, 1940, the battle of Dunkirk over, the Germans broke through French lines on the Somme and Aisne. They reached the Swiss border a week later, thus encircling the Maginot Line. To avoid capture, the French had planned to withdraw in three stages, starting on the night of June 14/15 with interval troops. Yet German offensives disrupted the withdrawal. Interval and artillery units disengaged, but most *ouvrage* crews were surrounded and trapped.

The Sarre Offensive

Early on June 14, before withdrawal began, the Germans launched an offensive in the Sarre Gap between RFs Metz and Lauter, where the French were fortified in bunkers (sometimes incomplete) behind planned flooding. After the largest artillery and Stuka bombardments of the entire campaign, six German infantry divisions (without tank support) attempted to infiltrate French defenses and use antitank guns to fire at embrasures. The French repelled

¹⁴¹ Morin, “Paroles de « défaitistes ».”

¹⁴² Giroud, *Le Journal*.

¹⁴³ SHD 27/N/69/2c, CP, 21 December 1939; Williams and Wilkin, *French Soldiers’ Morale*, 96–98 show that German sources confirm the incident.

¹⁴⁴ SHD 34N156/162 RIF, “Rapport d’un officier,” p. 70

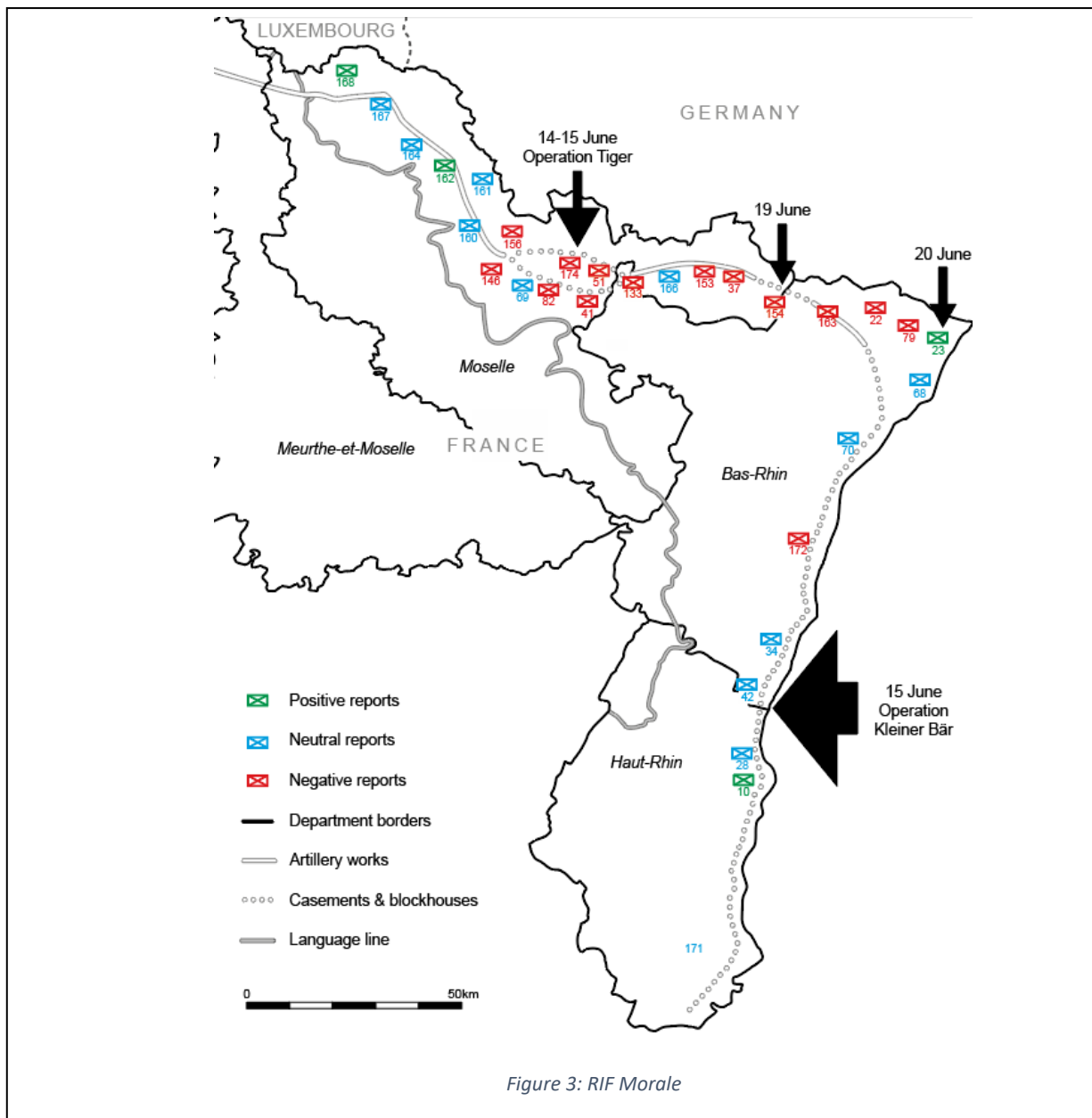


Figure 3: RIF Morale

the Germans, who took only a few positions. Yet since the French retreated that night anyway, the Germans pursued and decimated them.¹⁴⁵

In the French defeat, there was at least one politically motivated failure. In the evening of the 14th, the resistance of Captain Daubenton's 6th machine-gun company of

¹⁴⁵ The defenders were 69, 82, and 174 RIFs and 41 and 51 Régiments de mitrailleurs d'infanterie coloniale (RMIC), the latter a naval version of RIFs; Pflanz, *Geschichte Der 258*, I: 1939 und 1940 Aufstellung und Frankreichfeldzug: 66–85; Bruge, *Faites sauter la ligne Maginot*, 1:371–450.

II/174 RIF, manning a blockhouse at Kalmerich Wood, was drawing to an end when Sergeant Briot, a Germanophone Mosellan, arrived with “orders” from the German commander to surrender or die. Threatened by Daubenton, Briot said that his men had left casement C.10.B to fraternize with the Germans, and agreed not to fire on their “brothers.”¹⁴⁶ The incident was exceptional, but not inexplicable. The pro-Nazi Jungmannschaft counted members in the region and Bickler briefly served there. Leutnant von Bleichert, a German artillery observer, commented that during the evening, several Alsace-Lorrainers were among the prisoners taken from Daubenton’s sector: “They hope to see their homeland again very soon. Even the real Frenchmen [echten Franzosen] do not hide their joy that the war is over for them.” A couple of days later, as he moved on, a civilian showed von Bleichert his Iron Cross, which he could now wear proudly.¹⁴⁷ Guizard, retreating through the same area, thought many locals would find it easy to welcome the invader.¹⁴⁸

The Rhine

On June 15, the Germans launched Operation Kleiner Bär across the Rhine at Rhinau and between Schoenau and Neuf-Brisach.¹⁴⁹ The outgunned defenders could not prevent antitank guns on the opposite bank firing point blank at the French casements, most of which were destroyed within ten minutes. Understandably, many crews fled. However, troops on the second and third lines fought stubbornly. The Germans ultimately prevailed, but did not achieve their day-one objective of the Rhône-Rhine canal. Here alone did the French mount temporarily successful counterattacks. Alsace-Lorrainers were numerous

¹⁴⁶ SHD GR 14 P, Rapport complémentaire, October 21, 1941; 34/N/162/174 RIF, Rapport Daubenton, undated, 1945; Bruge, *Faites sauter la ligne Maginot* 311, note 2 states that a 174 RIF officer accused another officer of ordering a rifle company to abandon its post without firing a shot. This “affaire de Putteltange” was supposedly reported to the suspect retreats commission, but there is no trace of it in the archives.

¹⁴⁷ Bleichert, *Als Artillerie-Beobachter*, 37, 57.

¹⁴⁸ Déhu, *La drôle de guerre*, 2090, 15 June.

Mary and Hohnadel, *Hommes et ouvrages*, 3:196–200; Bruge, *Offensive sur le Rhin*.

¹⁴⁹ The French banks were held by two campaign divisions, plus 42 and 28 RIFs and 102, 103 and 104 DIFs.

among the casualties—around thirty of the 100 dead of 42 RIF, for instance. Alsatian officers were common among them, too, including reserve-officer priests and primary-school teachers.¹⁵⁰

An apparently similar incident to that at Kalmerich Wood reveals more about the Interior French than Alsace-Lorrainers. In captivity, certain officers of 42 RIF claimed that the Alsatian Lieutenant Paduch did not defend casement Sponeck-Sud effectively and led the Germans to second-line defenses. In fact, Paduch was the only first-line commander to obey the order to continue resisting once the Germans crossed the river. Despite heavy damage, his casement repelled the surrounding Germans with grenades, both sides showing remarkable audacity. Half the ten known deaths were locals. After the unit's surrender, witnesses confirmed that the Germans pushed Paduch towards the French lines as a shield. Released from a POW camp with other Alsace-Lorrainers, Paduch fought with the Free French in North Africa. It seems that officers projected unease about their own conduct onto Paduch.¹⁵¹

SF-Vosges

Although at midday on June 17, Pétain announced that he was seeking an armistice, fighting continued. Two days later, the Germans assaulted the hilly, thickly-forested Northern Vosges Gap. It was defended by a single line of blockhouses and casements held by 165 RIF. French field infantry and artillery had left, and Four-à-Chaux *ouvrage* could not provide adequate artillery cover. The Germans put two casements out of action to breach the line, and then attacked the others from behind. Two held out until the afternoon, by which time all twenty-two were captured.¹⁵² The military odds were against the defenders, so it is difficult to say whether poor morale in an autonomist area and the presence of communists

¹⁵⁰ For instance, Lieutenant (abbé) Grunenwald, killed at Limbourg Pont infantry shelter Bruge, *Offensive sur le Rhin*, 3:176–78, 149, 353; Mary and Hohnadel, *Hommes et ouvrages*, 3:198.

¹⁵¹ SHD 14/P/9, Bruges, Note, November 9, 1976. Bruge, *Offensive sur le Rhin*, 3:178–80.

¹⁵² Bruge, *On a livré la Ligne Maginot*, 191–99.

in the troop affected resistance. However, there were no examples of the desperate fights to the end seen elsewhere.

SF-Haguenau

On June 19-20, frontal assaults on seven casements between Hoffen and Oberroedern on the right flank of SF-Haguenau held by 79 RIF failed. The German ID 246 was second-rate, the French had left significant interval units in place, and Grand-Hohékirkel, Hochwald, and Schœnenbourg artillery forts covered them.¹⁵³ One casement was knocked out by a bomb. The rest repulsed the Germans, despite difficult moments. At the Hoffen infantry shelter, an officer fired his revolver at men fleeing after a bomb strike, but at Oberroedern-Nord, Lieutenant Vaille rallied his men after a direct hit by getting them to sing the Marseillaise.¹⁵⁴ In their combat reports, officers stressed ties of friendship between Interior French active officers resident in the Wissembourg area and Alsatian reserve officers.¹⁵⁵

Despite exceptions, there was no “crisis of national sentiment” among either Interior French or Alsace-Lorraine soldiers in these assaults. The mass panics at Sedan did not recur on the Maginot Line. Troops performed as well where morale was good (the Rhine) as where it was improving (the Sarre). It is possible that better morale encouraged stronger resistance in SF-Haguenau than in SF-Vosges, but military conditions were also better in the former. Why they were is beyond the scope of this article. However, the practical difficulty of flight from a blockhouse and the manly desire, whatever one’s view of the war, not to be seen as a coward prevailed. Sapper Giraud wrote, “No, one doesn’t flee like a frightened rabbit, whatever ideas one might have concerning war and death.”¹⁵⁶ Once soldiers had proved their manhood, they may have been happier to desert.

¹⁵³ Romanych, Rupp, and White, *Maginot Line 1940*, 77–78.

¹⁵⁴ See page 22; SHD 34/N/51/22 RIF/10/1, Rapport Miconnet;

¹⁵⁵ SHD 34/N/51/22 RIF/10/1, Rapport Miconnet; Bruge, *On a livré la Ligne Maginot*, 115–22.

¹⁵⁶ Giroud, *Le Journal*, 231, July 2, 1940.

Retreat

By June 25, when the armistice came into force, interval units (including RIF battalions) had moved westwards to bolster rearguard actions or into the Vosges Mountains. Alsace-Lorrainers deserted more frequently than the Interior French. For instance, those of 104 DIF on the Rhine departed while the rest of the division withdrew to the Vosges.¹⁵⁷

Downstream, Aubrac's unit retreated, minus a few Alsatian peasants, whom he did not blame for leaving a routed army.¹⁵⁸ Meanwhile I/22 RIF, which had transferred from the Lauter to Héricourt (Territory of Belfort), panicked under fire. The one soldier remaining with the commander eventually left with three Alsatians who had been disarmed by the Germans. (Officers claimed that they could have held Héricourt longer had an Alsatian officer in an armored car not betrayed them.)¹⁵⁹ Boswell sees evacuees' return as evidence of disillusion with France, but deserting soldiers were probably simply profiting from the chance to return home. Interior French soldiers did likewise once close enough.

Notwithstanding, there is strong circumstantial evidence that extensive desertion from 172 RIF was politically motivated. Around 30 percent of its men originated from Strasbourg and its suburbs, a stronghold of communism, autonomist or orthodox. There was a history of discord among soldiers and between officers and men. A captain decried the quality of the unit's officers, and a lieutenant doubted that his men would hold under fire. Morale was said to be especially low among Alsatians. We saw that Sergeant Kuntz was punished for "anti-French views."¹⁶⁰ In this unit, there was much depression and at least one suicide.¹⁶¹ Since the 172nd saw no action until it retreated into the Vosges, and only five

¹⁵⁷ SHD 14/P/6, 104 DIF, rapport Esclaibes;

¹⁵⁸ Aubrac, *Où la mémoire s'attarde*, 63; Didelot, *Drôle de guerre*, 62–63, June 17, 1940 reports that most men in III/174 RIF had deserted by the 17th, and their Interior French major was panic-stricken. See also SHD 34/N/52, undated 1945, Rapport Machère.

¹⁵⁹ SHD 34/N/51, Rapport Ollivier, June 23, 1945.

¹⁶⁰ SHD 27/N/69/2/2d, CP February 2, 1940.

¹⁶¹ SHD 27/N/69/2c, December 23, 1939; 34N399, Journal de Marche, January 20, 1940.

Alsations were among the sixty-nine dead (7 percent), many must have deserted before then.¹⁶²

Alsace-Lorrainers did not systematically desert. In the twilight of the battle, Lieutenant Ollivier (22 RIF) commanded forty-three determined Alsations and two Parisians in the Haguenau sector, awaiting an attack that never came.”¹⁶³ In the Sundgau—Stürmel’s constituency—the mobilized deputy of Belfort, Pierre Dreyfus-Schmidt, commanded a company of 171 RIF, comprising 60 percent Alsations. Morale fell as the men left their casement where they had been able to visit families and raise livestock. Locals despaired at their departure. Yet the unit fought well in the Vosges, despite opportunities to desert.¹⁶⁴ Options were different in the surrounded *ouvrages*.

The Ouvrages

As the Germans headed south from the Aisne and broke through in the Sarre and Vosges, they fanned out to threaten the rears of the *ouvrages*, which were all the more vulnerable because interval troops had departed. After the war, RIF veterans and the historian Roger Bruge promoted the myth of a “*forteresse invaincue*,” which continued to resist after the armistice until Weygand ordered capitulation.¹⁶⁵ In fact, if soldiers left the *ouvrages*, they risked immediate capture.¹⁶⁶ If they stayed, they might share the fate of the men of La Ferté *ouvrage* on the northerly limit of the fortifications, who had choked to death some weeks previously during a German assault—German propaganda profited from this tragedy. Yet crews believed that if they remained undefeated until the armistice, they would avoid POW status. The resulting tension can be glimpsed by reading combat reports and Bruges’s ostensibly heroic narrative between the lines, alongside some recently-published letters.

¹⁶² SHD 34/N/399, Journal de Marche, May 30, 1940.

¹⁶³ SHD 34/N/51, Rapport Ollivier, June 23, 1945.

¹⁶⁴ Dreyfus-Schmidt, *Captivités et évasions*, 9–11.

¹⁶⁵ Bruge, *Faites sauter la ligne Maginot; On a livré la Ligne Maginot; Offensive sur le Rhin*.

¹⁶⁶ According to Bruneau, *A demain*, 40–42, 22 June 1940, a German-born Alsatian in Grand-Hohékirkel, fearful of being shot as a spy, was smuggled out with the help of an officer who stole papers for him from another soldier.

Arguably, because vetting ensured that only the most reliable served in the *ouvrages*, Alsace-Lorrainers were often in the forefront of resistance. The Interior French, in contrast, targeted Alsace-Lorrainers to cover shame.

Morale, we saw, was unreliable in certain *ouvrages* prior to the battle. That applied to 146 RIF, holding Bambesch and Kerfent *petits ouvrages* on the left flank of the Sarre Gap, which fell on June 20. It was also poor in Haut-Poirier on the right flank, which capitulated the next day. Officers of its 133 RIF garrison attributed the “strange” behavior of the commander of SF-Sarre, Major Jolivet, whose HQ was in the *ouvrage*, to his being a German in disguise. Besides showing how wide suspicion of the assimilated was, officers also resented his lack of fortification experience. They did not oppose Jolivet’s decision to surrender, but his alleged Germanness perhaps hides embarrassment at capitulation.¹⁶⁷ The neighboring Welschoff fort also capitulated after sustaining serious damage—against the wishes of some junior officers. That morale had been low here too probably influenced the surrender decision. Judging by their names, some Alsatians belonged to the resistance party, as they did elsewhere.¹⁶⁸

Stronger evidence further east shows mixed Alsatian attitudes. On May 16, an “anxious” Alsatian platoon from 22 RIF sent out from the “safety” of the enormous Hochwald *ouvrage* to repair an antitank barrier complained that they were “sacrificed”—an echo of the refrain that Alsace-Lorraine was the “glacis” for others’ fights. Their officer, Lieutenant Ollivier, blamed their Interior French chief-corporal for lacking the authority to command Alsatians. Morale supposedly improved once Ollivier took over and the men received their “baptism of fire.”¹⁶⁹ Belief that Alsatians were “sacrificed” is as compatible with antiwar sentiment as with resentment that only Alsatians were doing their bit.

In Grand-Hohékirkel *ouvrage*, morale plummeted among the Interior French. Sapper Reignier wrote home that the crew was dismayed at the abandonment order, for it expected certain death if it left. Rumors spread that if the *ouvrage* surrendered, troops

¹⁶⁷ Bruge, *On a livré la Ligne Maginot*, 7–8.

¹⁶⁸ Bruge, 189–97.

¹⁶⁹ SHD 34/N/51, Rapport Ollivier, 23 June 1945.

could return home, but if it resisted one in three would be executed. Officers' authority collapsed and they were supposedly as near panic as their men. Reignier condemned the commander's refusal to surrender, and understood why some men advocated vengeance against him. He let slip that Alsatians were among those most committed to resistance.¹⁷⁰

If anyone experienced a crisis of national sentiment here, it was Reignier and his Interior French comrades: they condemned Alsace-Lorrainers to counter the possibility that their own actions could be seen as treasonable. That the chaplain gave lectures explaining French decadence and German superiority, which obviously prefigured collaboration, cannot have bolstered morale. Reignier approved them. He almost wished that Germany would "take on the direction of everything, cleansing as necessary. We would suffer, perhaps, but ultimately it would be a great good for the people." His claim that the same Alsace-Lorrainers who "most loudly proclaimed their hatred" for the Germans during the battle "prostrated" themselves once captured, devalues Alsace-Lorrainers' bravery, and excuses embarrassment at his own surrender and admiration for Germany.¹⁷¹ We saw a similar logic in the Paduch case. Giroud heard many soldiers admire Germany and advocate dictatorship in France.¹⁷² This "moment allemande" was short-lived in the population generally, but subsequently, ideological collaborators drew on a long history of respect for German order.¹⁷³ Before the war, reintegration of the province justified importing German methods into France. Now, accusing Alsace-Lorraine—and other minorities—of treason excused admiration for the erstwhile enemy.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷⁰ Bruneau, *A demain*, 23–55, June 18–25, 1940. SHD 34N151, Rapports des officiers.

¹⁷¹ On Paduch, see p. 30; Bruneau, 42, June 22, 1940.

¹⁷² Giroud, *Le Journal*, 277, June 23, 1940.

¹⁷³ One of countless examples, Rebatet, *Les Decombres*, 281 claims that without militarist, iron Germany, subtle, genial, western civilization would be nothing.

¹⁷⁴ See Page 24; Boswell, "Franco-Alsatian Conflict," 571–72 Shows that there was a recrudescence of attacks on evacuees in June; Malraux, *Les Noyers de l'Altenburg*, xi on attribution of the defeat to Breton autonomists.

Conclusion

This article set out to reconcile plausible evidence for a “crisis of national sentiment” in Alsace-Lorraine with equally plausible evidence of good relations between Interior French soldiers and Alsace-Lorrainers. Using a relational approach, it has been argued that Interior French arrived in Alsace-Lorraine with a mixture of assimilationist and ethnic views of citizenship, coupled with idealization of the lost province, and respect for its German qualities. In the Red Zone, the absence of Alsace-Lorrainers allowed prejudice free reign, often as a way of justifying pillage. Yet even there, antimilitarism may have united Interior French and Alsace-Lorrainers. In Alsace-Lorraine homes, national issues were set aside for ersatz family relations, while in cafés, Alsace-Lorraine women were subject to sexual exploitation. In the polarized communities of northern Bas-Rhin and contiguous Moselle, some locals proved patriotism by denouncing other Alsace-Lorrainers. Yet relations remained superficial, and could hide reservations. Relations were worse within units, thanks to bonding among speakers of the same language and Alsace-Lorrainers’ vaunting of “German methods.”

On neither side did poor morale compromise resistance to initial German attacks, but there were some cases of politically motivated refusal to fight. Sometimes, Alsace-Lorrainers were most determined in resisting the Germans, and in at least one case, friendship with Interior French sustained their resistance. In the retreat, Alsace-Lorrainers frequently deserted, but so subsequently did the Interior French—on June 17 in Rennes, Marc Bloch donned civilian clothes to escape capture. French soldiers elided their admiration for the erstwhile enemy by condemning minorities’ treason.

However, the point is not to quantify patriotism, but to problematize the assumption that national loyalty depends on shared, internalized ideas, and that their absence causes crisis. However much people feel patriotism viscerally, it is always conditional, not just in borderlands. Furthermore, protagonists continue to calculate their interests in the extreme situation of war and even in defeat. In the Phoney War, French and Alsace-Lorrainers alike opted for family and/or drew on positive views of Germany that existed in both cultures. Historians have not usually noticed this moment of Germanophilia, perhaps because it was so brief.

In Alsace-Lorraine, de facto annexation quickly changed options again. There was some approval of German rule in Northern Bas-Rhin and contiguous Moselle, where re-annexation could initially be seen as another blow in politico-religious struggles within villages. The leaders of pro-German autonomism accepted minor positions in the Third Reich.¹⁷⁵ The 2,428 known Alsatian volunteers for the SS and Wehrmacht were overrepresented in Strasbourg canton and northern Alsace.¹⁷⁶ Yet the advantages of Nazi rule soon disappeared. Eighty thousand francophone Mosellans were expelled and replaced by German colonists. Catholics were alienated by denunciation of the Concordat. Everyone resented the forced incorporation of 130,000 young men into the Wehrmacht.¹⁷⁷

Autonomism did not die. Whereas Vichy sacrificed Alsace-Lorraine to chimerical hopes for collaboration, Rossé joined Alsace-Lorraine regionalists exiled in France in pressing Pétain to profit from German defeats to secure autonomy. As Nazi rule collapsed, a group including Michel Walter, generally considered a nationalist, proposed an Alsace-Lorraine-Baden-Rhineland state under US protection. Although autonomism had survived repression and occupation, it too was conditional. Subsequently, it disappeared, thanks to the attenuation of French secularism and realization through the European Community of Robert Schuman's ideal of Alsace-Lorraine as a "bridge" between France and Germany.¹⁷⁸

KEVIN PASSMORE is Professor of History at Cardiff University. His interdisciplinary history of the Maginot Line will be published by Yale University Press in 2025.

Acknowledgements

The author thanks the editors and anonymous reviewers of *French Historical Studies* for their patient and constructive feedback on this article. He also thanks Kirsty Harding for drawing the maps. Research for this article was supported by a Leverhulme Trust Major

¹⁷⁵ Roth, *Alsace-Lorraine*, 180.

¹⁷⁶ Diebold, "Les volontaires alsaciens dans les troupes du IIIe Reich."

¹⁷⁷ Kettenacker, *La politique de nazification en Alsace*.

¹⁷⁸ Hochstuhl, *Zwischen Frieden und Krieg*, 295–99.

Research Fellowship, by a British Academy/Leverhulme Trust Personal Research Grants SG121372 and SRG18R1\181077 and a Cardiff University Research Fellowship.

References

Abercrombie, Nicholas, Stuart Hill, and Brian S Turner. *The Dominant Ideology Thesis*. London: Allen and Unwin, 1980.

Antoni, Victor. *Grenzlandschicksal - Grenzlandtragic. Lebenserinnerungen und menschliche Betrachtungen eines Lothringers zu den politischen Irrungen und Wirrungen seiner Zeit*. Saarbrücken: Funk, 1957.

Aubrac, Raymond. *Où la mémoire s'attarde*. Paris: Odile Jacob, 1996.

Baechler, Christian. "L'autonomisme Alsacien Dans l'entre-Deux-Guerres." *Historiens et Geographes*, no. 347 (1995): 249–55.

———. *Le Parti Catholique Alsacien: Du Reichsland à La République Jacobine*. Paris: Ophrys, 1982.

Bakhtin, M. M. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981.

Balbaud, René. *Cette drôle de guerre , (Alsace-Lorraine, Belgique, Dunkerque 26 août 1939-1er juin 1940) telle que je l'ai faite...* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1941.

Bankwitz, Philip C. *Alsatian Autonomist Leaders, 1919–1947*. Lawrence: Regents Press, 1978.

Barrault, Jean-Louis. *Souvenirs pour demain*. Paris: Seuil, 2010.

Beauvoir, Simone de. *La Force de l'âge*. Paris: Gallimard, 1960.

Bickler, Hermann. *Ein Besonderes Land : Erinnerungen und Betrachtungen eines Lothringers*. Lindhorst: Askania-Verlag, 1978.

Bleichert, Erich Wolfram von. *Als Artillerie-Beobachter durch die Maginot-Linie*. Reutlingen: Ensslin & Laiblin, 1942.

Boswell, Laird. "Franco-Alsatian Conflict and the Crisis of National Sentiment during the Phoney War." *The Journal of Modern History* 71, no. 3 (1999): 552–84.

———. “From Liberation to Purge Trials in the ‘Mythic Provinces’: Recasting French Identities in Alsace and Lorraine, 1918-1920.” *French Historical Studies* 23, no. 1 (2000): 129–62.

———. “Should France Be Ashamed of Its History? Coming to Terms with the Past in France and Its Eastern Borderlands.” *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 9, no. 2–3 (2008): 237–51.

Bruge, Roger. *Faites sauter la Ligne Maginot. La fortress invaincue*. 2nd ed. Verviers: Marabout, 1985.

———. *Offensive sur le Rhin*. Vol. 3. Paris: Fayard, 1977.

———. *On a livré la Ligne Maginot*. Paris: Fayard, 1975.

Bruneau, Antoine. *A demain, ma chérie. Lettres de la ligne Maginot*. Bruxelles: Editions Jourdan, 2018.

Carrol, Alison. *Borderland. The Return of Alsace to France, 1918-1939*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018.

———. “Paths to Frenchness National Indifference and the Return of Alsace to France, 1919–1939.” In *National Indifference and the History of Nationalism in Modern Europe*, edited by Maarten Van Ginderachter and Jon Fox, 127–44. Routledge, 2019.

Colas, Jean-François. “Les droites nationales en Lorraine dans les années 1930: acteurs, organisations, réseaux.” Thèse de doctorat, Paris X Nanterre, 2006.

Crémieux-Brilhac, Jean-Louis. *Les Français de l’an 40*. Vol. 2. Ouvriers et soldats. Paris: Gallimard, 1990.

Déhu, Geneviève, ed. *La drôle de guerre du sergent Henri Guizard sur la ligne Maginot*. Maisons-Alfort: Guizard, 2010.

Deroo, Eric, and Pierre de Taillac, eds. *Carnets de Déroute, 1939-1940: Lettres et Récits Inédits*. Paris: Tallandier, 2010.

Didelot, René. *Drôle de guerre : les carnets retrouvés, 1939-1940*. Oelleville: Amicale laïque de l’École normale mixte et de l’IUFM des Vosges, 2000.

Diebold, Geoffrey. "Les volontaires alsaciens dans les troupes du III^e Reich." *Union rationaliste* 3, no. 211 (2019): 79–87.

Dobry, Michel. "Éléments de réponse. Principes et implications d'une perspective relationnelle." In *La logique du désordre*, edited by Miriam Aït-Aoudia and Roger Antoine, 261–332. Paris: Presses de Sciences Po, 2015.

———. *Sociologie des crises politiques : la dynamique des mobilisations multisectorielles*. 3rd ed. Paris: Science Po, 2009.

Dreyfus, François-Georges. *La vie politique en Alsace: 1919-1936*. 173. Paris: A. Colin, 1969.

Dreyfus-Schmidt, Pierre. *Captivités et évasions*. Belfort: La Frontière, 1955.

Dubois, Mathieu, Olivier Forcade, and Johannes Großmann, eds. *Exils intérieurs: les évacuations à la frontière franco-allemandes (1939-1940)*. Paris: PUPS, 2017.

Dufilho, André. "Mon lieutenant, un blessé vous demande" : la 35^e division d'infanterie dans la guerre de 1939-1940. Mémoires de France. Bordeaux: Les Dossiers d'Aquitaine, 2002.

Eccard, Frédéric. *Le Livre de ma vie*. Strasbourg: Attinger, 1951.

Ernst, Gilles. "Sartre et l'Alsace En 1939-1940: L'identité à l'épreuve de l'évacuation." *Études Sartriennes*, no. 21 (2017): 177–222.

Fischer, Christopher J. *Alsace to the Alsatians?: Visions and Divisions of Alsatian Regionalism, 1870-1939*. Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2010.

Folcher, Gustave. *Les Carnets de guerre de Gustave Folcher, paysan languedocien : 1939-1945*. Edited by Rémy Cazals. Paris: Maspero, 1981.

Frisk, Kristian. "What Makes a Hero? Theorising the Social Structuring of Heroism." *Sociology* 53, no. 1 (February 1, 2019): 87–103.

Giroud, André. *Le journal d'un sapeur rebelle pendant la drôle de guerre*. Bourg-en-Bresse: M&G, 2001.

Goodfellow, Samuel Huston. *Between the Swastika and the Cross of Lorraine: Fascisms in Interwar Alsace*. DeKalb, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1999.

Gousset, Henri. *Dites à la Kommandantur que je l'emm... : une ville et son maire en zone interdite, 1940-1944*. Paris: Fayard, 1980.

Hiegel, Henri. *La drôle de guerre en Moselle*. Vol. 1: 3 septembre 1939-10 mai 1940. Sarreguemines: Pierron, 1983.

Hochstuhl, Kurt. *Zwischen Frieden und Krieg: das Elsaß in den Jahren 1938-1940*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1984.

Jamet, Claude. *Carnets de dérouté*. 1 vols. Paris: Fernand Sorlot, 1942.

Kettenacker, Lothar. *La politique de nazification en Alsace*. Strasbourg: Saisons d'Alsace, 1978.

Klein, Pierre. *Camille Dahlet, Une vie au service de l'Alsace*. 2nd ed. Fegersheim: Allewil Verlag, 2015.

Kugel, Uri, Catherine Hausman, Laurie Black, and Bruce Bongar. "Psychology of Physical Bravery." In *Oxford Handbooks Online*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017.

Laumonier, Albert. *Mémoires d'un Prisonnier de Guerre. De Brigueil-Le-Chantre à Kobierzyn, En Passant Par La Ligne Maginot*. Paris: Librinova. Kindle Edition., 2019.

Lavergne, Robert. *Journal de guerre du Hackenberg: mes deux années passées dans un ouvrage Maginot août 1939-août 1941*. Edited by Alain Hohnadel. Louviers: Ysec, 2007.

Lawrence, Paul, Timothy Baycroft, and Carolyn Grohmann. "'Degrees of Foreignness' and the Construction of Identity in French Border Regions during the Inter-War Period." *Contemporary European History* 10, no. 01 (2001).

Loustaunau-Lacau, Georges. *Mémoires d'un Français rebelle , 1914-48*. Paris: Robert Laffont, 1948.

Malraux, André. *Les Noyers de l'Altenburg*. Paris: Gallimard, 1948.

Mary, Jean-Yves, and Alain Hohnadel. *Hommes et ouvrages de la Ligne Maginot*. Vol. 3. Paris: Histoire et collections, 2003.

Metzger, Chantal. "Relations Entre Autonomistes Lorrains et Alsaciens de 1919 à 1932." *103e Congrès National Des Sociétés Savantes* 2 (1978).

Morin, Gilles. "Paroles de « défaitistes »." *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d'histoire*, no. 128 (October 23, 2015): 105–18.

Nicolle, Roger. *Comme tant d'autres, août 1939-août 1940*. Paris: Albin Michel, 1945.

Noblemaire, Georges. *Carnet de Route Au Pays Des Parlementaires*. Paris: Hachette, 1923.

Passmore, Kevin. "La Ligne Maginot dans les espaces transfrontalières franco-allemandes, 1928-39." In *Frontières en Europe depuis le congrès de Vienne, 1815: enjeux diplomatiques, stratégiques, militaires et économiques*, edited by Ludovic Laloux, Frédéric Dessberg, and Stéphane Palaude, 237–53. Valenciennes: Presses universitaires de Valenciennes, 2020.

Pflanz, Hans-Jochen. *Geschichte Der 258. Infanterie-Division*. Vol. I: 1939 und 1940 Aufstellung und Frankreichfeldzug. Kemmenau: Selbstverlag, 1977.

Rebatet, Lucien. *Les Decombres*. Paris: Denoël, 1942.

Romanych, Marc M., Martin M. Rupp, and John White. *Maginot Line 1940: Battles on the French Frontier*. Oxford: Osprey, 2010.

Roth, François. *Alsace-Lorraine. Histoire d'un « pays Perdue ». De 1870 à Nos Jours*. Paris: Texto, 2010.

———. *Les Lorrains entre la France et l'Allemagne: itinéraires d'annexés*. Edited by Université de Nancy II. Metz Nancy: Éditions Serpenoise Université de Nancy II, 1981.

———. *Robert Schuman*. Paris: Fayard, 2008.

Sadoul, Georges. *Journal de guerre : 2 septembre 1939-20 juillet 1940*. Paris: Les Éditions français réunis, 1977.

Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Carnets de la drôle de guerre: septembre 1939-mars 1940*. Edited by Arlette Elkaïm-Sartre. Paris: Gallimard, 1995.

Smith, Timothy Beresford. *Creating the Welfare State in France, 1880-1940*. Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003.

Storne-Sengel, Catherine. *Les Protestantes d'Alsace-Lorraine de 1919 à 1939: Entre deux regnes*. Strsabourg: Sociétés savantes d'Alsace, 2003.

“The Psychology of Heroes: Antecedents and Consequences of Combat-Decorated Heroism.” In *Psychology of War*, 63–91. New York: Nova Science, 2012.

Vulic, Milan. “La sociabilité du bistrot: Approche anthropologique de la culture populaire,” 2:703–15, 19-20-21 November 1987.

Weber, Eugen. *Peasants into Frenchmen : The Modernization of Rural France, 1870-1914*. Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1976.

Williams, Maude, and Bernard Wilkin. *French Soldiers’ Morale in the Phoney War, 1939-1940*. Oxford: Routledge, 2018.

Williams, Nicholas J. “Les Évacuations de 1939 En Moselle et En Sarre : Cadres et Plans Stratégiques Pour La Prise En Charge Des Populations Civiles.” *Vingtième Siecle*, no. 128 (October 2015): 91–104.

Zahra, Tara. *Kidnapped Souls: National Indifference and the Battle for Children in the Bohemian Lands, 1900-1948*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008.

Zanoun, Louisa. “Interwar Politics in a French Border Region: The Moselle in the Period of the Popular Front, 1934 - 1938.” PhD, LSE, 2009.