Epilogue: Liberation, remembering and forgetting

Liberation

From August to November 1918, the war of movement recommenced as the Allies pushed back the Germans across the Western Front during the Hundred Days offensive. For the occupied Nord, the end of German domination drew ever closer, but so too did the perils of combat. The notes of Lille’s Municipal Council for September–October 1918 record increasingly frequent instances of direct fire from Allied artillery, German anti-aircraft shells falling back to earth, or bombs dropped by Allied planes; these common occurrences throughout the war, responsible for injuring or killing German soldiers and French civilians, now became deadlier.¹ Direct fire was not the only destructive force: the final German retreat, which took place at different times depending on locality, was often chaotic and destructive. Requisitions of materiel were implemented before the military’s departure, including dismantling factory machinery. This was accompanied by the destruction of sites of economic or strategic importance such as railway stations, mines or bridges in what Wallart calls ‘scorched earth’ policies.² In Lille, the Saint-Sauveur railway station and all but one bridge were destroyed on 15–17 October.³ Buildings in neighbouring Roubaix were purposefully demolished the same night, whereas the main town square of Cambrai and adjacent houses had been destroyed by 9 October; in Fourmies, the Germans blew up a munitions train before their retreat on 8 November, causing considerable damage to neighbouring buildings.⁴ All of the mines of the Nord, apart from those of Béthune, were purposefully flooded.⁵

The occupiers also forcibly evacuated large swathes of locals, transporting them to Belgium or the Netherlands, allegedly to prevent
civilian casualties during forthcoming combat. Thus, the population of Cambrai was evacuated in early September 1918, sent initially to Valenciennes, then to the outskirts of Liège, before being repatriated to Évian on 4 October. The roughly 14,000 inhabitants of Douai were also evacuated to Mons on 2–4 September. In October, Habourdin, Aniche, Condé, Valenciennes, Fresnes, Denain, Bruay and Anzin were evacuated. The departure of civilian men from Lille was ordered on 30 September; 500 out of 1,476 municipal employees were allowed to remain, but municipal life was nevertheless paralysed. Here, locals committed many crimes in this period, especially theft and pillage but even some murders, a situation exacerbated by the German evacuation on 8 October of all French policemen under the age of fifty-five, including the Chief Commissioner. Given this, it is even more surprising that few instances of violent vengeance against those accused of misconduct occurred (see Chapter 2). Perhaps the fact that there was no power vacuum – the Germans were still present – and the uncertainty surrounding the military situation played a role. Locals could not predict what the Allied advance meant for them and remained acutely aware of the German presence. This attitude is visible in the diary of Jeanne Lefebvre from Saint-André-lez-Lille. Forced to leave her house to stay with her uncle on 6 October 1918, she remarked on 12 October:

The situation is not evolving, the Germans are still here whilst we hear more and more talk of peace […] It appears that the English surrounded Lille and were seven times as numerous as the Germans, so many things are said […] Yesterday, people said it was only a matter of hours, that the peace was signed, that all the [German] offices were emptied. Me, I no longer believe anything, there is too much contradictory information and the Germans still occupy our area.

In fact, the end was near, but the forced evacuations meant that certain chroniclers of occupied life were not present for the liberation of their towns. Although Lefebvre managed to return home on 16 October, Dumont (interpreter at the Mairie of Lille) was evacuated on 2 October and arrived in Belgium on 10 October; Blin’s diary stopped on 18 September 1918, and Trollin had also been evacuated by October 1918. Nevertheless, the towns of the Nord were not entirely evacuated, so some locals were present for the final German retreat and the eventual liberation. For many, like the Lillois, although they were aware of Allied progress, their deliverance was a sudden shock – the Germans disappeared overnight. 

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The date of liberation varied from town to town: Canadians liberated Cambrai on 9 October 1918, Douai on 17 October and Valenciennes on 2 November; the British liberated Lille on 17 October, and Avesnes and Maubeuge on 10 November. There was a universal reaction to this new-found freedom: joy, jubilation, relief, gratitude and expressions of patriotic fervour. Solicitor Pierre Motte from Lille noted in his diary that inhabitants displayed French and British flags. Crowds greeted the liberators, women kissed them, and many sang. Photographs, newspaper reports and film of the liberation of Lille and other towns corroborate this, demonstrating the extent of locals’ sentiments (see Figures 8–10). Similar scenes occurred throughout the Nord, notably in Valenciennes, Roubaix, Tourcoing and Maubeuge.

Official celebrations began straight away, including military parades by the liberating armies, exchanging honours and celebratory discourses, and visits to key towns by the President and Prime Minister, such as those mentioned in the opening lines of this book. Marshalls Pétain and Foch, and King George V also visited the liberated regions. However,
this was not the end of military occupation: Allied armies remained in the liberated Nord for months, initially carrying out humanitarian work. A French military report underlined that for the period up to 25 November 1918 the British army provided considerable transport, food and health care to the destitute, hungry population, including transporting tens of thousands of refugees and saving the 790,000 inhabitants (450,000 of whom were in Lille-Roubaix-Tourcoing) from famine. The report’s author described this as ‘a marvellous act of systematic and ingenious charity’ and concluded, ‘For this beautiful work, [British] army heads and soldiers have the right to the most profound gratitude of France.’ However, eventually the British presence and regulations led to discontentment among locals, who complained of a second occupation. Further, lack of provisions continued to plague the area despite the fact that on 31 December 1918 the CANF was abolished and the Ministry of Liberated Regions henceforth oversaw food provisioning and attendant controls.
Thus, the liberation did not represent the end of the hardships related to the war. Other problems existed. Many evacuated locals sought to return home, a complex process lasting until 1920 for many. Further, a vast programme of reconstruction was required for the entire battlefield area and former occupied zone, which had suffered heavily at both Allied and German hands (see Figures 11–12). This was why Jeanne Lefebvre remarked on 24 October 1918, ‘We are liberated, but now that the first moments of joy have passed, we only see sadness and desolation everywhere.’ The scale of destruction was massive: across the Nord eighteen communes were completely destroyed, sixty-five were more than 50 per cent destroyed, and 526 were damaged, with just fifty-nine intact. Further, 53,172 buildings and farms were completely destroyed, with 30,117 seriously damaged and 164,626 partially damaged. Infrastructure – road, canals and especially railways – was devastated. Both combat and occupation were responsible.
Reconstruction took many years, overseen by the Ministry for Liberated Regions and local authorities, financed by reparations, central government, local initiatives and bolstered by international aid such as British adoptions of French towns.33 Some aspects of reconstruction lasted until the 1930s, such as the reconstruction of Cambrai, completed in 1932.34 Yet, overall, the effort was impressively rapid, with industrial and agricultural production approaching, reaching, and in some areas overtaking, pre-war levels by the mid to late 1920s.35 By this point, thousands of kilometres of roads and railways had been repaired; canals, factories, mines and thermal energy plants were reopened; and temporary housing had been superseded by permanent lodgings.36 However, this remarkable process of reconstruction is beyond the scope of this book.

In the meantime, locals struggled to come to terms with their unique wartime experience and to frame it within both local and national memory, via what Nivet calls ‘moral reconstruction’.37 Other scholars and I have studied this in more detail elsewhere, but a brief examination is necessary before drawing some general conclusions.38
Misconduct remained in local consciousness for a short period after the liberation, but this weak memory soon became occluded, overshadowed by stronger memories. It was especially visible in the local press, which was interested in the persecution of individuals who had engaged in occupation misconduct. On 22 November 1918, Le Progrès du Nord contained a list of ‘simple contestations’ on its front page, remarking that ‘The swindlers of the occupation are still the masters of the pavement’ and ‘Some of the ravitailleurs who exploited us are still there.’ This marked the start of a campaign against ‘mercantis’, ‘hoarders’ and war profiteers. A week later, an article criticised mercantis who had engaged in ‘infamous complacencies’ with the Germans. The paper’s outrage was palpable the following day. In the middle of the front page was the following notice:

Figure 12 British soldier checking a wreck of a tram in the ruined Grande Place at Douai, 25 October 1918. © Imperial War Museum, Q 11407.

Remembering and forgetting

Misconduct
THEY HAVE RETURNED! If you walk in the streets of the Centre or if you enter the large cafés, you will meet here, returned from Brussels, most of the bandits who enriched themselves during the occupation by working with the Boches. This scandal must cease.\textsuperscript{41}

Underneath this proclamation was an article entitled ‘THE INSOLENT SCOUNDRELS’, expanding upon the above statement. It was even suggested that these people were being protected by those in positions of authority. A similar proclamation was published the next day.\textsuperscript{42}

In December 1918, \textit{Le Progrès} reported a conversation between two \textit{mercantis}, overhead in a café in Lille. The men had left Lille with the Germans because they feared ‘justice’, but as soon as they realised that no one was being punished for their occupation behaviour, they returned.\textsuperscript{43} This notion that suspect persons were not being punished, or were even being protected, was shared by the wider population, as revealed by the French military’s \textit{contrôle postal} of Lille. One \textit{Lillois} wrote of a man he knew was guilty of ‘suspect relations’ during the occupation: ‘From the way in which our Allies envisage the crime of “commerce with the enemy”, I am now expecting to see him soon benefit from an acquittal and be released.’ He concluded: ‘It is enough to make you disgusted at having remained French. I am sickened and only demand to get myself far away from this unhappy town of Lille, so afflicted and so criticised.’\textsuperscript{44}

The campaign of \textit{Le Progrès} had some success: on 18 December, it reported on ‘The traitor Hubert’, a \textit{ravitailleur}, German agent and correspondent for the \textit{Gazette des Ardennes}, who had been brought to the paper’s attention by a reader in response to its article on \textit{mercantis}.\textsuperscript{45} The following day, the paper boasted, ‘The campaign that we have led here against the strange times of the occupation has begun to bear fruit.’ One C. Dauphin, allegedly an accomplice of Hubert and fellow contributor to the \textit{Gazette}, had written to the editor. He denied any association with Hubert and claims of denunciation or commerce with the enemy but did admit that he had written one article for the \textit{Gazette}, which was approved by the Mayor of Lambersart. He outlined his logic: ‘If I had relations with some soldiers whose mentality seemed good to me, it was only to do good around me: I perceived that the services I offered, considering the favours that I obtained, whilst benefitting me \textit{avec les mains toujours garnies}, could not constitute a crime.’\textsuperscript{46} A few days later, \textit{Le Progrès} refuted Dauphin’s claims and highlighted a central tenet of misconduct, responding with, ‘A crime, no, my poor Dauphin, but all the
honest people with spirit will say to you […] that no one who is honest has the right to have friendly relations with “enemy soldiers who seem good to them.”

Cases of those arrested or sentenced for bad occupation behaviour – trafficking in gold, or ‘sexual affairs’ involving Germans – were reported in December 1918. Other newspapers mentioned misconduct in late 1918 but expressed less outrage than Le Progrès. The memory of misconduct was thus alive and well in the last months of 1918, at least in the pages of the regional press. Articles on this theme were rarer after 1918, but some examples do exist. On 20 October 1919, Le Progrès published a piece entitled ‘The Hunt for the Embochés’ detailing the arrest of a Lillois for intelligence and commerce with the enemy. The sentences of eleven collaborators of the Gazette were also reported. In 1921, industrialists of Lille who had complied with the German order to create sandbags faced legal action at the Parquet. La Croix du Nord printed former Acting Préfet Anjubault’s version of events on 21 March 1921. Another newspaper published an interview with the lawyer of one of the accused arguing for the innocence of the industrialists. This argument won the day, and all were acquitted, the judge ruling that they had been forced to work by the Germans. Such acquittals, Nivet argues, ‘made a scandal’ and led the editor of the socialist La Bataille to note, ‘Only imbeciles have confidence in the judicial system of their country.’ Yet what was the reality of punishments? Were the former occupés justified in complaining about apparent clemency?

Punishments in the Nord were limited compared to events in politically complex Belgium or Alsace-Lorraine after 1918, and especially to the post-1944 épuration, when new crimes were created to facilitate punishment. As Martinage has demonstrated via examining court records, the number of those taken to court for intelligence avec l’ennemi or commerce avec l’ennemi was surprisingly low in the Nord. Between 1918 and 1925, 123 people accused of intelligence avec l’ennemi appeared before the Cour d’Assises du Nord, of which eighty-three were tried in the Cour d’Assises de Douai. Of those, forty-three were condemned, with punishments ranging from minor correctional sentences up to twenty years’ imprisonment in a ‘fortified prison’ or deportation. The rest were acquitted.

This was not the only avenue through which suspect individuals passed: Nivet notes that conseils de guerre judged such people until October 1919; and in 1920, ‘the civilian judicial system of the Nord’
judged hundreds of such cases, although not all ended in a trial. The Parquet of Valenciennes hosted twenty-four affairs of *intelligence avec l’ennemi* in July 1923 alone. Other sources attest to the punishment of suspect activity, such as the archives of the women’s prison in Rennes.

A precise overall number of *Nordistes* put on trial or found guilty does not exist, but from the available data this seems small. This is not to say that the French Government did not take accusations of misconduct seriously. Nivet believes that ‘until the end of the 1930s […] the marginal part of the population of the Nord who collaborated with the enemy did not benefit from any clemency. They remained the dark side of the heroic France of 1914–1918.’

The apparent lack of widespread punishment may also be due to the fact that many denunciations leading to investigations were ostensibly ‘incorrect’, based on rumour or born out of personal quarrels, with many ending in acquittal. Only the high-profile cases were taken to court, and evidently only those who had broken laws could be punished. As the preliminary investigative documents regarding the Nord demonstrate, many more individuals were found, or admitted to being, guilty of breaching the limits of respectability, of the dominant occupied culture – but judicial punishment for such behaviour was not possible. This was noted by central government, and criticised by locals.

The official punishment of those who had engaged in misconduct could be perceived as a way for both central and local government to remove the dark side of the occupation from the wider collective memory – or at least to be seen to fulfil local demands for retribution, albeit on a small scale. Once some key individuals had been punished, and the objectives of one form of memory were met, that memory could potentially weaken. This was not a memory that could be celebrated, but perhaps it could be dealt with and disposed of. Thébaud suggests this regarding female misconduct, asking, “What became of these “bad women” after the arrival of French troops? Some had already been shorn as Grenadou mentioned. Others were judged; some committed suicide. And then they were forgotten…”

The rather limited number of punished individuals, on the other hand, may have given the impression that those who had engaged in misconduct were a minority – as opposed to the ostensibly commonplace resistance, and widespread suffering. This appears rather contrary to the large numbers of complaints locals made about occupation conduct of numerous compatriots, both during and after the occupation. The extent of the official inquiry into these suspects suggests a belief among French
authorities that the ‘Boches du Nord’ moniker could have had some truth to it; yet the end results hint at a desire to minimise the perception of wide-scale misconduct. However, this may have been an acknowledgement by the investigators/judges of the complex realities of the occupation, and the distinction between perception and reality. Whatever the reasoning, the slow wait for and small number of punishments did not satisfy locals, but it paved the way for a narrative of patriotic resistance during the occupation. Although aspects of misconduct were mentioned in some interwar texts, and are present in histories since the 1990s, resistance and suffering dominate.

Remembering patriotism and resistance

Immediately after the liberation, a narrative of widespread patriotism and multifarious resistance among the occupés crystallised. On 19 October 1918, the Mayor of Tourcoing gave a speech to visiting Prime Minister Clemenceau outlining the experience of occupation. He detailed the suffering at the hands of the Germans, set against the resistance of the population, particularly concerning the refusal to work for or to hand over metals, and the resistance of the former mayor, at that time imprisoned in Germany. A few days later, the Mayor similarly welcomed visiting President Poincaré in an official address and espoused that ‘the Flemish people have never put up with tyranny’ to explain why, ‘under the foreign boot, we remained calm and dignified, valiant and strong, certain of the triumph of our cause, of the final victory.’ Poincaré cemented the narrative by professing the strength of locals’ patriotism, to whom ‘all the gratitude of France must go, at the same time as to the admirable French and Allied armies’. The new Préfet echoed this attitude, especially the notion of national gratitude. The official line on the occupation experience was taking shape: locals had engaged in exemplary behaviour including widespread patriotism, dignity and opposition to the German presence, despite harsh suffering. The nation owed them a debt of gratitude.

This gratitude was primarily expressed through medals awarded to certain categories of former occupés. Those having engaged in acts of heroism and bravery were awarded the Légion d’honneur: at least twenty-eight Nordistes were awarded this posthumously. Others were awarded the Médaille de la Réconnaissance Française, created in 1917. Potential recipients often nominated themselves; others were nominated by their mayors; all applications had to be accompanied by supporting
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documentation. Locals could apply from April 1922 to December 1923, by which time 4,257 such applications had been received, although only 2,885 examined. Applicants also included those believed to have gone through extraordinary experiences, providing a civic or patriotic service during the occupation. Thus, the Director of the Galeries Lilloises was nominated for his role in extinguishing the fire in the hôtel de ville in 1916, and helping inhabitants evacuate their property. One man from Saint-Amand-les-Eaux requested the medal because he had injured himself falling off a wagon during German requisitions; his request was denied. A successful candidate was Mme Allard from Valenciennes, who had worked for the Red Cross during the occupation, tending to evacuees and prisoners of war. At least eighty-seven Nordistes received the Médaille de la Reconnaissance Française.

Other forms of compensation and recognition existed. On 30 June 1921, the Médaille des Victimes de l’Invasion was created at the request of the Minister of Liberated Regions. It was awarded initially to hostages, deportees, those imprisoned by the enemy or who had been subjected to forced labour, but from April 1922 also to those who had experienced serious brutality or ill-treatment. Depending on the judgement of the investigating committee, recipients were awarded a bronze, silver or vermeil medal. For the Nord, 166 men and twenty-two women received a bronze medal; two women and six men received a silver medal; and one man received a vermeil medal. Recipients hailed from sixty-one different communes and included those who had been punished for engaging in active resistance, notably espionage and evasion networks. The medal came with a certificate explaining its attribution ‘in view of perpetuating in their family and among their fellow citizens, the memory of their civic virtues in the invaded regions, during enemy occupation’. Even this medal from the national government seemed to be geared towards local remembrance.

On 14 March 1936, a law established the Médaille des Prisonniers Civils, Déportés et Otages de la Grande Guerre (Medal of the Civilian Prisoners, Deportees and Hostages of the Great War). It could not be awarded to those already in possession of the Médaille des Victimes de l’Invasion. Its goal was ‘to commemorate the memory of their sacrifices and to honour their acts of devotion to the Patrie, in recognition of the suffering that they had to suffer for [the Patrie] in the war of 1914–1918’. In total, more than 10,400 of these medals were awarded to inhabitants of the entire occupied zone, including to at least 107 Nordistes. Foreign decorations were also conferred on those who engaged in resistance to
the benefit of Allied powers. By 1923, out of a total of ninety-nine British medals awarded to Frenchmen and Frenchwomen, Nordistes received two OBEs (Officer of the British Empire) (Military Division), sixteen MBEs (Member of the British Empire) (Military Division), thirty-seven medals of the BEO (Military Division), and one medal of the BEO (Civil Division). Recipients came from twenty-three different communes and included de Bettignies, Trulin, members of the Comité Jacquet, the Patience network, and their accomplices.\(^84\)

Decorations, particularly the Légion d’honneur or the Croix de guerre, were also awarded to entire communes, towns and villages. The narrative of suffering, sacrifice and resistance was thus yet again reinforced. To name just a few, Courchelettes and Valenciennes were awarded the Croix de guerre.\(^85\) So too was Crèvecoeur-sur-l’Escaut, which, ‘Destroyed by bombardments, displayed the most beautiful attitude under shelling and during the sufferings of occupation.’\(^86\) The questions surrounding the conduct of the village’s mayor thus did not hinder the attribution of such a commendation. Cambrai and Douai received the Légion d’honneur in September 1919.\(^87\) The latter was described as a ‘town painfully wounded by four years of a harsh occupation’, which had ‘drawn the strength to resist all the suffering and even to prepare for, as much as possible, its renaissance for a fully French life’.\(^88\) Beyond these citations, at least 140 localities in the Nord (most of which had been occupied) received L’Ordre de l’armée in the early 1920s. Such distinctions were awarded for their alleged dignified and patriotic suffering during the occupation. Stock phrases and themes appeared, such as ‘dignified and courageous attitude/the most beautiful attitude’\(^89\) or ‘faith in victory’.\(^90\)

Symbols of gratitude and commemoration therefore acknowledged extreme suffering and extraordinary heroism or patriotism. Indeed, a link was drawn between the two, thus victimhood and resistance were the backbone of the official commemorative framework. However, this framework also seemed to press for a removal of the particularities of the occupation experience, calling for a speedy reunion with France and France’s wartime narrative. The extreme suffering of combatants was the apogee of this rather paradoxical world view – and no matter how much the occupés had suffered or resisted, their experience would never be able to trump the more universal trench experience in national memory.

The occupation cast a long shadow for locals, and this official narrative reappeared in the interwar years. Occupation behaviour was not the only subject of interest: in the immediate post-war period, the local
press reported on and called for reparations, for instance.\textsuperscript{91} Indeed, the Treaty of Versailles eventually called for Germany to pay for loss of property and life in the occupied regions,\textsuperscript{92} although John Maynard Keynes saw the amount demanded as excessive.\textsuperscript{93} The developments concerning reparations highlighted suffering and appealed to a sense of justice, whereas the resistance narrative allowed for pride.

**Resistance in the press**

Accounts of occupation resistance featured heavily in the local press in the interwar period. Articles recounted tales of heroism or informed readers of the fate of those punished by the Germans. The position of key resistors was already crystallised in late 1918: Catholic daily *La Croix du Nord* reported on the actions of the Doyen of Saint-Christophe in Lille, and the November 1918 service in memory of Léon Trulin\textsuperscript{94} – both Catholic resisters. Catholic martyrdom was therefore linked to resistance, unlike in the later Occupation, when the Church was associated with Vichy,\textsuperscript{95} and resistance with un-Catholic suicide and taking control of one's destiny rather than expiatory suffering.\textsuperscript{96}

In November and December 1918, *Le Progrès* reported on all types of opposition, from notable protests to active resistance, including Jacquet and Trulin.\textsuperscript{97} It even appealed in December 1918 for readers to submit stories of courage during the occupation, from which the paper wished to create a *Livre d'Or*.\textsuperscript{98} The publication further asked those who engaged in acts of resistance to make themselves known out of an explicit duty to memory: 'For there are gestures that cannot remain ignored, and names that the future must remember.'\textsuperscript{99} The same month, *L'Écho du Nord* launched a 'competition of tales and songs on the occupation and the war' because 'no historian will be able to recount all that our populations endured and all the courage they required to resist the daily persecutions of the Boches.' It was in the public interest to provide testimony of the horrors of this painful period. Entries had to be a maximum of 200 lines and based on reality, with 'acts of collective and individual heroism' the first suggested theme.\textsuperscript{100}

Into the 1930s, dozens of articles reported on the smallest developments regarding celebrated resisters. Thus, the posthumous awarding of the *Légion d'honneur* to Trulin on 2 June 1935 appeared in the publication of local historical society *Les Amis de Lille*.\textsuperscript{101} *Les Amis* used Trulin's resistance as a means to cement the occupation in public memory, and to advocate peace. It remarked:
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What is the meaning of this ceremony if it is not to declare alongside Léon Trulin our horror of the bloody carnage and our desire to be Men of Peace […]

Our Nord was during the war without Fear and without Reproach; its population […] paid during the war, beyond the sacrifice of the combatants, the tribute of blood and of suffering without hope.¹⁰²

The sacrifices of the Nord amalgamated with the sacrifices of combatants, and Nordistes rejoined the nation further by sharing the popular pacifist sentiment.

The inauguration of an inscription bearing Trulin’s name on the wall of Lille’s citadel was reported by multiple local papers in November 1935.¹⁰³ The authors blended hagiography with patriotism and religious virtue: one described the ceremony as ‘The pilgrimage of the citadel’.¹⁰⁴ Most stories on Trulin, like articles on other resisters, offered a summary of his deeds and discussed him in reverential tones. They portrayed him as a child, although he was eighteen at the time of his execution, and underlined his lack of fear during death (refusing a blindfold) and his Christian sentiments (he forgave the Germans in his final words to his executioners and his last letter to his mother). Les Amis de Lille made an explicit reference to Christ: ‘returned to life by our love, in all his glory, Léon Trulin is still alive.’¹⁰⁵

Similar articles were published about the Comité Jacquet,¹⁰⁶ and less well-known resisters,¹⁰⁷ although surprisingly few articles dealt with de Bettignies.¹⁰⁸ All were alike in style, based on the awarding of medals, the creation of monuments, sometimes the retelling of heroics – and always full of praise for the subjects’ alleged love of France and sense of duty. The actions of these heroes were cast within a redemptive, heroic framework. However, often the retelling of heroics eventually represented not the effective continuation of a certain memory but the rediscovery of such events. Just as Margaret H. Darrow has argued for the case of de Bettignies, whenever there was publicity, the press discovered resisters anew, each time extolling how much they had done for France, and how much they had been forgotten. Often journalists misspelled the names of key resisters.¹⁰⁹ In some cases, the press was aware of the lack of a resilient memory and its role in keeping the flames burning: after publishing extracts from the memoirs of Louise Thuliez (resister and friend of de Bettignies) in December 1933, La Dépêche du Nord concluded in stating: ‘Is not Mlle Thuliez right in being shocked that, apart from the monument erected in honour of Louise de Bettignies, there exists nothing in France to recall the sacrifice of the martyrs of the patrie[?]’. The publication of
her memoirs was a salvo in the struggle against oblivion. It was not the first such attempt: the previous year the President of the Committee for the Memory of Trulin (Philippe Kah) published *L’Adolescent chargé de gloire*, the story of Trulin. The front page of *Les Amis de Lille* contained the heading: “*L’Adolescent chargé de gloire*” Is Published: Every Lillois Family Must Own This Book.”110 The same heading dominated from October to December 1932,111 although the motives behind such publicity may not have been wholly patriotic considering that the *Amis* had edited the book.112 The role of locals championing such memories was clear in the *Croix du Nord’s* review of Kah’s work: ‘One day, when our grandchildren, become grandparents, recount beautiful true stories to their grandsons […] they will take inspiration from the book that has just appeared about Léon Trulin.’113 However, reading and passing down such stories, whether in the press or other publications, was not the only form of memory transmission; ceremonies and monuments were dedicated to occupation events and personalities in the interwar period.

Ceremonies and monuments

Monuments directly relating to the occupation are rare in the Nord.114 Among these, active resisters and their deaths were the most frequently commemorated themes – Lille still has its monuments to the Comité Jacquet, Trulin and de Bettignies.115 Unlike the handful of monuments to suffering experienced on a collective scale during the occupation,116 resistance was usually remembered symbolically through individual monuments, or in a more individualistic manner.117 Roads and town squares were named after resisters,118 and personal tombs in cemeteries commemorated them – such as those in Lille’s eastern cemetery concerning Patience collaborators Willot and Pinte.119

Often ceremonies and monuments were the result of campaigning on behalf of organisations created to perpetuate a certain memory and to influence local policy in this regard. Representative in this respect were forms of commemoration surrounding Trulin – around whom it was later said a ‘cult of memory’ was built120 – and the Comité Jacquet. The creation and celebration of a monument to Trulin on the wall of the citadel in 1935 has already been mentioned, as has the ceremony awarding him a posthumous *Légion d’honneur*. These were stages in a piecemeal but organised commemorative process, which saw Trulin’s resistance forever tied to that of the Comité Jacquet, and these five fusillés lillois (shot Lillois) in turn representing the occupation experience.
Trulin was awarded numerous decorations and citations posthumously in 1919 and 1920, and on 30 September and 1 October 1922 fêtes run by the Comité du Commerce et des Fêtes du Vieux-Lille were held in his honour. In May 1923, a poster called for as many Lillois as possible to aid in the posing of a commemorative plaque on the ‘Walls of the five fusillés lillois’ (Trulin being one of the five). The ceremony attracted much attention. This plaque was not enough for those safeguarding the memory of these men, and eventually a full-blown monument entitled ‘Lille à ses fusillés’ was unveiled in March 1929. It cost 200,000 francs, raised by contributions from the population at large with a subsidy from the municipality. Just one year before, however, some were unhappy about an alleged lack of commemoration regarding Trulin. In November 1928, Les Amis de Lille wrote of Trulin, one of the ‘most glorious’ victims of the war: ‘This little hero, has he been known, understood, appreciated enough, glorified as he deserves?’ This was despite the fact that the monument aux fusillés had been planned since 1924. A separate statue of Trulin was paid for by public donations, placed on the Avenue du Peuple Belge in 1934; it can now be found outside Lille’s theatre.

Yet Trulin’s memory remained linked inextricably to that of the Comité Jacquet, itself safeguarded by another ‘Comité Jacquet’ founded in April 1920 ‘to perpetuate the memory of Eugène Jacquet and his companions and, in general, the heroes of Lille shot during the occupation’ by ‘erecting a funerary monument to them’ and aiding their families. A ‘Comité Georges Maertens’ was also created, charged with receiving subscriptions to pay for a ‘sepulchre worthy of him’ in Lille’s eastern cemetery and to provide financial aid to his widow. By September 1919, enough money had been raised for the monument, with excess money given to his widow. Maerten was the only genuine Lillois of the Comité Jacquet, perhaps explaining why he was the only fusillé to whom a separate organisation was dedicated. His monument was unveiled in a ceremony on 26 September 1920, involving key notables, veterans, as well as British, Belgian and French military detachments. The Comité Maertens thus fulfilled its objectives rapidly.

The interwar Comité Jacquet outlasted its initial aims and continued a yearly procession on the anniversary of the execution of the fusillés. However, by 1937, the Minister of the Interior judged the Comité’s activity to be ‘insufficient’ enough to maintain its status as an œuvre de guerre (war charity), so dissolved it. Yet, in 1939, as war approached, the Comité returned with renewed vigour and purpose. It aimed to
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unite locals, heal divisions and draw inspiration from the fusillés. The Comité was to be enlarged, strengthened and its personnel (many of whom had died) replaced. The comité d’honneur was reconstituted, and members called for a journée des fusillés to be celebrated regularly, although the onset of war appears to have prevented this. A link was thus drawn between the resistance of 1914–18 and the response to the upcoming war of 1939–45.

Other resisters were the subject of real or attempted commemoration via ceremonies and monuments. De Bettignies was also promoted within the pantheon of heroes. However, monuments and ceremonies perversely provided concrete and short-term outlets for memory and commemoration. They were receptacles into which memories could be poured and stored, sites of memory that provided a way of both remembering the occupation on certain occasions (such as anniversaries of deaths), but forgetting the occupation experience on a daily basis. The monuments suggested that the occupation was not forgotten, but once these memorials were built the population moved on. The goals of the organisations dedicated to the memory of resisters was fulfilled, undermining their purpose and perversely weakening the memory of those whom they wanted to remember. La Dépêche in November 1932 – a year after the well-attended ceremony for the sixteenth anniversary of Trulin’s death – noticed this paradox: ‘Ah! If the Germans had had a Trulin! What poems, plays, films! Us, we have had, in Lille alone, Trulin, Derain, Jacquet, Deconinck, Maertens, Verhulst, many more. Do you consider that, despite all the monuments, we hold their names in high enough esteem?’ Correspondingly, Redier wrote in 1937 that, ‘In one hundred years, in two hundred years, the unpleasant […] page that the invaded population has added to our annals will without doubt be inscribed in memories and in hearts. Today it is necessary to say that it is not the case.’ Redier’s dream was never realised, as the Occupation of the Second World War soon dominated French and local collective memory.

The embers of the largely extinguished memory of the 1914–18 occupation were still occasionally present in post-1945 articles in the local press, usually published on the anniversaries of key occupation events, or upon the death of key occupation personalities. These rare reports continued to concentrate on famous resisters but sometimes contained factual inaccuracies and gave the impression of a lack of familiarity with the occupation among both authors and readers. The commemorations of the centenary of the First World War have, at least at a local level, shifted some focus back on the experience of occupation and potentially

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reinvigorated its memory. The occupation has been engaged with in physical and virtual exhibitions,\textsuperscript{144} digitisation of archival documents,\textsuperscript{145} hundreds of newspaper articles published in \textit{La Voix du Nord},\textsuperscript{146} and a series of articles and videos produced by France 3 Télévision diffused via social media.\textsuperscript{147} Yet even for these vectors of memory appearing amid a reinvigorated historiography of the period, while there is some nuance in the topics covered,\textsuperscript{148} the focus is disproportionately on the suffering of the occupation or acts of heroism and resistance. There is still a sense of a constant rediscovery of old heroes, both in content and dissemination. For instance, despite having published 320 articles on the occupation from 2014 until the end of 2016, \textit{La Voix du Nord} still referred to ‘the forgotten occupation’.\textsuperscript{149} This is representative of the overall place of the occupation in local and national collective memory: despite impressive attempts to (re)engage with the experience of the occupied Nord in centenary commemorations, this experience was and remains marginal.

\textbf{Conclusion: reflections on the occupation}

Despite the eventual shift towards forgetting, the experience of military occupation marked \textit{Nordistes} profoundly. Theirs was a different war, set aside from the national experience. Only compatriots from other occupied departments, who had undergone similar hardship, could begin to understand what they had lived through and the choices they had faced. The reality of living under foreign dominance forced these \textit{Nordistes} to interact with the national enemy at the same time as the Allied armies struggled to liberate French territory. Reminders of this ongoing struggle were never far away, from the sights and sounds of bombardment to prisoners of war marched through key towns, or the fabrication of sandbags. Consequently, locals were caught in their own no man’s land, neither clearly combatants nor fully non-combatants. Under such circumstances, the way they behaved took on greater importance, defining their role in the war effort and the way in which they understood this.

Unsurprisingly, occupied \textit{Nordistes} responded to their situation in a variety of ways ranging from forms of complicity, disunity and criminality, to multifarious expressions of patriotism, resistance and opposition to the occupiers. Naturally, other behaviours than the main forms examined here existed, notably those in the grey zone between the extremes of this spectrum; real life was rarely as clear-cut and neatly defined as my categorisations suggest. Individuals could and did engage
simultaneously in misconduct and resistance, criminality, acts of disunity and unity – and also in behaviours that fall under none of these labels. Nevertheless, I believe that these categories are not only useful for analysing and understanding the occupation but also represent the cornerstones of the way in which many occupés understood their experience; this was the dominant occupied culture, born of both pre-war social norms and daily wartime experience, comprising a framework informing and guiding what were considered acceptable and unacceptable behaviours. While the largely middle-class notion of respectability was central to this, and while most of those who have left traces in the archives were middle-class, certain working-class locals also bought into this culture. Such a world view was extreme and largely unforgiving, clouding or ignoring the complex realities of occupied life; it called for an idealised standard of behaviour, essentially unattainable in reality, but which set out the wartime narrative which in turn influenced the way many perceived the behaviour around them. Of course, not all locals shared this culture – especially those who breached it, often drawing criticism from compatriots who did buy into this world view. As such, for many Nordistes, the experience of occupation was marked by the judgement of compatriots based on perceived conduct, evoking fear, contempt and praise. Separating perceptions from reality is difficult, and in many ways perceptions themselves informed reality. Nevertheless, it is evident that there was more to occupied life – and to occupés’ understanding of their situation – than just the suffering and resistance that dominated the narrative of occupation soon after the liberation.

In examining both the ‘light’ and ‘dark’ side of this occupation, I hope to have demonstrated that there existed a multiplicity of behaviours in the occupied Nord; that occupied Nordistes were neither purely victims, heroes nor villains, even though they often thought in such terms. I have proposed a new conceptual vocabulary to help understand this situation, such as notions of ‘misconduct’ or a dominant ‘occupied culture’. These notions may be suggestive for understanding other instances of populations responding to military occupation, although tweaking and contextualisation would be required. Yet whatever the implications, strengths and weaknesses of my approach, it is my hope that this book represents a further step on the path towards a more comprehensive understanding of the oft-forgotten but consistently fascinating occupation of the Nord in the First World War.
Notes


4 Nivet, *La France occupée*, p. 316; BDIC, FΔ112605, dossier B.x006, Académie de Lille, Nord, Réponses au questionnaire sur le territoire occupé par les armées allemandes, Commune de Fourmies, École de garçons V. Hugo, information on Kommandant Schlichteisen, 25 July 1919.


6 Nivet, *La France occupée*, p. 314; Wallart, *C’était hier*, pp. 65–6. Nivet states the evacuation date as 6 September; Wallart claims it was 8 September.


8 Wallart, *C’était hier*, p. 65.


10 AML, 4H/21, Mairie de Lille, notes journalières à Messieurs les Conseillers Municipaux, 30 September and 1 October 1918.

11 Notes journalières à Messieurs les Conseillers Municipaux, for example 8 October 1918.

12 Notes journalières à Messieurs les Conseillers Municipaux, 7 October 1918.


15 ADN, 74J241, personal papers of Pierre Dumont (‘représentant de commerce […] employé comme interprète à la mairie de Lille de 1914 à 1919’), 2 and 10 October 1918.

16 74J225, diary of M. Blin (instituteur en retraite at Auchy-les-Ouchies), 18 September 1918; ADN, 74J224, diary of M. Trollin (Directeur de l’École Rollin, Lille), 17 October 1918.


20 ADN, J1950, diary of Pierre Motte (1861–1947, notaire à Lille), 17 October 1918.
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21 Nivet, La France occupée, pp. 317–18.
24 Wallart, C’était hier, p. 67.
29 MacDonald, Reconstruction in France, especially p. 34.
30 Lefebvre, Mon journal sous l’occupation, p. 270.
34 Wallart, C’était hier, p. 79.
35 Nivet, La France occupée, pp. 370–2.
36 Wallart, C’était hier, pp. 73–83.
37 Wallart, C’était hier, pp. 329–64.

39 Le Progrès du Nord, 22 November 1918.
40 Le Progrès du Nord, 29 November 1918.
41 Le Progrès du Nord, 30 November 1918.
42 Le Progrès du Nord, 1 December 1918.
43 Le Progrès du Nord, 6 December 1918.
44 SHD, 16N1462, Commission de contrôle postal de Lille, 1 January 1919, extraits, 1 – ‘opinions sur la libération des pays envahis et sur l'occupation des pays ennemis’, p. 3.
51 La Croix du Nord, 21 March 1921.
52 AML, 4H121, clipping, n.a, n.d.
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court documents, see ADN, 3U281/31–78, 2U1/444–8, 2U1/571, 2U2/515, 3U258/564, 3U274/174 and 3U303/6–7.


68 AMT, 4HA26, ‘Discours prononcé par M. Vandevenne, Maire de Tourcoing, à l’adresse de Monsieur le Président de la République, lors de son passage en notre ville, le 21 Octobre 1918’.


70 ADN, 9R1187, proclamation of Préfet, Lille, 23 October 1918.

71 See the entirety of AN, F23/377. M. Dubar and M. Willot, key collaborators of *La Patience*, received the *Légion d’honneur* whilst alive. Other confirmed
recipients do not appear in these documents, thus these individuals represent only a fraction of actual recipients.

72 Nivet, La France occupée, p. 335.
73 ADN, 3Z140, Médaille de la Reconnaissance française attribuée aux otages, déportés et brassards rouges.
74 AN, BB32/300, newspaper clipping, no title, n.d.: ‘En conséquence, par décret du 8 octobre 1923 (Journal Officiel du 12) le délai fixé par le décret du 1er avril 1922 est prolongé au 31 décembre prochain’.
75 AN, BB32/4, Ministre du Travail to M. le Garde des Sceaux, Ministre de la Justice, 25 April 1921, and supporting documentation.
76 AN, BB32/3, Médaille de la Reconnaissance Française application concerning M. Auguste Alloy, 12 March 1923.
77 AN, BB32/3, Mme Allard.
78 See ADN, 6Z39; ADN, 4Z34, République Française, Sous-Préfecture de Douai, Médailles des Victimes de l’Invasion 1914–18 et de la Reconnaissance Française.
79 Nivet, La France occupée, p. 335.
80 See files in AN, F23/375, Recompenses aux Otages, Nord. Most were awarded by 1923.
82 Nivet, La France occupée, p. 336.
83 ADN, 4Z34, République Française, Sous-Préfecture de Douai, Médailles des Victimes de l’Invasion 1914–18 et de la Reconnaissance Française.
87 Nivet, La France occupée, p. 334. Nivet puts the date as 14 September, but a document in ADN, M127/124 states the date as 13 September 1919.
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95 Julian Jackson, France: The Dark Years, 1940–44 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 268–71. There were Catholic resisters, however: see pp. 418–19.


97 See articles in Le Progrès du Nord: 4, 9 and 10 November 1918; 2, 5, 9, 13, 17 and 22 December 1918.


101 AML, 4H75, Les Amis de Lille, 15 June 1935; 1, 15 and 20 July 1935.

102 Ibid.

103 AML, 4H75, Le Réveil du Nord and La Dépêche du Nord, 9 November 1935.

104 La Dépêche du Nord, 9 November 1935.

105 AML, 4H75, single photocopied document entitled Les Amis de Lille, 15 June 1935; 1, 15 and 20 July 1935.


107 See, for example, most of AML, 4H78, especially Le Réveil du Nord, 9 November 1928; 24 September 1932; 9 March 1933; 13 August 1935; 16 January, 18 June, 14 August, 4 September, and 23 September 1936; La Dépêche du Nord, 12 December 1928, 23 December 1933, and 13 August 1935; L’Écho du Nord, 27 March 1919; 20 February 1927; 11–12 November 1928; 26 December 1933; 13 August 1935; 11 August and 4 October 1936; La Croix du Nord, 13 August 1935, 23 August and 18 September 1936.

108 AML, 4H77, L’Écho du Nord, 8 January 1920; 3 and 10 November 1927; Le Progrès du Nord, 25 August 1934; Le Grand Hebdomadaire Illustre, 7 March

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111 AML, 4H75, *Les Amis*, 15 October, 1 November and 15 December 1932.


115 Becker, *Oubliés de la Grande Guerre*, p. 342; Becker, ‘D’une guerre à l’autre,’ p. 456. The monument to the Comité Jacquet and Trulin, however, was destroyed in the Second World War and rebuilt afterwards.


118 Becker, ‘D’une guerre à l’autre’, p. 342; Nivet, *La France occupée*, p. 329 and 331. For instance, the Place Louise de Bettignies in Lille.


121 AML, 4H75, list, n.d., n.a., entitled ‘Madame Trulin à Lille (Nord)’.

122 Becker, ‘D’une guerre à l’autre’, p. 456. Executed resister Deconninck had predicted that such a monument might be erected and in his last letter to his wife asked that his name appear next to that of Jacquet: AML, 4H75, Ernest Deconninck to his wife, 15 September 1915.

123 AML, 4H75, poster, ‘Comité Jacquet: Pose d’un plaque commémorative’, Lille, 21 May 1923.

124 See, for example, AML, 4H76, *Le Réveil du Nord*, 20 May 1923. For more information, see ADN, 70J213.


126 AML, 4H75, *Les Amis de Lille*, 1 November 1928.

127 Becker, ‘Mémoire et commémoration’, p. 346. Executed resister Deconninck had predicted that such a monument might be erected and in his last letter to his wife asked that his name appear next to that of Jacquet: AML, 4H76, Ernest Deconninck to his wife, 15 September 1915.


129 AML, 4H76, Comité Jacquet to Mayor, 2 April 1920.

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AML, 4H76, President of Comité Georges Maertens to Préfet, 24 December 1919.


AML, 4H76, Le Réveil du Nord, 18 June 1939.

AML, 4H76, 'Le Chef de Division délégué' for the Préfet, to Mayor, 6 October 1937.

AML, 4H76, President of Comité Jacquet to Mayor, 1 June 1939. Original emphasis.

AML, 4H76, Le Réveil du Nord, 18 June 1939.

AML, 4H76, La Dépêche du Nord and La Croix du Nord, 18 June 1939.

See Becker, 'D’une guerre à l’autre'.

See, for example, AML, 4H76, Edouard and Fernard Plouvier de Lille, Chévaliers de la Légion d’Honneur, Souvenir de la Fête du 5 Mai 1921; AML, 4H74, ‘Comité Jacquet et des Fusillés du Nord Envahi, Projet d’érection d’un monument en l’honneur du douanier Guénard, Demande de participation de la Ville, Rapport à l’Administration Municipale’, 13 October 1933; AML, 4H78, Le Réveil du Nord, 24 September 1932.

For example, a mass was held on 22 September 1919 by the Bishop of Lille in honour of the fusillés and de Bettignies: AML, 4H76, note of the Mayor of Lille, 19 September 1919.

See ADN, 70J349, passim.

AML, 4H75, La Dépêche du Nord, 4 November 1932.


See, for example, the following websites (accessed 29 January 2017): www.cheminsdememoire-nordpasdecalais.fr/; http://archives.lille.fr/Actualites/p270/Exposition-Premiere-Guerre-Mondiale; www.archivesdepartementales.lenord.fr/mini_site/cahiers_pedagogiques/01_lille_envahi/index.html; http://archives.lille.fr/Les-Archives-de-Lille/p277/1914-mobilisee-bombardee-occupee-Lille-entre-dans-la-guerre. La Voix du Nord has frequently reported on local exhibitions, such as one in Lille's Place Rihour from 15 July until 18 August 2015 (La Voix du Nord, 15 July 2015).


It has published 380 articles touching upon the occupation since 2012; 320 of these were published between January 2014 and December 2016. See www.lavoixdunord.fr.

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(accessed 29 January 2017); France 3 Nord-Pas-de-Calais has produced 383 videos and articles on the war, many of which deal with aspects of the occupation: see http://france3-regions.francetvinfo.fr/playlist-histoires-14-18 (accessed 29 January 2017).
