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The French-Jewish POW Experience under German Captivity
(1940-1945)

In September 1939, as all mobilized French citizens, Jews were called up to defend their country. Some 60,000 Jewish combatants were rapidly enlisted to the French army while 15,000 foreign Jews joined the French Foreign Legion¹. In June 1940, however, the Battle of France ended in a bitter fiasco. The French army then experienced its most significant defeat in contemporary history with 1,800,000 French soldiers being captured and transported to POW camps in Germany. Among those prisoners of war, it is estimated that ten to fifteen thousand were of Jewish descent. Despite their Jewishness, they were granted a relatively protected status behind the barbed wires of their camps and were repatriated to France at the end of the war while their coreligionists in France experienced mass persecution and deportations to concentration and extermination camps.

This circumscribed group of POWs defined by its Jewish “race” forms the core of this study which aims to uncover the multi-faceted captivity experience of the French-Jewish POWs in the Oflags and Stalags that were scattered across the Reich territory.

The Jewish POW experience thus carries a surprising dimension as most Jewish POWs remained paradoxically safe while subject to German captivity. Undoubtedly, their fate stands out as “miraculous,” a term used in the various testimonies by former French Jewish POWs such as leading philosopher Emmanuel Levinas. In fact, their relatively protected situation can be explained by a complex web of political calculations and behind-the-scene diplomatic considerations. The leading factor was the role played by the collaborationist Vichy regime with Nazi Germany which turned out to be central in the plight of Jewish POWs from the French army.

Let me point out that since this paper is part of a manuscript in progress (to be published in France), it will focus primarily on one aspect of my work, i.e. the distinctive experience of French-Jewish POW and their encounter with their identity in the POW camp context. In the framework of today’s panel, I shall not discuss at length the role of the Vichy regime in the soldiers’

¹ André Kaspi, *Les Juifs pendant l'occupation*, Paris, Seuil, 1991, p. 21-22.

experience since it will form a central part of my forthcoming book. In today's presentation, I shall explore the French-Jewish POW experience through the prism of German racial policy and discrimination as applied to their POW camps. To do so, I adopted a bottom up or "history from below" approach (*l'histoire d'en bas*), which enabled me to encounter the captivity experience through the lens of the "social actors" themselves. Simultaneously, I used a top down or "history from above" perspective by focusing on the collaboration politics of Vichy with Germany and its impact on the management of POW camps. In this paper, I uncover the prisoners' experience through two main aspects. First, a bottom up observation of the soldiers' capture and the reversal of their status from "combatant soldiers" to "prisoners of war": those two moments formed a critical turning point as they raised the fateful question of the soldiers' Jewish origins. "Second, I explore the complexity of German racial discrimination policy as applied (differently) by the camps' German guards.

Until recently², the experience of Jewish POWs of the French army was by and large overlooked in Holocaust studies and in the historiography of 20th captivity. The Jewish POW experience was in fact marginalized not only from the historiography of captivity but also from the historiography of French Jewry. For historians and the public turned their main (and belated) attention to the categories of camp "survivors" and "hidden Jews." As such, the Jewish POW voice was obfuscated in the post-war collective memory of WWII and later put on the margins of the central Holocaust memory. In the vibrant explanation of French-Jewish philosopher and former POW in Stalag XI-B, Emmanuel Levinas: "In the drama that European Judaism had just experienced, Israelite prisoners of war did not hold the first role. They did not go through the death camps. [...] Their fate was just everyone's plight"³.

Up to now, though, the dominating narrative was that the German "respect" (if such a term can be used) of the Geneva Conventions was the main explanation why French-Jewish POWs escaped further deportations and immediate executions. And yet, did the Germans really abide by the judiciary barriers conceived to protect POWs? And what really prevented them from applying to the French Jewish POWs the same treatment that they reserved for European Jews in the Holocaust one the one hand, and for Soviet and Polish POWs on the other? Based upon my archival research, I argue that the German law-abiding argument is flawed. If the Geneva Conventions undoubtedly served as a formal basis of the German policy towards POWs, there was in fact no guarantee that they would respect international laws and norms in the long run. What's more, the Geneva Conventions had absolutely no significance to Hitler in the case of Polish POWs and later of Red Army prisoners. If Hitler considered useful to abide by the Geneva Conventions, it was

² Janine Doerry wrote a thesis on the Jewish POWs' wives: "*Schützlinge des Marschalls*" ? *Kriegsgefangenerre Juden aus Frankreich und deren familien während des Zeveiker Weltkrieges*, University of Hanovre, 2016. There is another work (in progress) by Delphine Richard on Jews in the French Army (1938(1938-1942) that focuses on the topic.

³ All the quotes of the different testimonies in this paper are translated from French to English by us.

merely by virtue of diplomatic interests and political calculations. Indeed, the Führer freely resorted to racial politics if it did not infringe upon German interests⁴.

Whatever the conflict at stake, prisoners of war have traditionally been a lucrative bargaining chip. In this sense, German policy followed the principles of *diplomatic reciprocity*⁵. Other considerations involved the concern for potential sanctions and reprisals which the belligerents may have applied in case of violation of the Geneva Conventions. Reciprocity did not exist, in fact, without concern for the fate of prisoners of war captured by the enemy as it was illustrated by the tragic fate of Soviet POWs. Once the mutual interest was absent, the lot of the captives was at the entire mercy of the detaining power. Here it should be noted that the case of France differed significantly from that of the American and British allies - which adopted diplomatic measures in favour of their own prisoners of war through neutral Switzerland and the Red-Cross⁶. Germany had in turn a keen interest in preserving the principle of reciprocity, as the allies retained German POWs in their respective territories such as in Great Britain, Northern Ireland, as well as in camps in the United States⁷ and Canada⁸.

In November 1940, the Vichy regime signed an agreement with Nazi Germany that delineated the contours of the French-Jewish POW experience in Germany. This pact entrusted the Vichy regime to play the role of “Protective Power” of French POWs substituting the United States. This is how the Diplomatic Service of French Prisoners of War (Service Diplomatique des Prisonniers de Guerre Français -SDPG) was established under the responsibility of Ambassador Georges Scapini who served as mediator with German authorities on issues related to French POWs⁹.

This new configuration by which the defeated country represented the “Protective Power” of its own prisoners of war was an unprecedented step since only a neutral country was supposed to take this responsibility (Geneva Convention, Article 86, July 27, 1929)¹⁰. From now on, the captivity of the French POWs followed a distinct bilateral logic relying on the agreements signed between both countries and not on international laws and norms.

Given the absence of German prisoners of war on the French soil ensuing the agreements between the two countries, Germany did not fear possible sanctions that may have followed its

⁴ Christian Streit, « Prisonniers de guerre alliés aux mains des Allemands », in : Catherine, Jean-Claude, *La captivité des prisonniers de guerre : Histoire, art et mémoire, 1939-1945. Pour une approche européenne*, Rennes, PUR, 2008, p. 29-40.

⁵ Geoffrey P. R. Wallace, *Life and Death in Captivity: The Abuse of Prisoners During War*, 2016, Internet resource, Cornell Scholarship Online, 2016, p. 117.
<https://cornell.universitypressscholarship.com/view/10.7591/cornell/9780801453434.001.0001/upso-9780801453434>

⁶ Arieh J. Kochavi, *Confronting Captivity: Britain and the United States and their POWs in Nazi Germany*, University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 2005, p. 2.

⁷ Daniel Costelle, Jean-Paul Bled, and Frédéric Guelton, *Prisonniers nazis en Amérique*, Paris, Pocke t, 2013.

⁸ Jean-Michel Turcotte, *Comment traiter les « soldats d’Hitler » ? la détention des prisonniers de guerre allemands au Canada, aux États-Unis et en Grande-Bretagne (1939-1945) : divergences et enjeux dans les relations interalliées*. Thèse (Ph. D.), Université Laval, 2018, online : <http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11794/31744>

⁹ Yves Durand, *La vie quotidienne des prisonniers de guerre dans les stalags, les oflags, et les kommandos : 1939-1945*, Paris, Hachette, 1987, p. 315-319.

¹⁰ *Convention relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War*, Geneva, 27 July 1929.

violation of international law, yet the reciprocity principle was maintained and followed this time different calculations and considerations. A few studies on the captivity experience highlighted how the political collaboration between the Vichy regime and Nazi Germany impacted the captivity experience and living conditions of French POWs including POWs of Jewish descent¹¹.

The policy towards all POWs *at the moment of their capture* was dictated not by the prisoners' origin or religious faith, but rather by the type of uniform they wore at the phase of surrender. Indeed, wearing a French uniform protected the Jews who wore it from immediate racial deportation that was yet designed for their co-religionists back in occupied France.

From this point of view, the French and Western European Jewish POW experience stood in harsh contrast to the grim fate of Jews fighting in the ranks of the Soviet army, who were promptly executed when their origins were discovered. Since the Soviet Union was among the countries that did not sign the Geneva Conventions, the Germans had no diplomatic interest – or any other stake – to uphold the Soviet soldiers' human rights. However, wearing a French uniform alone did not provide any guarantee of invulnerability as illustrated by the tragic case of African combatants of the French army who despite wearing a French uniform were met with extreme violence and merciless massacres by the German soldiers during the Reich's defeat. In fact, even though Nazi Germany aspired to exterminate all Jews, in practice their racial politics differed from one frontline to another. As pointed out by late French historian Henri Rousso, Germany did not approach racial politics similarly on its Western and Eastern fronts with the war in France and the battles against the “Slavs” carrying different racial war agendas¹².

Taken Captive as a Turning Point: Religious Identity or Racial Origin?

In the POW testimonies, one of the most salient and impactful memories is the moment of capture itself marked by the laying down of one's arms in front of the army enemy. For all combatants, regardless of their ranks and origins, the capture experience was in and by itself an intensely emotional one as it marked a fateful tipping point and a source of personal and collective humiliation.

In the Summer of 1940, against the backdrop of France's capitulation, most soldiers of the French Army sensed that captivity and transfer to German POW camps was looming on their horizon. This expected outcome sowed deep fear and anxiety among French combatants of Jewish descent, even prior to any physical encounter with the army enemy, for they felt doomed because of their origins.

In anticipation of their likely capture, soldiers of Jewish descent resorted to different survival tactics. Some decided to hastily bury their identity papers so that no one could find out their true identity. Among other examples, a Jewish volunteer in the Foreign Legion, Serge Bac who was captured in June 1940 and subsequently transferred to a POW camp in Germany, near Fürstenberg,

¹¹ Scheck, Raffael. “The Prisoner of War Question and the Beginnings of Collaboration: The Franco-German Agreement of 16 November 1940”, *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 45, no. 2, 2010, pp. 364–388. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/20753591. Accessed 9 Oct. 2020.

¹² Henry Rousso, “Une bonne question, de mauvaises réponses”, in *Le Débat* 183.1, 2015, p. 182–185.

buried his ID just before embarking to the camp. Yet Serge Bac later followed the advice of his peers who had pushed him not to hide his origins and even disclose them so that “to avoid any severe reprisals”.¹³ Still others deliberately avoided the evasion option as being Jewish represented an aggravating circumstance and an increased risk. For example, French Jewish officer Roger Ikor (well-known for his literary work) mentioned his Jewish origins in an exchange with a German soldier (an origin that up to the defeat had absolutely no meaning for him). In Ikor’s recollection: “it had just come back to me, astonishingly, that I was Jewish, and that I may be in deep trouble should he discover it”.¹⁴ At this very moment, Ikor froze and felt that even if he were to receive an opportunity to escape, he would not seize it. I quote: “Was it fear that held me back? To some extent, yes. Of course! And I may be allowed to recall that, as a Jew, the risk was seriously increased if I were recaptured”.

Ikor’s fear was not baseless. Racial taxonomy was indeed applied in the German POW camps when German authorities did differentiate the French army’s captives based on their “racial” profiling. Although French POWs formed a relatively homogeneous group (after all they all wore the French uniform), German authorities were literally obsessed with categorizing them according to their putative racial, ethnic, religious, or even regional origins.

The first German-generated category of POW who were to be treated separately included all the *non-European soldiers and volunteers*, i.e. the *indigenous* from the French colonies and the overseas departments (North Africa, Madagascar, Reunion, Black Africa, or the West Indies).¹⁵ After the exclusion of the “Africans” and the “indigenous,” the Germans sought to identify prisoners of war with “alien” ethnic or religious roots: primarily Jews, but also Muslims and Armenians. In addition, the Germans drew distinctions within the French POWs according to their regional origins separating, for example, the French Flemings from the Bretons or the Corsicans! These three categories of German POWs as applied to the French captives (the “indigenous” from the French colonies, the ethnic and religious “aliens” including Jews, and representatives of different regional minorities) were provisionally separated from their peers and transferred to different camps that later would be dissolved¹⁶.

Another and fourth category of POW which the Germans sought to identify and treat separately included the “volunteers of the French Legion”. In their case, German authorities carried

¹³ [Serge Bac et le drapeau de l’Union des engagés volontaires et anciens combattants juifs | Musée national de l’histoire de l’immigration \(histoire-immigration.fr\)](http://www.musee-napoleon.fr/visites/serge-bac-et-le-drapeau-de-l-union-des-engages-volontaires-et-anciens-combattants-juifs)

¹⁴ Roger Ikor, *Pour une fois écoute, mon enfant*, Paris, A. Michel, 1975, p. 23.

¹⁵ The Black soldiers from the French colonies who had been fighting for France were transferred to transit camps: *frontstalag* Recham, Belkacem, under French domination. The Vichy government asked the Germans to grant a special “leave” to the prisoners of war from the French colonies and suggested to send them back to their native lands. Vichy’s proposal was based on the argument that those POWs may not be able to survive the cold weather in the German camps. The Germans turned down his request yet agreed to have them return to mainland Occupied France. For further reading: « Les indigènes nord-africains prisonniers de guerre (1940-1945) », *Guerres mondiales et conflits contemporains*, vol. 223, no. 3, 2006, p. 109-125. See also: Armelle Mabon, *Prisonniers de guerre « indigènes »*. *Visages oubliés de la France occupée*, Paris, La Découverte, 2010.

¹⁶ Pierre Gascar, *Histoire de la captivité des français en Allemagne (1939-1945)*, Paris, Gallimard, 1967, p. 52.

out a double distinction and a double triage. First, they separated the “French” soldiers from the “foreign” volunteers or soldiers. Second, they separated the voluntary enlisted men of the French Legion into different categories based on their ethnic origins and nationality. For example, the Spanish refugees who fought on behalf of the French Army were sent to concentration camps. Foreign Jews were deported to Honehfels in Bavaria where they worked in the *Kommando 24-32*¹⁷. One should note that among the foreign regiments, the proportion of Jews was particularly high compared to other groups or nationalities. Those volunteers or soldiers identified as Jews were a target of systematic humiliation from the moment of their capture and were forced to stand aside, regardless of their official citizenship.

Once they reached the POW camps in Germany, all captured prisoners grappled with a lengthy and cumbersome process of bureaucratic registration. During this process, they were granted a new status (*Kriegsgefangene*) as they officially ceased to be “combatants” to become “prisoners of war”.

The captivity experience was generally homogenous among prisoners, yet two important factors – nationality/citizenship and rank – created significant internal distinctions. First, all prisoners of war were categorized according to their national uniforms, troop soldiers were held in regular camps called Stalags (*Stammlagar*), while officers were kept in different camps known as Oflag (*Offizierlager*). Second, if all French POWs of Jewish origin were also categorized upon arrival in Germany according to this distinction (Stalag/ Oflag), their Jewish origin still became a prevailing feature of their captivity experience once they reached Germany.

This mass of men, who were identical in their new status and appearance, had to undergo the matriculation process marked by the handling of captivity papers to each prisoner. With this life-changing administrative measure, each soldier was deprived of “his national military number, which was the major feature of his identity, in exchange for subjecting him to a new order, that of the vanquisher”¹⁸. The prisoners were photographed holding a blackboard on which a number was inscribed, and this number was then engraved on the steel plaque that they had to wear during their captivity. From this moment onwards, their identity was reduced to a set of German-generated numbers, which replaced and nullified their previous official military identification. The captivity records included the POW fingerprints, portraits, and family status (as requested by the Red Cross).

As part of the administrative formalities of the POWs’ registration, all prisoners were required to declare their religious affiliation, and this is *at this point* that the issue of Jewish origins popped up. This moment of administrative religious self-declaration thus became a critical turning point that determined the entire course of their captivity experience. The questionnaire thus served as a method of “racial census” as soldiers were identified and treated based on their origins, and then set apart from their peers and co-citizens. It should be mentioned that almost no prisoner of war testimony mentions any kind of physical examination of the prisoners such as a circumcision check.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ François Cochet, *Soldats sans Armes : La captivité De Guerre, Une Approche Culturelle*, Bruylant, 1999, p. 235-236.

It should be emphasized that on the battlefield the soldiers' religious or ethnic origins was irrelevant, yet in the POW camps religious and national differences became particularly meaningful. Suddenly, Jewish POWs were no longer "French prisoners", but "Jewish prisoners". In the words of Emmanuel Levinas: "In captivity, the Jewish prisoner suddenly rediscovers his Jewish identity".¹⁹ This registration process enabled German authorities to identify all Jewish POWs who declared their Judaism, while atheists or converts were registered by Nazi authorities as Jews only if they had Jewish-sounding surnames such as Weil, Blum or Dreyfus. For all the prisoners who declared their Judaism, by choice or lack of, the experience of captivity thus became tightly intertwined with their origins.

In the absence of any official document that would have enabled a straightforward "racial" categorization of their war prisoners, German authorities opted for another kind of census. It should be emphasized that in the prisoner of war camps context, documenting a filiation or blood lineage was not easily applicable. In the POW camps, the Germans did not conduct any in-depth inquiry on the ancestry of prisoners suspected, in their eyes, of having Jewish blood in their veins, as they had been carrying out at their country for the past seven years and as Vichy's administration was going to hurry up and do²⁰. For the captives could not display any administrative records that would have easily enabled to determine their Jewishness by investigating their "blood filiation" across three generations. The only way to track down Jews amongst French prisoners of war (except for those who did not have any Jewish or Hebrew-sounding names) was thus by *self-declaration*. From this viewpoint, the German approach with regards to the Jewish POWs carried some resemblance with the census of the Jewish population as initiated by Vichy and its October 1940 laws that summoned Jews to identify themselves as Jews via self-declaration to French administrative authorities²¹.

In addition, Jewishness was quite a monolith concept for the Germans who drew no distinction whatsoever between all shades of Jewish belonging or existence in the POW camps. In fact, "atheists", "non-religious", "liberal thinkers", and even "converts", were all forcefully subsumed into the same overarching "racial" category, whose contours were defined solely based upon a "racial" criteria.

Captivity Registration Procedure as Racial Census

For Jewish POWs, the initial captivity registration procedure was the critical step that would determine or seal their captivity experience. At this stage, they realized that their multi-dimensional belonging, - patriotic, social, or military - was wiped out and replaced by an exclusionary "racial" affiliation. The only Jews who managed to escape racial discrimination were

¹⁹ Levinas, Emmanuel, Rodolphe Calin, Catherine Chalier, and Jean-Luc Marion, *Carnets de captivité : suivi de écrits sur la captivité*, suivi de notes philosophiques diverses, Paris, Grasset, 2009, p. 205.

²⁰ Pierre Gaspar, *op.cit.*, p. 51.

²¹ Here I use the expression « self-declaration » based upon the work of Nicolas Mariot and Claire Zalc, *Face à la persécution : 991 Juifs dans la guerre*, Paris, Odile Jacob, 2010.

those who successfully adopted an underground or *incognito*²² posture. In the words of the novelist Francis Ambrière, author of *Les Grandes vacances* (Goncourt 1940, awarded in 1946):

Those of our Jewish comrades who escaped the first triage and remained among us, were treated by the Germans as we were. But the reason is quite simple: they had been carefully silent about their origins to their captors.²³

This moment when Jewish POWs were forced to declare their origins was fateful for their future but also enabled them to grapple with their own identity and its significance. In fact, the diversity of the captives' reactions to German "Jewish policy" in the POW camps is a testimony to the diversity of the French Jewish population on the eve of the Second World War. As French historian André Kaspi pointed out, at the time this minority did not represent a homogeneous "community" since it was neither "religious" nor "ethnic" or "cultural".²⁴ Several features then characterized pre-WWII French Jewry: religious practice, political convictions, and their integration into French society,²⁵ not to mention the gap in mentality and customs between Sephardi and Ashkenazi Jews,²⁶ or ancient "native" Jews from assimilated families, and immigrants citizens.²⁷ There was another salient category among French Jews: the foreign Jews who kept a different conception of Judaism²⁸ with their Jewishness being reflected by their Yiddish accent, a different mentality and behavior, or even by their Eastern European "appearance". Many Jewish prisoners of war of ancient French descent declared themselves to be "*without religion*" (*religionlos*), *atheists*, *agnostics*, or *freethinkers*. This was not only a cautious strategy, but an expression of their visceral attachment to French *laïcité*, which enshrined the idea that faith is a matter of private *choice*. In the German self-declaration forms, responding *without religion* was an option, but a suspicious one (why a prisoner would like to obfuscate his religious affiliation?). By contrast, Jewish atheist or converts, who carried a Jewish-sounding name were registered as members of the "Jewish race".²⁹

This declaration was particularly painful for the assimilated *Israélites* who were "fools for love of the Republic" as put by French historian and sociologist Pierre Birnbaum³⁰. This category of Jews carried the pride of their social and cultural integration to the French Republic that was conquered by their families through several generations. They passionately claimed their secularism while their Judaism was reduced to a religious practice in the private sphere or disappeared to be replaced by social, public, or cultural identities. For the *Israélites*, being defined primarily as "Jewish captives" and not as "French soldiers" was particularly traumatic. As

²² A term borrowed from the testimony of Georges Musnik, former prisoner of war of Jewish descent; *Par-dessus mon épaule*, Paris, Collection Ecritures, L'Harmattan, 1996.

²³ Quoted in Roger Berge, « Juifs de France, combattants de la Seconde Guerre mondiale 1939-1945 », *Pardès*, 1990, n°12, « Autorité et controverse dans le Judaïsme », p.196-197. URL : <https://www.cairn.info/revue-commentaire-2014-1-page-25.htm>

²⁴ André Kaspi, *Les Juifs pendant l'occupation*, Paris, Seuil, 1991, réédité en 1997, p. 17.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

²⁷ André Kaspi, *op.cit.*, p. 27.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p.27.

²⁹ Roger Berge, *op.cit.*, p. 201.

³⁰ Pierre Birnbaum, *Les Fous de la République*, Paris, Fayard, 1992.

Raymond Aron put it after the war: “In 1940, I was still a Jew, but I didn’t know if I still was French³¹.”

As an example of the French *Israélite* experience, let me highlight the case of Raymond Lipa, who considered himself as agnostic. In the chapter “Catholique malgré moi” (Catholic in spite of myself), he described the interrogation episode upon his arrival to his camp in Germany. He firmly refused to associate himself with any religion and identified himself as a “free thinker” in front of German authorities:

When my turn came to answer the questions of my comrade, “required” for the circumstance, as I have already indicated, I declared my identity, age, address, etc... I still had my driver’s license which confirmed my identity.

[...] My comrade went on with the interrogation and when the question “Religion?” popped up I replied without hesitation: “Free Thinker”.

This answer, however, did not seem to satisfy my colleague who suddenly raised his head, stared at me and, without bursting, told me: “say Catholic!”.

Obviously, he “understood”! As naïve as I was, I imagined that my neutrality, or my laicity, would be useful to me! Using the same tone, my companion repeated: - “Say Catholic!

Then a short discussion began during which I intended to claim my rights to the freedom of thought!... As a secularist and son of a secularist (since my adulthood, I had always presented myself as a “Free Thinker”, or “without religion”.

I could not therefore decline any religion, whether Christian - and even less Israelite - to the guy who questioned me in the Nuremberg prison camp. [...]

In my remaining naivety, I thought that Nazi paganism could constitute a kind of equivalence.

This was a profound error, and more so since this element of the questionnaire was precisely intended to detect some “passing Jewishness”!!”

“Say Catholic!” my interrogator repeated to me twice already. He spoke softly, yet stubbornly.

The scene had been going on for a while, and no doubt it must have seemed unusual to the German non-commissioned officer [...], he reached behind the table, close to my interrogator, and, rather impatient. My interrogator [...] contented himself by pronouncing loud enough to be overheard by the crowd, and particularly by the NCO: - “Catholic. That’s fine. Go on!”³².

Lipa was not the only Jewish POW to consider that religion is a matter of free choice and not an inherent component of his identity. Take for example Jean-Louis Crémieux who was only 23 years old when he was taken as a prisoner of war in Jaulgonne, in the Aisne region. He was sent first to Oflag II-D in Pomerania (June 11, 1940) and then to Oflag II B until his evasion (to the Soviet Union). In his interrogation he replied “*freethinker of Jewish descent*”, but as in the case of Lipa, he hasn’t been declared as Jew thanks to his German interrogator who took the initiative to “reformulate” the identity of this young - and naive - Jewish officer:

³¹ Raymond Aron, « Français et juif », *Commentaire*, 2014/1, n° 145, p. 30.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 72-77.

The interrogating NCO said to me half-heartedly, “I won’t write that”. I asked him why. He whispered, “I know what I know”.

- And what do you know?

- “I am a German from Poland”, he answered, “and I saw what I saw”.

- “Well! Just write free thinker”.

He wrote: *Religionslos*³³.

The Declaration: Endorsing One’s Jewishness

Unlike the Jewish POW who managed to dissimulate their origins, POW with a Jewish-sounding name had no alternative but endorse their origins. Among many other examples, let me mention the two brothers Éli et Alain de Rothschild, the socialist member of Parliament Pierre Bloch, the son of the socialist leader Léon Blum, the lieutenant Robert Blum, the philosopher Emmanuel Levinas, all chaplain rabbis, or the mayor of Belfort Dreyfus-Schmidt.

For Simon Fux, who served as rabbi and military chaplain, Jewish identity was an undeniable part of his being, and in this case, he was registered as a Jew while his Jewish comrades around him escaped thanks to the initiative of the German officer who took upon themselves to register them as Catholics. Let me cite a rather exceptional scene of a group of prisoners who initially endorsed their identity but subsequently adopted another one:

As soon as we arrived at the camp, we were given a card on which we had to mention our identity. And, of course, there was a place reserved for “race”. Whether or not one believed in a Jewish race, it goes without saying that I wrote the word “Jew” on it.³⁴

The scene is remarkable because the declaration act remains “silent”, and it is the German authorities themselves who conceal the origin of these individuals presenting themselves for registration at Oflag VIII H in Oberlangendorf:

In fact, we had to present ourselves to an old German lieutenant who took our identity. This was done in public. That’s why I went to the place where this registration of all prisoners was done. At a certain point, a Major Cahen appeared. The question was asked: “Religion?”. Silence from the interrogated person. Then I heard the German lieutenant say: “I’ll mark you: Catholic”. I immediately had the Jewish officers informed to keep quiet when they were asked what their religion was. And so all of them (some of them were called Levy), I mean all of them, were registered as Catholics. Except for me, of course, because as a rabbi, I had to affirm my Judaism. And that is why, when it was my turn, I declared: “Israelite military chaplain”. There was no way out for this brave German

Jean-Louis Crémieux-Brilhac, *Prisonniers de da liberté : l’odyssée Des 218 évadés Par L’URSS, 1940-1941*, Paris, Gallimard, 2014, p. 62-63.

³⁴ Simon Fux, Grand Rabbin, *Un Rabbin d’Alsace. Souvenirs de guerre*, Colmar, Jérôme Do Bentzinger Editeur, 2003. ULR : <http://judaisme.sdv.fr/histoire/villes/colmar/fuks/guerre/index-g.htm>

lieutenant who wrote *Jüdischer Feldgeistlicher*. And I thought I saw in his eyes a look of pity³⁵.

Roger Berg managed to conceal his identity, but at some point, he was denounced. The day the *feldwebel* designated Berg as “Jude”, Berg was transferred to a *Judenbaracke* with his co-religionists. I quote:

The truth is that the situation is not so simple. For this group of “Juden” of which I was a member from the day in September 1940 when I had to recognize myself as a “Jew” in the face of the enemy, did not have a linear existence. Before I became a “Jew” by confession, I had personally used every trick to avoid being registered, exercising the official function of registering the XIIC and XIID camps. This did not only allow me not to go to the Kommando in July, but also to smooth the future existence of those who went there for three months, and to make it easier for many others to be released, including the “gefang” [prisoner] Sartre (Jean-Paul).³⁶

Despite all, he insists on clarifying his military status as officer in a footnote:

I believe I must explain my attitude. As a non-commissioned officer in the French army, I felt - following international law on wartime captivity - that I had no more to say than French law required of me. I was not a Jewish prisoner, but a French NCO. Nothing more. Nothing less.³⁷

Another rationale for declaring one’s origins was honoring one’s conscience and dignity. In fact, some prisoners of war who declared themselves “Jewish” justified their decision by pointing out that their conscience prevented them from denying their solidarity with their Jewish comrades. Putting themselves separately from their co-religionist comrades - in this context where their origin becomes a sign of infamy – was a coward act and a betrayal to their co-religionists. Henri Koch could have had a completely different experience had he take the decision to obfuscate his origin. Nevertheless, the value of solidarity overcame all other personal considerations. I quote his words:

From the outset, I was facing my problem of Jewishness. When registering in my “new society”, I have to declare my religion. What can I say, when it is obvious that, despite the Geneva Convention designed to protect prisoners of war, the affirmation of my Jewish quality involves certain risks? I am even more inclined to ask myself this question since my name can cover all sorts of people.

[...]

But not to declare myself a Jew is to deny myself. Would I be a coward towards comrades with “flashier” names?

When the non-commissioned officer behind the reception desk asked me “your religion?”, “I answered “Jewish”. Then a German second lieutenant, who was observing the registration process from afar, stood up, looked me straight in the eyes with the expression of someone who was deeply sorry, and asked me: “Are you really Jewish? My answer comes out, now without hesitation: “yes”. And, with the desperate look of

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Roger Berg, « Mes grandes vacances », *Le Monde Juif*, septembre n° 51, 1968.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

someone talking to another person who might drown, yet refuses to get help, he replies: “Well, if that is your wish, we shall leave it like this!”.

This shows that even in this deeply rotten Third Reich, there were still men who were clear-sighted, courageous, and capable of human sentiments³⁸.

This moment of administrative registration, which was only a brief episode preceding a long captive experience, nonetheless formed a crucial moment in the trajectories of Jewish war prisoners. For this bureaucratic process marked a shift in the identity of those who lived in captivity under the label of “prisoners of the Jewish race”, but also for those who lived in captivity while dissimulating their Jewishness. Life in captivity imposed will it or not a reflection on one’s origins as the camps’ racialized context did not leave much room for the denial of one’s identity. Entering captivity was particularly impactful due to the complex assignment process of the POW identities. This liminal administrative phase also reflected the diversity of the Jewish POW who themselves mirrored the diversity of the Jewish population in France in 1939: foreign volunteers, immigrants, naturalized persons, practicing or assimilated Israelites. They also embodied several conceptions of Jewishness: from the immigrant attached to his tradition as an Eastern European Jew to the secular bourgeois officer. Another aspect that made this administrative phase particularly intense was the way “camouflage” or dissimulation was conducted. It included hesitation, fear of judgment, support from non-Jewish comrades, and in a few cases personal involvement and support by German officers.

In many cases the Germans asked French officers to establish a list of all the *Israelites* POW, but denunciations of brothers-in-arms and compatriots with Jewish origins were rare. French officers remained loyal to the French army’s *Esprit de corps* and often refused to establish lists of Israelites at the request of German authorities, or simply mentioned “Catholics”. Michel Grojnowski, a Jewish volunteer in the French Foreign Legion, recounts that upon his arrival at Stalag B I (Hohenstein), a German captain concluded his speech by screaming: “The Jews must be exterminated, EX-TER-MI-NES”, but the French officers and non-commissioned officers in charge of drawing up the lists “declared all Jews as ‘Catholics’”³⁹. This solidarity, as Francis Ambrière recalls, was “one of the beautiful memories” of his captivity: “in five years of captivity, and in the seven successive Stalags where my ill-fated destiny led me, I have not known a single case when French Jews would have been denounced to the Germans by non-Jewish Frenchmen”⁴⁰.

³⁸ Henri Koch, « La vie d’un juif à l’Oflag XVII à en trois tableaux », in Henri Koche et Robert Dreyfus, « La condition des juifs dans les Oflags allemands », *Tenouah*, septembre 1984, p. 19.

³⁹ Extrait du « Les Juifs dans la Résistance Française 1940-1944 » (Avec armes ou sans armes), in David Diamant, Éd. Le pavillon Roger Maria, [Prisonniers de guerre - U.E.V.A.C.J.-E.A. \(combattantvolontairejuif.org\)](http://Prisonniers de guerre - U.E.V.A.C.J.-E.A. (combattantvolontairejuif.org))

⁴⁰ Francis Ambrière, supplément au numéro 130 de *Notre Volonté*, p. 71, in Roger Berg, « Juifs de France, combattants de la Seconde Guerre mondiale 1939-1945 », *Pardès, Autorité et controverse dans le Judaïsme*, 1990, n°12, « », p.203.

Anti-Jewish Segregation in Stalags and Oflags

The treatment of Jewish prisoners was different from one camp to another, yet on the whole Jewish POWs were subject to various extra discriminatory measures compared with other prisoners. In most camps, Jewish POWs were put in separate barracks specially designed for them, and in few rare cases, they were required to set a yellow badge on their uniforms. Certainly, those who spent their captivity in the Stalags or in the *Arbeitskommando* were subject to arbitrary treatment compared to Jewish officers. Although officers of Jewish descent would later experience racial discrimination and segregation, their experience remained comparatively more tolerable.

The segregation and tagging of Jewish POWs was part of a policy of clear differentiation between the POW community as a whole and the minority of Jewish POWs. This racial policy's objective was also to humiliate and disgrace the Jewish minority in the POW camps. In their case, racial segregation aimed at creating a collective stigma and a diffused sense of shame through the segregation of Jewish prisoners into specially assigned barracks or the imposition of ridiculous physical exercises in public. In many cases, humiliating helpless prisoners served as preliminary stage to the enacting of extreme violence, as it was the case for Soviet POWs. Per the international law and the Geneva conventions POWs are to be treated with respect, humanity and protected by the Detaining Power, particularly against violent acts. The protection clause is clearly formulated in article 2 of Geneva Conventions:

Prisoners of war are in the power of the hostile Government, but not of the individuals or formation which captured them.
They shall at all times be humanely treated and protected, particularly against acts of violence, from insults and from public curiosity.
Measures of reprisal against them are forbidden⁴¹.

Despite those laws which intended to assure protection for unarmed combatants in the hands of the Detaining Country, violence was still practiced by the enemy holding them. Here, there is a critical semantic clarification to be done:

In the case of French Jewish POW (as well as British or American Jews), the level of German-exerted violence remained restrained. It was more physical and emotional *abuse* in which the violence dimension remained curbed and did not precipitate into an uncontrolled outburst of extreme violence or the systematic carrying out of cruelty acts. "Abuse" is therefore the term that, in my analysis, best captures the French (or British and American) POW Jewish experience as it embraced a wide range of mistreatment (without the exterminatory or extreme violence treatment applied to Polish or Soviet POWs). The Western Jewish POWs were subject to hard living conditions, insufficient nourishment, and psychological manipulation through humiliation and physical abuse (beating, humiliating and senseless physical labor).

⁴¹ *Convention relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War*, Geneva, 27 July 1929.

In some camps, the minority of Jewish prisoners of war suffered more than others camps, such as those of the *Judenstalag* of Baumholder, where “the guards parked them aside and denied them ‘the consolation of being treated, despite their uniforms, as French soldiers’ “ (he quotes Ambrière)⁴². And as described by former Jewish officer in Colditz Oflag and later in Lubeck Oflag, Robert Christophe⁴³:

In Baumholder camp, the instructions went as far as barbarism. When the rain turned the ground into mud, the guards amused themselves by forcing their captives to do “relaxation exercises”, which were all the more painful because they had to be executed at full speed when commanded to do so: Flat on your stomach! Stand up! Down on your stomach! Crawl! Pass under the electric wires! Stand up! No gymnastics! Get down on your stomach! Crawl! If one of the victims of these boors leaned on his hands and toes to avoid plunging into the mud, a *Posten* [guard] would jump on his back or his buttocks to push him in despite himself. The unfortunate would return wet, shivering, and crusty to his hut.

[...]

In this “quarter of the punished”, the guards easily drew the gun. Using no pretext (there is such a thing as art for art’s sake), they would shoot a captive without the officers giving them the slightest reproach⁴⁴.

Humiliation was also part of the experience of French officers with Jewish origins. I quote:

One winter day, this inquisition went too far. The head of the Gestapo had the Jews taken to an empty barrack and forced them, at gunpoint, to strip completely naked. The pretext was to inspect the duplicates of their uniforms, even their underwear, in order to look for escape plans. Naked as a worm in ten degrees below zero, the unfortunate ones began to run or jump on the spot to warm up. This is a Jewish habit, “the head of the Gestapo shouted at them, “that I cannot stand! Stop, you pigs!””. An hour and a half later, the head of the barracks went to report these insults to the representative general. At his request, the dean wrote to the German general who was in charge of the camps in the region: “By calling French officers pigs, your Gestapo major has offended the French army. If I do not receive his apology, I will complain to the Scapini Mission. How successful was this complaint? None”⁴⁵.

They were loaded with the most painful labors to perform, they were forced to practice humiliating physical exercises, and were targets of anti-Semitic abuse. All those measures contravened the commitments of the Geneva Conventions made by the Detaining Power. Let me quote the description of Mayer Zylbercan:

I worked hard, 12 hours a day without enough food, with the brutality and insults of the supervisors. I was not entitled to any Red Cross package. In March 1942 I was sent to Stalag

⁴² Francis Ambrière, *Les Grandes Vacances*, Paris, Seuil, 1984 (other editions : 1946, 1956, 1958, 1984).

⁴³ Robert Christophe was an intellectual and author, one of the first who published a book about the history of French POW, in 1979.

⁴⁴ Robert Christophe, *Les flammes du purgatoire : histoire des prisonniers de 1940*, Paris, France-Empire, 1979, p. 126.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 135.

VII B in Memmingen until May 15, 1942, when I was transferred to Stalag 325 in Rava Ruska. This camp was a real hell. From morning to evening I had to do dirty and hard work; I was starving, freezing and on all occasions, I was mistreated and brutalized. I had no days off and led an inhuman life.

In November 1942, Zylbercan arrived at Stalag II-A in Neubrandenburg where he found Jewish barrack and Jewish star. In 1943 he started to work in a Jewish Kommando under particularly harsh conditions:

An insupportable life began again for me. Very hard work, insufficient food in an intense cold against which I was not protected, under the brutality, hatred, and mistreatment of the supervisors. I was physically and morally broken; I lived without any care or hygiene. I carried on like this until May 1945, when I was liberated. My health was severely damaged⁴⁶.

Those acts aimed at humiliating and excluding Jews. Yet beyond humiliation and insults, Jewish POW also wrote about the extensive physical abuse they had to endure.

Jewish POWs Facing Nazi Indoctrinated Guards

As pointed out by historian Rüdiger Overmans, no one knows of any formal document in the *Wehrmacht* archives that enumerated specific instructions regarding French-Jewish POWs. The only known order, titled “Treatment of Jewish Prisoners of War” from December 1944, included four clauses, the most important of which dictated that Jewish prisoners should be treated as all other POWs. Yet, the fact that this order was formulated close to the end of the war and the *Wehrmacht*’s collapse, suggests that it does not offer a satisfactory explanation for the relatively mild treatment Jewish POWs received under German captivity⁴⁷.

Most of the abusive acts were the result of personal initiatives by the sentinels, who used and abused their power position and their fundamentally asymmetric relationship with the prisoners.

Insulting and beating the victims were not disciplinary acts aimed at maintaining order in the camp, but domination acts designed to project power and impose the guards’ domination over their helpless victims. Per the international conventions, guards were not allowed to resort to violence or humiliation, and yet as demonstrated by a wide range of prisoner testimonies, the guards sought to satisfy their domination thirst and even displayed pleasure at inflicting and seeing suffering among their victims who were disgraced by their “race”. I quote XXX testimony:

This non-commissioned officer had the specialty of continually persecuting the Jewish Pow, had sanctions pronounced against them for the slightest act or for his simple

⁴⁶ Centre de documentation Juive Contemporaine (CDJC), MDLX/4 ([Fonds UEVACJ-EA](#))

⁴⁷ Rüdiger Overmans, « Le traitement allemand des prisonniers de guerre juifs durant la Seconde Guerre mondiale », in : Pathé, A.-M. (Ed.). *Captivité de guerre au XX^e siècle*, Paris, Colin, 2012, p.63.

pleasure. Thus, he imposed punitive exercises on entire barracks: gymnastics in the snow and rain, etc...

For several months, he had forbidden the Jewish POW to go to the washbasins to wash themselves and they were told that they had to wait for the rain to get water.

The German guards indoctrinated by Nazi ideology followed the “spirit” of the Reich politic. Their mental landscape was deeply formatted by Nazi racial indoctrination, which served as fertile grounds to the enacting of this ideology⁴⁸. Nevertheless, as highlighted Johann Chapoutot, there was also an element of free choice in inflicting evil and enjoying from the other’s suffering: “the soldier is not a machine, he is endowed with free will and an intellectual and moral space for manoeuvre”⁴⁹. One of the strongest testimonies is that of Constantin Joffé, a non-Jewish POW who described the physical degradation of his fellow Jewish prisoners through their physical abuse a stalag VVII A located in Kaisersteinbruch:

On July 8, 1940, during that famous day of the organization of the “French nation”, the cry “Jews out” ! Forty-two comrades, paler than usual, were guarded by a platoon of about ten men.

[...]

Von Brunswick had decided that all day and every day the Jews would do German physical training and that this would “make their feet grow”. Mustapha and a German corporal were given this glorious task. First, the Jews were stripped of their shoes and given artificial leather clogs with thick wooden soles. The official reason for this theft was that shoes were essential for the workers, but the real reason was that the soles of the clogs were not flexible, so the physical cultivation movements would become torture and... this was the essence of the decision.

For three weeks, at any time of the day or night, the whistle brought the “forty-two” together. When the whistle blew, they returned to their places in the barracks, and this game of whistling, aided by boots or simply by the boner, lasted for hours. No Jew was allowed to leave his barrack without a military escort, even for personal needs. They were not allowed to talk with their Christian comrades. When the German corporal thought that the whistle had sufficiently terrorized his victims, he began the physical training.

The movement was very simple and never varied. No gymnastics in clogs, lie down where the command surprised the guy: stand up - lie down, stand up - lie down, run, stand up [...]. The favourite terrain was around the makeshift sanitary facilities and was submerged in a foul-smelling yellow liquid.

[...]

Wounded or not, sick or well, with or without fever, young or old, the Jews had to earn their right to live in Stalag XVII A.

The climax of the life of the “forty-two” during these three weeks is found in the following episode:

⁴⁸ Omer Bartov, *Hitler’s Army: Soldiers, Nazis, and War in the Third Reich*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1992.

⁴⁹ « La violence nazie », entretien avec Johann Chapoutot, propos recueillis par Didier Sicard, *Inflexions*, vol. 31, no. 1, 2016, p. 15.

One morning at about ten o'clock, von Brunswick interrupted the physical training and led them personally to an alley in the camp [...]. There hundreds of Hitler Youth were gathered. Eighty meters from the group, the “forty-two” were stopped.

- On your knees, dogs! “and they were forced to crawl on their knees before the Nazi youth. [...]

- These are the conquerors of the world!

- This is how Germany treats its enemies!”

Then:

“The Germans chose those with the most pronounced Israelite type, about ten, and photographed them on their knees in front of the 'youth'.

I don't think I have ever in my life had the opportunity to witness such a humiliation: men made responsible for their birth, fathers of families, fighters, wounded, dragged through the worst”.⁵⁰

These figures of mistreatment and bodily abuse demonstrated by these examples cited above lead us to reflect on the question already posed by Geoffrey P R Wallace on the reasons which lead in the same conflict the same detaining power to brutally abuse some prisoners while relatively well-treating others⁵¹. The case of the Jewish prisoners of war shows that despite the racial issue, there was a threshold that the German military would not cross. What was “allowed” regarding Soviet Jewish POW was not for French Jews (and to the Jews of the Allied armies). It is true that compared to war crimes perpetrated against Soviet POWs or the massacres of Africans from the French army during France's capitulation, the abuses suffered by French Jewish POWs were carried out on a significantly lower scale. Second, what is their relationship to the simultaneously evolving Nazi extermination machine against European Jewry? Are they part of this larger story or not? Third, the abuse against Jewish POWs was not perceived per se as the result of Nazi racial politics, but rather as a violation of the Geneva Conventions.

In fact, the Red Cross was well informed about the humiliating acts and segregation practiced in the POW camps as shown by the Red Cross report written by a delegate who visited Stalag XI A, on March 11, 1941. I quote:

We saw, during the visit of the camp, a detachment of about fifty French soldiers and non-commissioned officers. These men wore French army uniforms on which was written in indelible characters 15 centimeters high the word “Jude”. We questioned the commandant as to whether he had had the inscriptions made by order. He told us that he had and that these men were to be sent to a special labor camp. We considered that to label the uniforms of soldiers who had simply done their duty as combatants with an infamous sign and to subject them to a special regime of labor was in violation of the spirit of the Geneva Convention⁵².

⁵⁰ Joffé Constantin, *Les Enterrés vivants du Stalag XVII A*, New York, Ed. de la Maison française, 1943, p. 101-109.

⁵¹ Geoffrey P R Wallace, *op.cit.*, p. 7.

⁵² Quoted by Yves Durand, *op.cit.*, p. 354-355, translated by us.

In fact, over 11,000 visits by Red Cross delegates were recorded in order to observe daily life in the POW camps and to improve the conditions of detention. Acts of discrimination against Jews are mentioned in a few rare reports, and only in a few lines.

The Red Cross Committee preferred not to protest in front of Berlin, but rather to limit itself to transmitting some remarks referred to the specific cases which the delegates had observed on their visits in the camps. These observations are mentioned succinctly, in a few lines. For the Red Cross, the essential point was that the Jewish POW were treated in the same way as their compatriots.

Swiss historian Jean-Claude Favez, a specialist in the history of the Red Cross, points out that only one event of discrimination linked to one's origin was mentioned (in 1942): the case of Jewish doctors and sanitary personnel who were not released by the German as requested by the Geneva Conventions. Favez underlines the fact that the CICR opted for a cautious position in front of the Germans due to the sensitivity of the topic⁵³. When Jean Schwarzenberg in the Spring 1943 was approached by the World Jewish Congress⁵⁴ in the Spring 1943 as the CICR's representative for Jewish civilians, he answered that the CICR "does not possess any information that would prove that Jewish prisoners of war under German captivity are subject to a different treatment due to their race". Historian Favez points out that the Command of the Armed Forces (*The Oberkommando der Wehrmacht*, OKW) did not come up with a full-fledge racial policy to be applied in the Stalags and Oflags with regards to Jewish POWs, and limited itself to segregating Jews in separate barracks located in the same camps as their compatriots⁵⁵.

As Nazi Germany conducted exterminatory racial politics against European Jewry and war crimes against Soviet-Jewish POW, anti-Jewish violence in the German Stalags and Oflags remained curbed and relatively restrained. Even when the Wehrmacht suggested to Ambassador Georges Scapini, responsible of the French POW, to transfer Jewish prisoners to "special" camps, this plan was abandoned following Scapini's involvement. From this point of view, Germany did not enjoy the Vichy government's support when applying arbitrary measures against Jewish POWs in stark contrast with the full support that Germany received from Vichy with regards to the Jewish question in France.

The lack of evidence on whether there was (or not) an official German order enforcing a top down racial policy in the POW camps (this lack of proof enabled the Red Cross to consider Jewish prisoners' segregation and abuses as not motivated by racial politics) creates for us, the historians, a "grey interpretative zone" filled with uncertainty regarding the real chain of responsibility for those anti-Jewish abuses and the motivations (whether ideological or power

⁵³ Jean-Claude Favez, *Une Mission Impossible ? Le CICR, Les déportations et les camps de concentration nazis*, Lausanne, Payot, 1996, p. 202-203.

⁵⁴ Penkower Monty Noam, "The World Jewish Congress Confronts the International Red Cross during the Holocaust", *Jewish Social Studies*, vol. 41, no. 3/4, 1979, pp. 229-256.
JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/4467053. Accessed 15 Sept. 2020

⁵⁵ Jean-Claude Favez, *op.cit.* p. 202-203.

relations-oriented) that were behind this “retrained” and yet salient anti-Jewish violence. The anti-Jewish abuses were in fact situational as they were carried out by the camp guards while “tolerated” by German authorities. For the French Jewish prisoners of war, those abuses became central to their wartime experience. For Nazi authorities, anti-Jewish violence in the POW camps was less than a “footnote” in their overarching anti-Semitic genocidal machine.