

***Being Jewish in Nord and in Pas-de-Calais*¹**

Summary by Jacqueline Duhem

Danielle Delmaire, Jean-Baptiste Gardon, Monique Heddebaut, Rudy Rigaut, *Être Juif dans le Nord et le Pas-de-Calais 1939-1945*. Preface by Claire Zalc. Afterword by Jacques Fredj. Éditions Tirésias-Michel Reynaud, 2022. 480 pgs.

Finally, a book that presents a story of the fate of the Jewish population in these two *départements*—Nord and Pas-de-Calais²—during the German Occupation. Because, even before the armistice and as a result of Hitler’s personal directive, these two regions were attached to the German military command in Brussels—directed by General von Falkenhausen,³—their specific history during the war has rarely been told in historical writings devoted to France under the German Occupation. More generally, in part because of their reliance upon documents from a Vichy administration⁴ that was only very partially informed of the specific situation of the Jews under Occupation in these two *départements*, historians contributed, in spite of themselves, to the omission of these Jewish populations from French history during World War II.

The authors have carried out meticulous research in numerous French and foreign archives, complemented by the first-hand testimonies of survivors or families of survivors as well as by countless photographs and lists of names.

The book begins with a chapter devoted to the research of Judaism within the two regions before the summer of 1940, which provides an introduction to the French, Israelite community of the region and to the foreign Jewish population which settled there from 1920 to 1933. The following chapters attempt to show the antisemitic policies implemented, emphasizing their prescience in the coastal zones from which the Jewish population was exiled as of December 17, 1940. Additionally, orders from the German military in Brussels on October 28, 1940, forbade the return of the Jewish population to their homes in Belgium⁵. Those who were exiled from

Belgium and who found themselves in Nord and Pas-de-Calais were blocked in permanently, due to the presence of the line of demarcation on the Somme. They thus became the target of operations executed against the foreign Jewish population by the “General Delegation of the French Government in the Occupied Territories” which organized the roundup of October 18, 1941.

An entire chapter details the roundup on September 11, 1942, the day of Rosh HaShanah,⁶ of more than 500 Jewish people, both foreigners or individuals who had been “denaturalized” by the Vichy regime, and also of their French-born children. The chapter also describes the amazing rescue of 40 to 60 adults and children at the Lille-Fives train station as well as the support they received from the Secret Aid Committee for the Jewish People⁷.

Another chapter is devoted to the following theme: “Arrested, rounded up, hunted down during the ‘full-blown war’ (October 1942-August 1944).” From the summer of 1942 until June 1944, in the context of the construction of the “Atlantic Wall”⁸ by the Todt organization,⁹ a dozen internment camps were built on the coast of Pas-de-Calais, such as those of Condette, Dannes-Carmiers, Étaples, and Hardelot in the Boulonnais. From June to September 1942, approximately 2000 Belgian Jews were sent by train to the camps to engage in forced labor. However, towards the end of October, some 1500 of them would be deported to Auschwitz via Mechelen,¹⁰ the “Belgian Drancy”. At this point in time, the Nazis were prioritizing the “Final Solution,”¹¹ implemented after the Wannsee conference of January 20, 1942,¹² because they wished to fill the convoys leaving Mechelen for Auschwitz... The “Jewish Road” built out of concrete by prisoners for the purpose of transporting the necessary materials for the construction of bunkers,¹³ is today a hiking path that has been transformed into a memorial. Passing through the

National Forest of Ecault,¹⁴ the route connects the dunes bearing the same name, to the Hardelot castle in the commune of Condette.

Yet one part of this chapter also presents the surprising fact that Nord and Pas-de-Calais served as a refuge for entire families or for the Jewish children traveling without their parents who came mainly from the Parisian region after the immense “Vel d’Hiv” roundup of July 16 and July 17, 1942¹⁵. Indeed, nothing predisposed the two departments to serve as refuges, given the powerful German military presence there, the absence of sparsely populated areas, and the absence of extensive forests that might have sheltered the French resistance¹⁶. The presentation of Jewish families and of Jewish children in the text makes it possible to illustrate that this process of providing refuge ensued thanks to parents, friends, and acquaintances living in the North of France who were acting as intermediaries.

Finally, the last chapter discusses the confiscation of Jewish property and the challenge of restitution after the war.

At the end of the text, more than thirty pages are devoted to sources and a bibliography, as well as to an index containing the names of individuals.

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Edited by Julin Everett, Scripps College.***

¹ All annotations are the original work of the translator.

² Nord and Pas-de-Calais are the two northernmost administrative divisions—*départements*—of France and lie just south of the Franco-Belgian border.

³ General Alexander von Falkenhausen was the military governor of Belgium (1940-1944) who was responsible for many deaths. However, the General did not support Hitler and the Nazi government. Therefore, he was imprisoned in a concentration camp shortly before the coup attempt by Claus von Stauffenberg. “Alexander von Falkenhausen.” *Www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org*. Accessed 10 May 2024.

⁴ The Vichy regime was France’s puppet government led by General Pétain, who was responsible for the deaths of many Jews. “The French Vichy Regime.” *Jewishvirtuallibrary.org*, 2018, www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/the-french-vichy-regime. Accessed 10 May 2024.

⁵ Belgium played a significant role in aiding the Nazis in their mission to exterminate the Jewish people. Additionally, the government implemented many antisemitic policies targeting Jews. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. “Belgium.” *Ushmm.org*, 2019, encyclopedia.ushmm.org. Accessed 10 May 2024.

⁶ Rosh HaShanah is the celebration of the Jewish New Year.

⁷ The Comité Clandestin d’Aide aux Juifs was founded shortly after the roundup of September 11, 1942. René Douce, a railroad worker, head of the organization, and later named Righteous Among the Nations, participated—along with other railroad workers—in saving Jews from the roundup. “Appel à témoins du sauvetage des Juifs de la rafle de Rosh HaShana à Lille”. *yadvashem-france.org*. Accessed 9 June 2024.

⁸ The Atlantic Wall was built by the Nazi regime as a defense mechanism against the Allies along the coast of Western Europe. Kaufmann, J. E., et al. *The Atlantic Wall: History and Guide*. Pen and Sword, 2012, p.6. www.books.google.com. Accessed 11 June 2024.

⁹ The Todt Organization was a military engineering group in Nazi Germany that played a major role in Nazi infrastructure. *Yadvashem*, www.yadvashem.org. Accessed 10 May 2024.

¹⁰ The Mechelen camp was based in Mechelen, Belgium. This camp was a deportation center for prisoners who were being sent to extermination camps. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, www.encyclopedia.ushmm.org. Accessed 10 May 2024.

¹¹ “The Final Solution” was the Plan of the Nazi regime to exterminate the Jewish people. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, encyclopedia.ushmm.org. Accessed 10 May 2024.

¹² The Wannsee Conference was a meeting of Nazi officials, the objective of which was the coordination and implementation of “The Final Solution”. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, encyclopedia.ushmm.org. Accessed 10 May 2024.

¹³ Nazis built large concrete bunkers for military and artillery purposes. Blockhaus d’Éperlecques was built in Northern France as a setting in which the Nazis could test new weapons. “History.” *Le Blockhaus d’Eperlecques - 1ère Base V2 & V1*, www.leblockhaus.com. Accessed 10 May 2024.

¹⁴ La forêt domaniale d’Ecault is a national forest in the north of France. Here, Jewish prisoners were forced to work to build infrastructure for the Germans. “Forest of Ecault.” *Office de Tourisme Du Boulonnais Côte d’Opale*, 14 Aug. 2019, www.boulonnaisautop.com. Accessed 10 May 2024.

¹⁵ Thousands of people were arrested in Paris by the Vichy government for being Jewish. This roundup signifies French collaboration with the Nazi regime to exterminate the Jewish people. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, www.encyclopedia.ushmm.org. Accessed 10 May 2024.

¹⁶ The French Resistance opposed the Nazi government and worked to liberate France from German occupation. Additionally, these individuals aided in saving Jewish lives. “The Resistance.” *The Resistance | Chemins de Mémoire*, www.cheminsdememoire.gouv.fr. Accessed 10 May 2024.