

German Soldiers and the Occupation of France, 1940–1944

From 1940 to 1944, German soldiers not only fought in and ruled over France, but also lived their lives there. While the combat experiences of German soldiers are relatively well documented, as are the everyday lives of the occupied French population, we know much less about occupiers' daily activities beyond combat, especially when it comes to men who were not top-level administrators. Using letters, photographs, and tour guides, alongside official sources, Julia S. Torrie reveals how ground-level occupiers understood their role, and how their needs and desires shaped policy and practices. At the same time as soldiers were told to dominate and control France, they were also encouraged to sightsee, to photograph and to “consume” the country, leading to a familiarity that often limited violence rather than inciting it. The lives of these ordinary soldiers offer new insights into the occupation of France, the history of Nazism and World War II.

Julia S. Torrie is a professor of history at St Thomas University. Her publications include *“For Their Own Good”: Civilian Evacuations in Germany and France, 1939–1945* (2010).

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Abbreviations

AA	Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes, Berlin
ADP	Archives Départementales, Paris
AN	Archives Nationales, Paris
BArch	Bundesarchiv, Berlin, Freiburg, Koblenz
BfZ SS	Württembergische Landesbibliothek, Bibliothek für Zeitgeschichte, Sammlung Sterz, Stuttgart
BfZ SSch	Württembergische Landesbibliothek, Bibliothek für Zeitgeschichte, Sammlung Schüling, Stuttgart
DAF	Deutsche Arbeitsfront (German Workers' Front)
DTA	Deutsches Tagebucharchiv, Emmendingen
MBH	Militärbefehlshaber Frankreich
NSFO	Nationalsozialistische Führungsoffizier (National Socialist Leadership Officer)
NSV	Nationalsozialistische Volkswohlfahrt (National Socialist People's Welfare Organization)
PK	Propagandakompagnie
SS	Schutzstaffel
TNA	The National Archives, Kew
UNBASC	University of New Brunswick Archives and Special Collections, Fredericton

Recurring Personalities

Full names have been used wherever possible.

Walter Bargatzky (1910–98), a member of the German administrative staff in Paris, worked in the department responsible for legal matters (“Justiz”). He was linked to the 20 July 1944 plot against Hitler, though was not one of its leaders, and wrote a memoir about his experiences in occupied France that was published in 1987.

Heinrich Böll (1917–85) was stationed in France in 1940, and again in 1942–3, before being sent to the Eastern Front. After the war, he became a well-known West German novelist.

Lothar-Günther Buchheim (1918–2007) was a propaganda company member, author and photographer, who served notably in Brittany and collected material that inspired the post-war feature film, *Das Boot*.

Hans-Peter Eckener (1910–44), who was from an artistic family in Stuttgart, served in Brittany and visited Paris as part of a soldiers’ tour group in October 1941. Later transferred to the Eastern Front, he died there in February 1944.

Kurt F. (1909–44) fought in France in 1940, and then took part in the invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941. Wounded in the Ukraine, he convalesced in Germany and then was again sent to France. In 1944, he was stationed in Hungary, then transferred back to the West. He died in Normandy two days after the Allied invasion.

Johannes Gutschmidt (1876–1961) was a veteran of World War I who arrived in France in the summer of 1940 to command a prisoner of war camp near Le Mans. He later commanded several other camps in Poland and the Soviet Union.

xii List of Recurring Personalities

Alfred Haas (?–1942) was a lieutenant in the Luftwaffe. He was stationed at Arcachon in 1940 and later deployed to Poland, where he visited the Warsaw ghetto. He died on the Eastern Front in February 1942.

Ernst Jünger (1895–1998), a well-known author who served in the military administration in Paris, was sent briefly to the Eastern Front, and later published his recollections of the period.

Hans Klumpp (1917–2008) had been in the army since 1938. Musically inclined, he was a life-long bachelor from Karlsruhe who became a teacher after the war. In December 1941, he requested leave to pursue medical studies. The leave was not granted, though he later worked in a field hospital.

Bernhard Schulz (1913–2003) was born in the village of Lindlar (Bergisches Land) and served as an occupier in the Cherbourg area, as well as on Alderney (British Channel Islands). He wrote letters home to Gerda, his future wife, in Osnabrück. After publishing short stories and several books during the war, he pursued a postwar career as a journalist and author.

Friedrich Siebert (1888–1950), from Würzburg, was commander of the Forty-Fourth Infantry Division, stationed notably at La Rochelle in 1940–41. He then served on the Eastern Front and ended his career at the rank of General.

Klaus Peter Suhrkamp (1920–2004) was wounded in northern France in 1940. After his recovery, he served in France for several months before being sent to Poland. Son of the publisher Peter Suhrkamp, he kept a war diary from 1940 to 1942.

Fritz Swoboda (1922–2007) was an SS-Oberscharführer from Austria who was stationed in Prague, and later involved in anti-partisan operations in France, where he was taken prisoner in 1944 at the age of 22.

Wilhelm Unverzagt (1900–71) was a lawyer who was head of personnel management for the Reichsbahn (German national railway) until he lost his position on political grounds in 1938. During the war, he worked for the Reichsbahn in Russia and in France.

Map



Map of occupied France showing its division into various zones.
 Julian Jackson, *France: The Dark Years, 1940–44* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

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