

Vel d'hiv-The Nazis, Vichy France and the Jews

“The shrug of a policeman’s shoulder has remained more deeply engraved on my memory than the screams of the tortured”-Arthur Koestler, *The Spanish Testament*

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A main point of contention concerning the occupation of France from 1940-44 has long been the extent of active collaboration among the French and their occupiers. The Vel d'hiv roundup of July 16-17 represents the climax of this collaboration between German and Vichy government forces. What motivated a nation forged under the auspices of republican values to order 9,000 French policemen to systematically find and deport 13,000 Jews to their deaths? What motivated Adolf Eichmann to believe during the Wannse conference that, "In occupied and unoccupied France, the registration of Jews for evacuation will in all probability proceed without great difficulty¹"? The motivations of French collaboration with their Nazi occupiers will be discussed in this analysis of the largest scale operation in France during the Holocaust.

After the sweeping Nazi victories across Western, Northern, and Central Europe hundreds of millions of people now lived in the shadow of the swastika. Every government fell to the seemingly invincible Wehrmacht, and the leaders of the remaining nations were forced to make incredibly difficult decisions. To resist meant certain annihilation at the hands of Hitler's forces; thus, the Germans were able to effectively terrorize the majority of their newfound subjects into submission. The Nazis view of France differed heavily from that of other conquered states. An apparent "legitimate" French government emerged from the defeat, Vichy France, with Marshal Petain as its leader (a man who possessed overt Nazi sympathies). With this collaborationist government in place, German soldiers during the occupation of Paris were given special instructions to treat the native French populace with some degree of respect. Soldiers

¹ "Minutes of Wannesse Conference" *Pro Rev.* <http://prorev.com/> (November 15, 2016).

were to hold doors for French women, allow certain social gatherings, and were banned from buying illicit substance from drug dealers.² France was a prize to be enjoyed.

Reasons for this kind of treatment were not in the slightest out of any Nazi sympathies to the French people. Rather, the Nazis viewed an amicable French government as a tool in its pursuit of a new Europe. High-level French bureaucrats quickly emerged as the leaders of this new French government, notably Pierre Laval, a known anti-Semite and overt fascist sympathizer, who was to be the head of government. The perverted logic of these men and others who actively collaborated was to save the dignity of France; that by working with their Nazi overlords they would eventually be able to emerge as a stronger France, one that would be a partner to Nazi Germany in the future Europe.³ This dedication to the “État Français” would quickly become distorted to a point that it could barely be recognizable. However, it is crucial to understanding of Vel d’hiv that the formation of the Vichy government was, in the beginning, intended to serve the French state.⁴ The men that carried out the most inhumane Nazi orders later on would cling to this fallacy.

The Vichy government wasted no time in quickly alienating its foreign born population as well as its native and non-native Jewish population. It is important these

² Kershaw, Alex. *Avenue of Spies: A True Story of Terror, Espionage, and One American Family's Heroic Resistance in Nazi-occupied France*. New York: Crown, 2015. 25-26

³ Marrus, Michael, and Robert Paxton. *Vichy France and the Jews*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1981. 15.

⁴ Webster, Robert. “Remembering *La Rafle Du Vel d’Hiv*.” *Contemporary French Civilization* Volume 18, (1994):72-77

“laws” that will discussed were not laws in the traditional view, rather they were mandates, decrees by civil servants that reported to Berlin. All it took was a signature from Marshal Petain for a drastic reduction in human rights to go in effect all across France⁵.

The alienation of the Jewish population was deliberate, calculated, and incredibly thorough in its implementation. Much like the Nuremburg laws in their interpretation, the rapid pace of which these laws were issued makes them noteworthy. The often cited “Statut des Juifs” in 1940, which prevented Jews from government work and many liberal professions, was all but a piece in the larger bureaucratic operation to systematically alienate, exploit and deny rights to the Jewish population (one of which would be the right to exist).⁶ These laws, issued among various Vichy decrees, were thorough and masked their nature. A law that “liberalized the press” simply made it easier for Anti-Semitic newspapers and documents to be distributed. In the 12 months after the “Statut des Juifs,” the Vichy government issued 26 laws and 24 decrees against Jews.⁷

While these laws were deemed necessary to satisfy their Nazi leaders, it is important to recognize one particularly disturbing decree, the 2 June 1941 statute, which furthered the definition of a Jew to include anyone who had two Jewish grandparents and

⁵ Webster, Robert. “Remembering *La Rafle Du Vel d’Hiv*.” Contemporary French Civilization Volume 18, (1994):73-74

⁶ Webster, Robert. “Remembering *La Rafle Du Vel d’Hiv*.” Contemporary French Civilization Volume 18, (1994): 83.

⁷ Millington, Chris. “Vichy France, the Nazis and the Holocaust.” *French History Online*. <http://frenchhistoryonline.com/> (November 17, 2016).

was married to a Jew.⁸ This decree went above and beyond what the Nazis expected. Under this rigid definition two people who did not think of themselves as Jewish, (2 grandparents) and were married to each other would be considered a Jew under French law. On several occasions Nazi authorities who were obsessed with strict definition in their implementation of the Final Solution, asked the French to not just “fill in the blanks” when it came to defining who was a Jew.⁹ One can see this explicitly in the Nazi orders, prepared by Adolf Eichmann for Vel d’hiv. The memo states, “As to mixed marriages only the stateless spouse will be arrested.”¹⁰

It is important to note the extent of which these Vichy actions were concerned with the “Final solution to the Jewish question.” Only the most dedicated of Anti-Semites were concerned with such a radical, violent extermination of the Jewish people. Rather when the Vichy government established the “General commissariat” on the Jewish question, an office to coordinate anti-Semitic policy throughout France, it was done to pre-empt German intervention.¹¹ State collaboration with the Nazis was, for the most part, to extend French jurisdiction with the goal of eventually unifying the nation. Vichy

⁸ Yad Vashem. “Statut des Juifs.” *Yad Vashem Online*. <http://yadvashem.org/> (November 12, 2016).

⁹ Weisberg, Richard. *Vichy Law and The Holocaust In France*. (New York: New York University Press, 1996). 63-67.

¹⁰ Weisberg, Richard. *Vichy Law and The Holocaust In France*. New York: New York University Press, 1996. 65.

¹¹ Weisberg, Richard. *Vichy Law and The Holocaust In France*. New York: New York University Press, 1996. 66-73.

bureaucrats clung to this belief, while Nazis simply viewed France as a part of its European enterprise, and the Final Solution was no exception.

While the Einsatzgruppen carried out the Holocaust by bullets in Eastern Europe, SS leaders knew that this type of extermination was not viable in the West. It wasted ammunition, put considerable hardship on the men who carried out the operations, and created partisan backlash. Midway through 1941 the SS began to introduce its infamous bureaucratic elements to the systematic killing of Jews. On 20 January 1942, leaders of all necessary government ministries met under the directive of Reinhard Heydrich. They planned the murder of millions within an hour, and presented the formal process on which Jews would be deported East. In regards to France, Eichmann estimated 165,000 Jews lived in the occupied territories, with another 700,000 residing in the unoccupied territories.¹² As previously stated, Eichmann believed the registration and deportation of Jews in France would not be difficult. This confidence sprung from many beliefs but was based on the established French compliancy. What was happening in France was unique. No other occupied nation issued anti-Semitic decrees or undertook initiatives that went well beyond what had been requested.

On three occasions before July 1942, Nazi forces had arrested large amounts of foreign French men, one thousand of which were French Jews. Gestapo forces along with help from the French police carried out these arrests. George Wellers, a prominent scientist working at the Sorbonne was among those arrested in these roundups; he stated, I wanted to say that this arrest was clearly a selection. They went to the homes of each of us separately; there were 750 of us, and this included a large number of very well-known people – many lawyers, many intellectuals in general – so that there was a certain

¹² “Minutes of Wannesse Conference” *Pro Rev.* <http://prorev.com/> (November 15, 2016).

resemblance among those that were selected. It would seem that we had been specially selected, each one individually.¹³

May 1942 was the beginning of an organized policy to systemically deport Jews from France. This was due to many specific changes made in the administration concerning the Jewish question in France.

Theo Dannecker, a career Nazi had been in charge of the *Judenreferat* at the SD post in Paris, the intelligence service of the SS. Dannecker had been disappointed with the effectiveness of anti-Jewish policy. In a note dated March 10, 1942 he speaks “of the difficulties that we have in our intervention in France” and the necessity to “propose to the French government something really positive, for example, the deportation of thousand of Jews.”¹⁴ In May General Carl Oberg was transferred from Poland where he had experience in the extermination of Jews and Slavs, to Paris, where he was personally appointed by Hitler “Chef supérieur de la SS et de la Police.” Oberg and Dannecker were to order all operations with the French police.

Along with Oberg, the Nazis acquired another key bureaucrat in their implantation of police, Rene Bousquet, who was appointed chief of the police by Pierre Laval. Bousquet began his reign as head of Vichy police by writing a letter to General Oberg which stated, “You know the French police. They have no doubt their flaws, but also they have their qualities. I am sure that by being reorganized with a new base and

¹³ Trial of Adolf Eichmann, Jerusalem, Israel. Sections 32,38, 39 (1961) (testimony of George Wellers). Print.

¹⁴ Webster, Robert. “Remembering *La Rafle Du Vel d’Hiv.*” Contemporary French Civilization Volume 18, (1994):78.

with energetic leadership, they are susceptible to give great services.”¹⁵ The tone of this letter is typical of Bousquet, with an emphasis on giving the Nazis more than they expected to obtain, in order, in his mind, to restore the lost prestige and authority of the “État Français.” Bousquet would play a key role in the *Rafle* of July 1942. Dannacker was extremely pleased with Bousquet’s enthusiasm to help as noted in their meetings in June, “Bousquet declares that he is ready to have arrested throughout the French territory and in a unified action, the number of Jewish foreign nationals we want.”¹⁶ Actions against Jews could now proceed with all necessary bureaucratic elements in place.

In June 1942, all Jews were forced to wear the Yellow star on their outermost layer of clothing. This and the actions of July 1942 could not be in place if it was not for a middle level French bureaucrat named André Tulard under the orders of Theo Dannacker. In the early days of the occupation, a census was taken and a *fichier* or index of identity cards was created, each with an address, zone, occupation, nationality and of course religion. Historian Jean Tulard has this to say of his father and the *fichier* he created, “No one understood, imagined what was to happen and the usage of the index...when he was selected to integrate all the Jews in the department, he obeyed naturally all the orders without thinking anything about it. My father always placed his actions in a context of a strict plan, he just followed orders.”¹⁷ Now, these phrases are too

¹⁵ Webster, Robert. “Remembering *La Rafle Du Vel d’Hiv*.” Contemporary French Civilization Volume 18, (1994):78

¹⁶ Webster, Robert. “Remembering *La Rafle Du Vel d’Hiv*.” Contemporary French Civilization Volume 18, (1994):78-79.

¹⁷ Webster, Robert. “Remembering *La Rafle Du Vel d’Hiv*.” Contemporary French Civilization Volume 18, (1994). 83

familiar when discussing the Holocaust. Just as this was used as a defense during the trials of those who personally carried out extermination, one can't overlook that this mentality prevailed at all levels of bureaucratic operations concerning the process of extermination.

The heightened actions of June 1942 were seen by those Jews living in the occupied territories immediately. Being forced to wear the Yellow star would have a lasting effect on survivors and victims. One young man, Jacques Bienstock stated that “the humiliation, the degrading of one human being to another would stay with me for the rest of my life, to be labeled as a Jew, to never forget it, I can say nothing more on this.”¹⁸ For young people who had not experienced anti-Semitism like their fathers and mothers, it was a lasting blow to their perception of the world, and their place in it.

Hélène Berr, a young Jewish women living in Paris who kept a diary throughout the occupation stated about the badge, “I now think it is cowardly not to wear it, vis à vis people who will. Only, if I do wear it, I want to stay very elegant and dignified at all times so that people can see what that means. I want to do whatever is most courageous. This evening I believe that means wearing the star. But where will it lead?”¹⁹ Hélène would be right to ask this question, as tragically it lead to her death in Bergen Belsen near the end of the war. Hélène speaks of how for the most part people were uncomfortable with the badge, and that besides a few exceptions of jeering, she felt silent support from

¹⁸ “Testimony of Jacques Bienstock” *UNHMM*. Washington D.C. Steven Spielberg Shoah Project. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b5nRMPEDjlY&t=5s/> (October 29, 2016)

¹⁹ Berr, Hélène. *Journal*. London: MacLehose Press, 2008. 50.

strangers and those who knew her. Uncertainty, this was the most prevailing emotion of Jews after June 1942, still, many clung to their perception of France as a progressive nation, not in France, not in France...foreign born Jews still clung to this belief.

With state sponsored anti-Semitic action in place, along with an enthusiastic Bousquet who was eager to please and impress the SS, “Operation Spring Wing”, the Nazi code word for the operation in Paris could begin. In mid June 1942, Dannacker and General Oberg demanded 40,000 Jews to be deported from both the unoccupied and occupied zones, 40% of these to be French Jews. Bousquet reported back to Vichy and eventually negotiated on July 2nd with Dannacker that only foreign born Jews were to be deported²⁰. Using the incredibly efficient index compiled by André Tullard, 27,388 cards were extracted bearing details of Jews in the area who were not of French nationality. On July 7th the Gestapo summoned eight Frenchmen, all in charge of various police, concentration camp and Jewish affair positions to Avenue Foch to prepare for the operation. The session was chaired by two Germans, SS Haupstrumfuehrer Dannacker and SS Unterscharfuehrer Heinrichsohn. At the meeting Velédrome d’hiver, a roofed bicycle-racing track seemed as the most convenient spot to keep a majority of the Jews.²¹ Not one person even raised the question on how a facility built for spectator sport was to accommodate the mass number of men, women and children.

²⁰ Millington, Chris. “Vichy France, the Nazis and the Holocaust.” *French History Online*. <http://frenchhistoryonline.com/> (November 17, 2016).

²¹ Lévy, Claude, and Paul Tillard. *Betrayal at the Vel d’Hiv*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1969. 6.

A question that was raised was what was to be done with the children. How was the Parisian public going to respond to seeing little boys and girls being dragged out of their apartments? Wouldn't children slow the operation? Did the French police, an organization not built on anti-Semitic values such as the SS or Gestapo have the stomach to complete the operation if children were involved? Dannacker recognized this problem in late June and cabled Adolf Eichmann in Berlin, "cabling on issue of whether children under sixteen years of age could be deported after the fifteenth convoy". On July 4th, a key meeting occurred between Helmut Knochen, commander of the Sicherheitspolizei (security police) in Paris and Pierre Laval occurred. Knochen informed him of the details for the plan, (Laval was already informed that foreign Jews were to be deported), and told him that an age limit was to be set at sixteen. Laval questioned him on who was going to care for these young Jewish refugees, certainly not the Vichy government. No, Jewish children were to be deported with their families, for "les raisons d'humanité."²² Dannacker, shocked by the Prime Minister's indifference, urgently telegraphed Eichmann on July 6th, "President Laval has proposed that children below the age of sixteen be included in the deportation of Jewish families. The fate of Jewish children in the occupied zones does not interest him."²³ So Laval made a decision, Eichmann mulled it over until the Jews were either in camps or Vel d'hiv and finally ordered that they were to be deported as well. Not one of the 4,051 children deported in Operation Spring Wind returned.

²² Lévy, Claude, and Paul Tillard. *Betrayal at the Vel d'Hiv*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1969. 94.

²³ Lévy, Claude, and Paul Tillard. *Betrayal at the Vel d'Hiv*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1969. 94.

With established rules for who was to be seized and deported east, the operation was set for July 16, and 17th, delayed two days to avoid any interference with Bastille day. For the French police this was their opportunity to prove themselves, and instructions were given to proceed with maximum efficiency. One gets a real sense of the long, detailed planning that went into the *Rafle* simply by looking at the numbers. About 9,000 men (police and auxiliaries) were deployed to arrest an anticipated 28,000 Jews. In the 4th arrondissement alone, 139 teams of officers would be required with 205 reinforcements to assist them, 45 guards to watch detainees and 3 buses to round up 2401 Jews.²⁴ The efficient use of men from various administrations required the close cooperation of many agencies of the Nazi and French administration.

The French police had one week to prepare and was given specific instructions from Nazis who had experience in the east carrying out similar roundups. Article 7 of the instructions sums up the tone the general tone of the operation, “Guards and inspectors are responsible for the success of the operation, which must be carried out with maximum speed and without useless conversations or argument.”²⁵ The roundups would occur between three and five am to catch the sleeping victims confused and disorientated.

It was in this week between the announcement and implementation that some with knowledge of the operation attempted to cheat Operation Spring Wind from some of its intended victims. One French policemen telephoned his first girlfriend, a Jew who lived

²⁴ Webster, Robert. “Remembering *La Rafle Du Vel d’Hiv*.” Contemporary French Civilization Volume 18, (1994):79.

²⁵ Lévy, Claude, and Paul Tillard. *Betrayal at the Vel d’Hiv*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1969. 11.

on his childhood street on the eve of July 15th. He simply stated, “It is going to be a warm night, and there will be thunderstorms. I think you had better go and sleep somewhere cool.”²⁶ She got the message and survived the war. The alienation of the Jewish people discussed earlier was crucial to the success of the operation. While some clandestine newspapers reported a warning of a large round up, Jews had no place to gather or to meet for word of mouth to be an effective tool to spread an accurate message. Anxiety was at a high on the night of July 15th with inconsistent rumors about a round up reaching every Jewish community. Anxious visits were made to friends, where according to one witness the families comforted each other by repeating that a roundup which put women and children at the mercy of the enemy was inconceivable²⁷. Maybe in Poland, Germany, Austria, Ukraine, but not in France, not in a nation that prided itself on progressivism.

July 16th a date which would go down in French history as “Jeudi Noir” or black Thursday. In the early morning the French police proceeded to their assigned apartment buildings and went door to door with their list of Jews to be arrested. Some policemen were relieved to find an empty apartment building, some searched every room and questioned neighbors if they knew where the missing family was. Miss Monod, a social worker at one of the camps where Jews were to be held after the round-up noted that, “I know for a fact that some children were arrested by the police even though their parents

²⁶ Lévy, Claude, and Paul Tillard. *Betrayal at the Vel d’Hiv*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1969. 18.

²⁷ Lévy, Claude, and Paul Tillard. *Betrayal at the Vel d’Hiv*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1969. 23

were not there.”²⁸ The French police orders were to proceed as efficiently as possible and to not entertain any plea for mercy from Jews who protested.

Jewish response varied greatly. On Rue Poitou French police had orders to deport a young Polish woman whose husband was already on his way to Auschwitz. She calmly waited for the police to bash open her door, looked them in the eye and jumped to her death with her two young children. Such a response was not uncommon, more than a hundred suicides occurred during the round up. Police reported multiple occasions of having to pull gas tubes out of the mouths of Jews wanting to die rather than be taken away, these people would almost certainly be gassed weeks or months later. This was a crucial problem for the efficiency of the operation, as well as how swiftly French police could detain the Jews without news spreading rapidly. H  l  ne Berr’s diary includes a three day break in writing from the 15th to the 17th. She was a third generation French Jew and thus exempt from Operation Spring Wind, but remarks on the 18th, “a whole family, the father, the mother and five children, gassed themselves to escape the round-up. One woman threw herself out of a window.”²⁹

The Goldenzwags, living in the V Arrondissement proceeded calmly and opened the door, thinking with their French born son they were safe, the policeman chatted them up, demanded coffee and in an indignant manner stated, “Pack up your things. You are going to a ghetto near Lublin till the end of the war. After the war you will be able to

²⁸ L  vy, Claude, and Paul Tillard. *Betrayal at the Vel d’Hiv*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1969. 152.

²⁹ Berr, H  l  ne. *Journal*. London: MacLehose Press, 2008. 98-99.

come back to this apartment.”³⁰ A neighbor offered to care for Mrs. Goldenzwag’s child, she refused, not knowing what lay ahead. One of the most horrifying aspects of Operation Spring Wind and indeed the Final Solution was the split second decisions men, women and children were forced to make. Jews who followed the French policemen were not naïve, the concept of systematic extermination was just so foreign at the time.

For the most part French police acted with a complacent calm during the operation, many felt embarrassed in their position. Their good behavior along with their French uniforms was taken into account by the Germans in planning the operation. This was the major influence in the Gestapo and SS deciding to not include Germans in the initial roundup. Indeed for a majority of Jews, this trick worked, many followed their French captors while they would have been horrified by the sight of a German uniform³¹. The timing of the operation was also key in complacency as many Jews were half asleep when answering the door. Jews were given an hour to pack up their belongings before making the sad trek through the streets.

Concierges played an important role, in some instances they had the power to either save or condemn whole families to death. Some responded to inquiries on Jews living in the building by lying to the Police or warning their residents. Others blocked escape. Mrs. Rado who would be deported but survive noted how a resident of her building led the policeman directly to her door. The policeman apologized, helped her

³⁰ Lévy, Claude, and Paul Tillard. *Betrayal at the Vel d’Hiv*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1969. 28.

³¹ Lévy, Claude, and Paul Tillard. *Betrayal at the Vel d’Hiv*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1969. 32-33.

pack up her things and told off anyone who jeered as she was led away.³² The average French response to seeing Jews being paraded through the street was mostly silent sadness and those who cheered or insulted the Jews being led away were quickly silenced.³³ Word quickly spread throughout Paris that “They are arresting the Jews, women and children too”.

From their homes Jews were taken to police stations or other large government buildings and ordered on to buses. Many noted that as soon as they arrived at the holding centers the tone quickly changed. Children were crying, policemen were screaming at the top of their lungs, threatening to spray their submachine guns into the crowd if anyone attempted to escape. Mrs. Rado who had experienced kindness by a police officer earlier, began to realize she was in trouble as she was herded onto the bus. “An officer screamed, “If anyone so much as moves or tries to escape, use your guns”. That made me shiver. Being a woman with three small children, I was scared”³⁴. From that point, their transfer on buses to Vel d’hiv until their arrival at Auschwitz or other death camps, the foreign Jews of Paris were simply prisoners of the Reich.

One cannot understand the horror of Vel d’hiv without understanding the conditions within the former cycling track. These details must be expressed to fully understand the deprivation of basic humanity allowed to the Jews of Paris. Any inkling of

³² Lévy, Claude, and Paul Tillard. *Betrayal at the Vel d’Hiv*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1969. 32.

³³ Lévy, Claude, and Paul Tillard. *Betrayal at the Vel d’Hiv*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1969. 39.

³⁴ Lévy, Claude, and Paul Tillard. *Betrayal at the Vel d’Hiv*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1969. 42.

hope immediately vanished at the sight and smell of the stadium. In Lévy and Tillard's popular history of the event, *Betrayal at Vel d'hiv*, the authors stated not one of the survivors they interviewed failed to mention the smell and sanitary conditions of the camp. Ten lavatories and twenty urinals were all that was given to the Jews, 7,000 which arrived on the first day.

Two doctors and a small group of Red Cross and Catholic nurses were assigned to treat the thousands. Many went crazy, stricken with grief and shock and unable to accept they were trapped. Thirty attempted suicide, ten of which were successful. The doctors who were to treat the Jews of Vel d'hiv would never forget the horrors they saw. Mass hysteria was common, the sick pleaded for death and doctors had no way to treat the mass amount of viral disease that spread through the stadium.

In contrast to those who lost hope, some felt their instincts and stubborn will to live or help their children live intensify in the stadium. One mother, Mrs. Lichten, could not forgive herself for falling asleep on the couch and not realizing what she was doing when she answered the door earlier in the day. She pushed her daughter through the entrance when a new group of arrivals appeared, saving her daughter's life. She waited outside the entrance and a guard took notice. She pleaded, "one more prisoner what does it mean?", the guard looked her in the eye, stated "get back inside", and promptly turned his back to her, Mrs. Lichten sprinted past him. Mrs. Lichten walked through the streets numb, then pleaded with a group of women to let her in a building, they insulted her and told her to go away. A street sweeper took notice, smiled at her and accompanied her as she walked past the police patrolling the area for any escaped Jews, he winked at her as she reached the metro. Mrs. Lichten ran into her daughter at a metro stop by miracle,

both survived the war.³⁵ This story is a perfect example for expressing the attitudes present during July 16, 1942. Through Mrs. Lichtein's unrelenting desire to survive she encountered kindness, cruelty and indifference from the native French.

One word can sum up the guards at Vel d'hiv, cold. Mothers would continue to plead with them just for water, they would not even recognize these requests. The only complaint registered by these guards was the smell and unrelenting wailing of Children. One police officer, Louis PetitJean was so overcome with remorse and shame, he drove to the stadium, collected the young women and boy he had arrested and led them to safety³⁶. If only more involved in the process had mercy. For eight days seven thousand men women and children were kept in a closed stadium in the July heat with thirty total toilets available. One can't imagine the stench, hunger, thirst, and sadness these people witnessed and felt. The SS officials that visited the stadium nicknamed it "the birdcage" in typical morbid Nazi imagination.

By the end of July 18, Nazi officials tallied 3,031 men, 5,802 women and 4,051 children seized in Operation Spring Wind.³⁷ In a memorandum on the situation issued by the SS in Paris, Nazis criticized the French police for their efficiency and the fact the general population was well aware of what was occurring. The total fell far below the 28,000 the operation was to deport, the report blames this on many Jews hearing about

³⁵ Lévy, Claude, and Paul Tillard. *Betrayal at the Vel d'Hiv*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1969. 57-58.

³⁶ Lévy, Claude, and Paul Tillard. *Betrayal at the Vel d'Hiv*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1969. 59.

³⁷ Lévy, Claude, and Paul Tillard. *Betrayal at the Vel d'Hiv*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1969. 80.

the roundups before, and the perceived low rates of arrest on the second day, 66%. Still Nazis were encouraged, although not a complete success, one has to understand the perspective at which the Nazis viewed Operation Spring Wind in context of the Final Solution. The Allies had not launched any operations against Nazi forces and the war in the East was going well. A new, *Judenfrei* Europe was still possible, and it would only be a matter of time until all Jews of France would be targeted. On August 13th a meeting was held at Avenue Foch; the Gestapo and SS informed the French police that “this operation had been planned as a permanent solution and would in its final phases include Jews of French nationality.”³⁸

The Jews that would survive the misery of Vel d’hiv were transferred to various holding camps, then to Drancy transit camp, then from Drancy to Loiret, and then back to Drancy. A pointless and cruel exercise that one survivor stated it “made the police seems like a murderer who is jumpy because he does not know where to bury his victim.”³⁹ During their transfer from holding camps to Drancy the last escape attempts were made, one boy tore his hands moving barbed wire to make a jump through a train window, he walked all the way to Paris and survived the war.

The treatment of the Jews in these French camps can be compared to that of German camps, although some scholars disagree on the issue. Mrs. Beckman, who would save two of her three children from deportation along with herself states, “We were quite

³⁸ Lévy, Claude, and Paul Tillard. *Betrayal at the Vel d’Hiv*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1969. 136.

³⁹ Lévy, Claude, and Paul Tillard. *Betrayal at the Vel d’Hiv*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1969. 146.

brutally treated by the police as we boarded the train...I threw myself at a French policeman. I felt ashamed but told myself that he was French would feel sorry for me. The next thing I knew, he kicked me in the head.”⁴⁰ The level of tragedy in these camps for children was particularly horrifying. Miss Monod remembers one case of a women crying and pleading with French police to arrest her as well, knowing that her children were on the inside, but the guards only acted on instructions.⁴¹ Children at Drancy, hearing stories about where they were headed, nicknamed this land “Pitchipoi”, a Yiddish sounding word meaning nothing, the unknown⁴². Similar to German camps, Drancy operated to exploit everything from their victims, including children. In his testimony against Adolf Eichmann, George Wellers stated “Brooches, earrings, bracelets were all confiscated by inspectors. On one occasion a ten year-old girl came out of the shed with a bleeding ear. The inspector had torn her earring right off when in her terror the girl had fumbled with the clasp”⁴³. From their arrest to extermination, Jews were plundered openly and crudely, up to the last Frenchman they encountered before the train to Auschwitz. Children were no exception.

Their brief stay in Drancy was just as horrific as Vel d’hiv. Many continued to attempt suicide as it became increasingly clear that they had no hope of “resettlement”.

⁴⁰ Lévy, Claude, and Paul Tillard. *Betrayal at the Vel d’Hiv*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1969. 154.

⁴¹ Lévy, Claude, and Paul Tillard. *Betrayal at the Vel d’Hiv*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1969. 157.

⁴² Moscovici, Jean-Claude. *Voyage à Pitchipoi*. Paris: L'Ecole des Loisirs, 2009.

⁴³ Trial of Adolf Eichmann, Jerusalem, Israel. Sections 32,38, 39 (1961) (testimony of George Wellers). Print.

George Wellers stated that immediately upon arrival deportations began, first just men, which created incredible distress among the women⁴⁴. The cries and protests would not stop until all the foreign Jews of Paris would be deported within the coming days and weeks. Almost all the children had diarrhea and severe weight loss, of which no cure could be given. The train ride to Auschwitz took two days, marked with the typical horrors of the ride millions would take before death or imprisonment; incredible thirst, claustrophobia, hysteria. By September, almost all of the 13,000 Jews taken from their homes in Paris would be murdered in Auschwitz-Birkenau, the majority by gassing from Zyklon B. Mr. Goldenzwag, who believed his family would be safe since his son was born in France would survive the war, his son and wife would be gassed on arrival. 811 from the 13,000 deported would survive the war, not one of the Jews under 16 Dannacker had originally intended to spare survived. No they were gassed with their families because of the humanitarian reasons Pierre Laval cited.

Lévy and Tillard's history of the event ends with the question, "how could this all happen?" Bousquet's memo to Pierre Laval after the operation gives insight. Bousquet noted that by close cooperation between French and German services, Oberg was now willing to grant Vichy police more independence. This was a carefully constructed lie by the Nazis to retain French complacency in future matters. The tone of the memo is self congratulatory, giving Bousquet himself the credit for restoring the "independence indispensable de la police Française."⁴⁵ Not once does he mention the suffering of the

⁴⁴ Trial of Adolf Eichmann, Jerusalem, Israel. Sections 32,38, 39 (1961) (testimony of George Wellers). Print.

⁴⁵ Webster, Robert. "Remembering *La Rafle Du Vel d'Hiv*." Contemporary French Civilization Volume 18, (1994):81.

victims or the children that Laval himself personally ordered to be arrested. Here we can see the differing motives of the Vichy collaborators and the Nazis. Adolf Eichmann, Theo Dannacker, and General Oberg all had the goal of eliminating as many Jews from France as possible. Bousquet and many in the Vichy government involved in Operation Spring Wind had one calling during this period, which was to serve the state and regain French autonomy. At least that is what their diluted, xenophobic minds believed. This became an obsession much stronger than anti-Semitism or devotion to fascism. The system Bousquet had set up was impersonal, effective and fatal. It allowed those who carried out these orders to remain, in their minds, willfully ignorant of the Final Solution. When a Protestant leader accused Laval of murdering Jews, Laval insisted they had been sent to build an agricultural colony in the East. "I talked to him about murder, he answered me with gardening."⁴⁶

The hellish experience of the foreign Jews of Paris was a result of an ungodly marriage. One between the Nazi's desire to destroy the Jewish people and that of Vichy, their belief that by helping the Nazis, they would somehow save France. Foreign Jews were the ideal victim. They were systematically eliminated from almost all aspects of society by Nazi inspired, French implemented laws from 1940-42. They were registered clearly as foreigners and Jews in Tullard's *fichier*. In France they had few family ties, no network of relations. The marginalization and expendability of the foreign Jews in Paris

⁴⁶ Jackson, Julian. France: The Dark Years, 1940-1944. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001. 362.

made them an easy target when the Reich implemented the Final Solution. The murder of 13,000 was thus a result of Vichy's willful and active indifference, and Nazi bloodlust.

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