



Simon Kitson, *Vichy et la chasse aux espions nazis, 1940-1942: complexités de la politique de collaboration*. Éditions Autrement, Collection Mémoires no. 110, 2005. 268 pp., index, bibliography, ISSN: 1157-4488; ISBN 2-7467- 0588-5.

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“Armistice, Collaboration and Sovereignty: The Vichy Dilemma”

Several years ago John Sweets warned against replacing a Gaullist myth of France as a nation of resisters with another image of France as a nation of collaborators (1). Since then historians have been investigating points along the arc between resistance and collaboration, discovering that neither resistance nor collaboration were “blocs”. Each had its ambiguities and varying levels of engagement or commitment. Histories of resistance and collaboration have become shaded in tones of gray, although attempts to understand complexity has not meant approval, nor did it obscure the sinister aspects of collaboration, occupation and resistance. Kitson’s contribution is less another piece of revisionism than a welcome addition to our understanding of the Vichy years. Ambiguity and paradox are key words in the Kitson’s analysis.

Simon Kitson’s book joins a literature that assesses the complexity of Vichy’s collaboration by looking at the persistence of spying and counter- intelligence in Vichy’s relations with the German occupiers. For Vichy, collaboration was considered a way of preserving a measure of French sovereignty and independence despite the inequalities in the relationship. Although previous accounts have noted that Vichy pursued German spies, these accounts were brief and depended upon the memoirs of participants, who were anxious to display their resistance credentials while in the service of the Vichy State. What was needed was a more thorough investigation, and the return of the extensive (1400 cartons) archives of the French counter-intelligence service seized by the Nazis in 1943 and then taken by the Soviet secret service at the war’s end provided the documentary depth needed. They came back to France in the 1990s and are currently available at the Service Historique de l’Armée in Vincennes. Kitson was stunned to discover the aggressiveness, including the use of torture, against the Nazi spies by a regime that was presumably collaborating with the Nazis. Out of this encounter the present book emerged.

While Kitson is well aware of the limits of an archive that may have been edited by the Germans or Russians, the Moscow collection reflects French policy discussions from which much can be extrapolated about intentions and priorities. Even the absence of any discussion of anti-Gaullist

activities in the Paillole file is the basis for interesting speculation about what might be the anti-Gaullist spy chase. Although Kitson was unable to gain access to the files of military justice at Vincennes, which might have further clarified the record, he was able to supplement the Moscow collection through resources of the Archives Nationales and French liaison officers' reports from the Armistice Commission. Kitson weighs this evidence judiciously and provides a convincing narrative of the world of spies and counter-intelligence, focussing on the non-occupied zone, and he analyzes these activities within the political context of the time, enabling him to assess the purpose and the limits of Vichy's pursuit of sovereignty within collaboration.

Kitson rightly takes us back to the terms of the armistice and its implementation in two opening chapters that discuss the creation of a German espionage network in recently conquered France and analyze German intentions toward France. This discussion reveals, as most historians since Paxton and Jäckel have argued, that German determination to keep France quiet was the basis for German interest in collaboration. Kitson reminds us that although the armistice was a cease-fire, terms were intended to weaken France to the point where it would be impossible for the French to break the armistice and turn back to the Allies, a mirror of the 1918 armistice terms imposed on Germany. The apparent moderation of the armistice terms, which Pétain's government in Bordeaux quickly accepted, obscured Nazi intentions to subordinate and exploit France to the full. France remained Germany's historic, hereditary enemy, and the 1940 armistice provided full revenge for 1918, including the symbolism of the armistice signing in the railway car at Rethondes and the military parade down the Champs Élysées as in 1871. Not the least of Kitson's contributions is to refocus upon the armistice, which remains the key document for understanding both German attitudes and anti-German sentiments within Vichy.

While accepting Vichy's autonomy in the non-occupied zone, the Germans set up front organizations in Vichy controlled territory, including North Africa. The SS and SD soon overshadowed German military intelligence. This rivalry between the Wehrmacht and the more ardent Nazi organizations is a familiar story, but Kitson warns against making too much of it. Both military and Nazi intelligence had the same goal: to assure that France remained weakened. Kitson considers this spying activity to be a serious challenge to French sovereignty. Although spying takes place among friendly countries, Kitson argues that the ways in which German intelligence operated in France was more common for an occupied, enemy country than a friendly or allied one. In response French counter-intelligence, mainly the military's fifth bureau but also other intelligence gathering agencies, swung into action, and with the aid of police began arresting, imprisoning and torturing Nazi spies. Nazi front organizations were under constant surveillance. French military intelligence in particular continued to regard Germany as the immediate enemy. Visitors to German spy operations were interrogated and harassed under the guise of "protecting" the Germans, which led to German complaints.

Who were the spies? While a variety of motives drove individuals to work for German intelligence service, the primary one was money rather than ideology. The Germans did not hesitate, though, to exploit separatist tendencies in Brittany and elsewhere, and they played upon anti-Semitic sentiments among the Muslim populations of North Africa. These subversive activities brought protests from French administrators, including General Weygand, who warned Pétain of German attempts to alienate the Muslims and encourage ideas of independence in

North Africa. In short, measures that threatened political control of independent territory limited in effect French sovereignty.

A key question that Kitson addresses is to what extent did Vichy condone this spy chase, the arrests, imprisonment and tortures. The issue was the old perennial of French centralization versus local autonomy. In everyday activities Kitson convincingly shows that intelligence operations occurred without central directives or guidance. But Vichy was aware of these activities and accepted them in the name of preserving sovereignty. This approval had limits. Kitson rightly notes that while the pursuit of Nazi spies was vigorous and revealed a significant strain of anti-German nationalism within Vichy, when the choice came, Vichy preferred collaboration and its pursuit of the National Revolution. Nevertheless, Vichy's harsh treatment of German spies persisted. Kitson notes that it was Vichy that began the practice of shaving the heads of women whose collaboration was too intimate with the occupiers. Vichy counter-intelligence also threatened spies with severe punishment, which enabled them to turn a number of the spies into double agents.

One of Kitson's major contributions is to raise the issue of anti-German hostility within Vichy as an element of resistance to the German occupation. This meant a protection of sovereignty, but it also revealed the fundamental illusion at the heart of the Vichy enterprise. For the anti-German patriots within Vichy, collaboration went beyond strict adherence to the terms of the armistice. While these anti-German patriots had no quarrel with the goals of the National Revolution, including its militant anti-communism, hostility to franc masons, and anti-Semitism, they bristled at any apparent or real subordination or subservience to Germany. Even more, as Kitson notes, they recognized that collaboration would lead to a decline in French status to that of a Spain or even being dismembered (Alsace, the northeastern military zone, Breton separatism, Algerian nationalists, etc.) in a Nazi dominated Europe (p. 72). In this sense, they were more prescient than either Vichy leadership or the Nazi enthusiasts in Paris, who attacked the anti-German counter-intelligence activities of Vichy as harmful to true collaboration and claimed that it violated the armistice injunction against anti-German activity.

The way this mixture of anti-German and conservative patriotism within Vichy, revealed in the pursuit of German spies, was linked to issues of sovereignty and collaboration may be found in the case of General Maxime Weygand to whom Kitson makes frequent reference. Conservative, anti-republican, militantly anti-Communist, Weygand played a crucial role in securing the armistice that enabled the formation of the Vichy Government under Pétain. Philip Bankwitz's critical account of Weygand's intervention to bring down the republic he detested has stood as the classical account (2) of the French military politics at the end of the Third Republic. Yet Bankwitz does not carry the story beyond Bordeaux 1940.

Without exonerating Weygand from his role in the downfall of the Third Republic, Kitson offers a more nuanced view by stressing his anti-German patriotism and even opposition to a collaboration that went beyond the requirements of the armistice. His was a strict or "narrow" interpretation, which also reflected his stiffness toward the Germans as still enemies. His opposition to Darlan's concessions in the Paris protocols was well known, as was his anti-German patriotism. German spies had him under constant surveillance in North Africa, and

German pressure forced Vichy to recall him in November 1941. Although Weygand had been minister under Pétain, this collaboration failed to secure his immunity.

It was the Allied invasion of North Africa that brought Weygand's arrest and deportation to Germany with the active collusion of Vichy officials, who carried out the arrests. Weygand and other Vichy supporters, such as Colonel de La Rocque and Pétain's one-time minister of sport, Jean Borotra, became prisoners of the Third Reich after arrests by Vichy police. The German occupation of all of France, the dissolution of the Armistice Army, Vichy's connivance in the arrests and deportations of high ranking military and political figures meant violation of the armistice and the virtual end to Vichy's claim to meaningful sovereignty. For all practical purposes the *chasse aux espions nazis* was effectively over, although arrests were still being carried out as late as December 1943. However, Kitson rightly terminates his story at the end of 1942 with the landings in North Africa and the German occupation of the former free zone. Kitson's choice of a date to end his account underlines the significance of November 1942 as a crucial moment in the saga of Vichy. Claims to sovereignty were now hollow and all was left was the pursuit of the resistance, enforcing the labor draft, and continuing participation in the Holocaust. The sovereignty left to Vichy was no more than pursuit of France's own resisters and undesirables.

One issue that Kitson can only suggest but not document is the extent to which Vichy counter-intelligence operations were more indulgent toward the Gaullist, British and American spies within France. Here and there he suggests that despite resentment at the ways in which Gaullist activity played into German propaganda, there was a certain indulgence even within the military toward the Gaullists, who at least were perceived to share an anti-German position. He cites evidence of warnings of double agents given to Gaullists and others. The main complaint about the allied spy operations was their amateurism. The French found the Germans more efficient and professional. As long as allied spy operations were directed against Germany and not Vichy they were tolerated, but the evidence for any further assessment of a double standard is not to be found in the available sources that are open to the researcher. The impression is one of ambiguity toward Allied spying. This would be another area to pursue.

In the meantime, Kitson has successfully provided further insight into the complexities of Vichy. That Vichy was not of a piece has become part of the interpretations following Paxton's path-breaking study. This is not revisionism as such. It does not rehabilitate the old "shield" claim for Pétain's rule, even if Kitson could confirm the indulgence of Vichy's spy-chasers toward the Allies. Instead we have an emphasis upon the presence of anti-German, conservative nationalism within Vichy that manifest itself in several ways, including the pursuit, arrests and jailing of Nazi spies. This did not constitute a full resistance either. Where, then, does Vichy et la *chasse aux espions nazis* 1940-1942 fit on the arc between collaboration and resistance? One point may be misleading, and the image might be a cluster of points on the Vichy side and a few others toward resistance. What we have then is an important contribution to history as complexity.

Notes

(1) John Sweets, "Hold that Pendulum...Redefining Fascism, Collaborationism, and Resistance in France," *French Historical Studies*, XV: 4

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(1988): 731-758.

(2) Philip C.F. Bankwitz, Maxime Weygand and Civil-Military Relations in Modern France (Cambridge, Mass., 1967).

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