

The conflict of exile: servicemen

Qui se pourrait d'elle laisser
Toujours sa beauté renouvelle.
Dieu! Qu'il la fait bon regarder,
La gracieuse, bonne et belle!

Charles, Duke of Orléans (1391–1465)¹

In late January 1941, French Welfare concluded that the most urgent problem it had confronted during the first six months of its existence was not the handling of refugees, but what to do 'with the considerable number of French soldiers, sailors and merchant seaman in this country who had not immediately expressed their willingness to join General de Gaulle'.² These men were, of course, the majority. When, on 18 June 1940, de Gaulle emitted his 'call to honour', the response was feeble, a fact acknowledged by even the most unreconstructed of the general's hagiographers. It has been calculated that, in mid-August 1940, the numbers of Free French, 'volunteers of the first hour', in both Britain and across the world, numbered approximately 8,000.³ It is, though, these initial *ralliés* whose stories have been told over and over again, both by historians and by themselves.⁴ History remembers the winners, and there is little desire to recall the pitiful history of the remainder of the French armed forces during the war years, except to recount how those soldiers, sailors and airmen, principally in the colonies, eventually rediscovered a dignity and retrospective glory by rallying to de Gaulle. Unquestionably, it was these colonials that transformed the Forces Françaises Libres (FFL) into a truly formidable force, enabling it to play an important role in the ultimate defeat of Nazism. By contrast, the rump of the French forces in metropolitan France had an undistinguished war. According to the terms of the Armistice, Vichy was left with an army of 100,000, men whose job was

primarily the maintenance of order, and whose every action was closely watched by the Germans. Determined to maintain the principle of conscription, Vichy was compelled to create a series of youth movements, principally the *Chantiers de la Jeunesse* and the *Compagnons de France*, which espoused the values of both Baden-Powell and the National Revolution, ideals that are not as dissimilar as might be imagined. The air arm was a shadow of its former self, while the navy, the most advanced section of the French military, had an ignominious campaign: sunk by the British at Mers-el-Kébir in July 1940, and scuttled by the French themselves at Toulon in November 1942.

To read the many histories of the French armed forces during the Second World War is, then, all too often to read the history of the Free French.⁵ Little mention is ever made of the sizeable numbers of French sailors and soldiers, over 10,000 in total, stranded in camps in Britain at the time of the defeat, and who largely chose repatriation over enlistment in the Free French or action with the British services.⁶ They are alluded to briefly in de Gaulle's memoirs, as one might refer to an embarrassing relative at the dinner table, before they are passed over in favour of another subject.⁷ As noted in Chapter 1, de Gaulle conveniently blamed their unwillingness to join him on Mers-el-Kébir, and suggests that the British were not as supportive as they could have been in his recruitment drive. There is a measure of truth in these claims, in particular the accusations against London. The British government had serious doubts about the reliability of French servicemen and their worth in battle. Yet, as will be seen, the reasons behind the failure to rally were far more complicated; and it is significant that the attitudes of many exiled servicemen reflected those of their comrades-in-arms in metropolitan France.⁸

Arriving: Narvik, Dunkirk, Compiègne and Oran

In explaining why large numbers of French servicemen were to be found in Britain during the summer of 1940, it is necessary to read the roll call of Narvik, Dunkirk, Compiègne (where the Franco-German Armistice was signed) and Mers-el-Kébir, hardly the most illustrious episodes in French military history. In Norway, on 8–9 April 1940, a joint Franco-British naval force battled with a German expeditionary mission in an attempt to disrupt the flow of Swedish iron ore that passed through the port of Narvik on its way to Hitler's factories. Although this episode prompted the Norwegians to abandon their

neutrality in favour of the Allies, the operation was a disaster for the French and British, because of woeful military preparations and, most importantly, because of insufficient air cover.⁹

As French ships slipped into British harbours, transporting seriously wounded troops from the abortive Norwegian campaign, far greater numbers of retreating servicemen were gathering on the beaches of Dunkirk.¹⁰ Initially, on 27–29 May, it was principally the BEF that was being ferried across the Channel, prompting Darlan to remark acerbically, ‘The British Lion seems to grow wings when it’s a matter of getting back to the sea,’ a sentiment that was shared by several of his countryfolk at the time, and one that has not altogether disappeared since.¹¹ In truth, the French had been kept fully informed of the Royal Navy’s evacuation plans, but had anticipated Dunkirk holding out for longer, and were disadvantaged in that the bulk of their own ships were in the Mediterranean.¹² Aware that British troops were withdrawing in an orderly fashion, whereas their French counterparts were being left to flounder in the waves, and conscious that an overstretched RAF could not provide the air cover demanded by Reynaud, Churchill attempted to save the Anglo-French alliance by agreeing that French and British troops should be evacuated in equal numbers.¹³ This decision had a dramatic impact. Whereas, by 31 May, some 150,000 British soldiers had been removed in comparison to a paltry 15,000 French, at the close of so-called Operation Dynamo, on 4 June, the total stood at 224,320 British and 141,842 others, principally French.¹⁴ Such statistics were cold comfort to those 30,000–40,000 French soldiers who remained behind to protect the bridgehead, and who spent the next five years in German prisoner-of-war camps.

The overwhelming impression is that Dunkirk evacuees, of all nationalities, were given a hero’s welcome on their arrival in Britain, this to the astonishment of some French soldiers who feared that they would be accused of letting Britain down. Such was the anxiety of a Lieutenant ‘B’, later killed while fighting with the Free French, who was overwhelmed by the kindness shown to him by the British public.¹⁵ Indeed, the cheering crowds that Orwell witnessed at Victoria and Waterloo were replicated elsewhere. In a wide-ranging thesis on Franco-British relations during 1940, Joan Delin recalls several similar incidents in Southampton where schools were given over to housing the men.¹⁶ Some sixty miles north in Reading, chemistry lecturer Dodgson was so impressed by the manner in which the veterans were received that his diary quotes extensively from one eye-witness

account, published in *Home and Country*, on the scenes in southern England during late May/early June:

Upon arrival I found that trains were pulling up at our little station laden with tired and hungry men and it was our job to cut up sandwiches for them so tables were erected and preparations made for catering on a very large scale. Never have I seen at one place so many loaves, tins of corned beef, eggs, sausages, fruit, etc. Trains were sometimes arriving every ten to fifteen minutes so that we had to work hard to ensure every man having a cup of tea and something to eat. As time went on, helpers came from neighbouring villages and we worked in shifts sometimes 40 at a time. The food was packed in large boxes and taken to the station in lorries. At times, we were held up for bread and butter but in no time such consignments arrived and we carried on. At Headcorn alone, 3,600 loaves, 8,000 eggs and 100,000 cups of tea issued between Wednesday and Friday.¹⁷

Such morale-stirring accounts were commonplace in the British press that summer. One of the more unusual stories was that included in *The Times Educational Supplement* of 15 June 1940. It reported how the playing fields of a London secondary school adjoined the main line from the south coast to Victoria. For nearly a whole day, trains carrying French troops rescued at Dunkirk were held up outside the school.¹⁸ It was not long before the boys had made contact, scampering down 'the slippery embankment' to offer gifts of sweets, chocolates and biscuits to 'these bearded, tired-eyed and dusty men'. By the afternoon, 'convoys had been organised, bringing water and cakes and fruit'. 'Nous n'oublierons jamais cet accueil chaleureux. Merci!', scribbled one soldier on the back of a packet of cigarettes. Once disembarked in London, there were further gestures of kindness. Helen Long, who later acted as an interpreter among other duties for de Gaulle and his wife, recalls how her Paris-born father was so 'devastated' by the collapse of France that he set off to Olympia, where many of the Dunkirk veterans and early Free French supporters were gathering, his car overflowing with *vin ordinaire*.¹⁹ He later arranged for such troops to receive loaves of bread in the shape of baguettes, a gesture that deeply touched de Gaulle himself, who described it as 'gentil'.²⁰ In another show of solidarity, the Palladium Theatre, then showing the play *Garrison Theatre*, reinserted the scene in which French soldiers marched through the Arc de Triomphe, to the sound of the 'Marseillaise', the display having been dropped at the time of Dunkirk.²¹

As with the *exode*, it is the eye-witness accounts that convey the horror that was an integral part of the Dunkirk evacuations. The

following is an extract from the unpublished diary of Mlle Toutain, a nurse attached to the 68th French Infantry Division, who later became one of the founding members of the Corps Féminin of the FFL:

As we got nearer the North, refugees and cars were coming in an endless stream. French army lorries were abandoned, no more petrol! ... Wounded French and English soldiers sitting on the side of the road begged us for a lift. But we had no room, we were stocked with supplies. Suddenly a terrific roar and screaming of a plane overhead made us stop. I was just about to get down, when machine-gun fire started. A German Stuka dive-bomber was behind us. We decided to move on. The screaming of the plane was heard again, and at the same time we saw it disappear in front of us, then a terrific explosion shook the ambulance, almost lifting it up. Jacqueline (my friend and driver, to die at Dunkirk) stopped, we got out and looked around. We then saw that two bombs fell in the road just missing us, I made the sign of the cross but my driver, her hands on her hips said: Not very good aim. I could have choked her! ... We then resumed our route.²²

Despite such bravery, there was no disguising the fact that the morale of French troops was extremely poor on arrival in England. As Robert Mengin observed, 'For us, the French, ... Dunkirk was the collapse of France. For the English, it was a battlefield like any other.'²³ Nor was it likely British propaganda would play well with the French. As Philip Bell observes, broadcasts such as that of J. B. Priestly's in which he urged the steamers *Brighton Bell* and *Gracie Fields* to leave 'that innocent foolish world of theirs to sail into the inferno' merely caused offence.²⁴ Helen Long remembers how the mood among the French, even at the improvised Gaullist barracks at Olympia, was downcast.²⁵ For her part, Gwen Rennie, a nurse stationed at a hospital in 'the south of England' recalls how, after Dunkirk, her ward was inundated with French soldiers and Moroccans, 108 men altogether, only a few of whom were injured.²⁶ Clutching German propaganda leaflets, they 'pelted' the nurses with bread and butter at teatime, and it was not long before a fight broke out between the Moroccans and a French soldier. Rennie was appalled to learn that these men had looted on their way from Dunkirk, and she thus refused a gift of a pair of gloves. When the day came to be repatriated, she records that only two elected to join de Gaulle. To be fair, the overwhelming majority of French troops were never given that choice as, on arriving in Britain in early June, they were immediately ferried back to France, via Normandy or Morocco, to carry on the battle, the intention being 'to

stabilise the fighting front on the Seine, Lower Normandy and the Marne, thus repeating the September 1914 miracle'.²⁷ Not all were keen to return to the fray, recognising the battle lost. One such was Pierre Veydert, but for very different reasons to his comrades.²⁸ An ardent Anglophile and a truly exceptional figure, he was keen to stay on British soil where he believed he could be of most use in the fight against Germany. Ordered back to France, he later became part of the same Parisian resistance network as Samuel Beckett, and was deported to Mauthausen, where he lived out the war, perfecting his command of the German language.²⁹

The soldiers remaining in Britain were soon to be joined by sailors and merchant seamen. At the time of the Armistice, several French ships had taken refuge in British harbours. As with the Dunkirk evacuees, the mood among these men was not good. In a telephone call with his son David, who was serving with the marines in Portsmouth, Lord Astor learned that 'discord' and 'fighting' on the ships was commonplace.³⁰ The younger sailors, worried about their families and economic prospects, were already keen to go back to France. Troubled by this state of affairs, on 30 June Astor addressed a letter to Dr Alexander, a minister at the Admiralty, in which he recalled how, in the West Country, there were several thousand sailors, some of whom had been there weeks, others a matter of days.³¹ On the whole, the 'men and petty officers are sounder in their views about the future than the officers'. The officers' sense of discipline had made them more likely to follow the orders of the Bordeaux government. To win over the ratings, Astor continued, there was a vital need to settle any terms of enlistment in the British armed forces. Overtures also needed to be done through indirect propaganda, difficult as the officers forbade any 'direct approach' to the men; a promise of good pay; and generous hospitality on the part of the local community, especially French-speakers, if possible 'intelligent French ladies'.

Such advice fell on deaf ears. In the aftermath of the Armistice, the British government was deeply concerned about the future of the French fleet and was utterly unconvinced by French reassurances over its future. Nor did it set much store by recruiting among the French sailors who were viewed as highly unreliable, even though rumours quickly grew among an agitated public that they would enlist in large numbers with de Gaulle.³² So it was that Churchill ordered the shelling of those vessels anchored at Mers-el-Kébir to prevent them falling into German hands, an episode that cost the lives of some 1,200 sailors.

After the decision to attack was taken, Spears recalls how he drove his car through Hyde Park, where he saw French sailors with red pompons on their caps playing games with some English girls, prompting him to think of those other French sailors wearing the same uniform in their ships off the coast of Africa, 'What would happen to them tomorrow?'³³ As de Gaulle himself recalls, the British coordinated this operation with an occupation of 'French warships which had taken refuge in British ports'; their officers and crew were 'taken ashore and interned – not without some bloodshed'.³⁴ All in all, some 130 French ships were seized in this manner, among them 2 battleships, 2 light cruisers, 8 destroyers and 5 submarines.³⁵

Hardly the most natural of Anglophiles at the best of times, these seamen bitterly resented the manner in which they had been rounded up. In September 1940, French Welfare officials, visiting camps in the Liverpool area, reported that a recurring complaint 'was the way in which these officers and men were removed from their boats', often early in the morning 'at the point of bayonet' and, virtually 'frog marched', perhaps an unfortunate turn of phrase, 'down the streets to be locked up in some jail or other'.³⁶ Much controversy centred on whether the officers had been bundled into Black Marias. Such officers further alleged that they had 'been looted by the British soldiery'. Subsequent investigations, however, had 'proven that a considerable amount of loot has been found in the possession of the French themselves'. When, earlier in 1940, the sailors' camp at Aintree was inspected, a 'good deal of mess plate' was uncovered along with 'the personal belongings of officers'.³⁷ Apart from seizing the ships themselves, another thing that the British claimed was a sizeable quantity of red wine, some 7,000 barrels in total discovered on board the vessels, and which was subsequently distributed among Gaullist forces.³⁸ Perhaps most important, Britain seized vital French naval codes, which created intelligence problems at Vichy.³⁹

There is little doubt, however, that the French sailors were treated in a rough fashion. Whereas at Dundee, the commander of the submarine *Rubis* was approached in a polite manner, possibly because his men had already opted for de Gaulle, matters were different elsewhere. Warren Tute records how, on 3 July, the two French submarines *Ondine* and *Orion* were docked at Portsmouth to undergo repairs.⁴⁰ Their crews resting on shore, the two sentries were easily overpowered and the boats seized. The captains, Vichot of the *Orion* and Bourgine of the *Ondine*, were not informed beforehand of British intentions and were

brusquely summoned to Fort Blockhouse, the British submarine headquarters, where, as Tute writes, they were presented with an ultimatum:

The Franco-German Armistice terms require the French fleet to be disarmed under the German-Italian control. The British government is aware that the Germans have already broken their word. Under these circumstances therefore we very much regret – but you will realise that we have been so ordered – to require you to choose either to continue to fight loyally and wholeheartedly on the side of Great Britain and its Empire or to return to France.⁴¹

Not allowed to contact their senior officer, the two captains put the above choices to their men, Vichot opting for repatriation, and his junior colleague Bourguine siding with de Gaulle, together with a majority of the ratings. Further along the coast at Plymouth, the crew of the gigantic submarine, *Surcoeuf*, reputed to be the largest vessel of its type in the world, had no time for Gaullist overtures and actively resisted the British boarding party. Two Royal Navy officers, Lieutenant-Commander Sprague and Lieutenant Griffith, were killed, along with a French engine-room officer.⁴² Three other Frenchmen were wounded. Apparently, the man responsible for the deaths of the British seamen was, at the last minute, hauled off the SS *Djenne*, as she prepared to set sail from Liverpool in autumn 1940 with a cargo of repatriated French sailors on board.⁴³

Although this was the only act of bloodshed in the takeover of French ships, it created great resentment both at Vichy and among the French in Britain. In May 1941, Admiral Darlan delivered a speech in which he proclaimed, ‘Au mépris de toutes les lois de la mer l’amirauté britannique a pris l’habitude en ce que concerne la France, de transformer le droit de visite en droit de prise, même quand les bateaux sont vides.’⁴⁴ Within Britain itself, naval servicemen were always going to be prickly customers. Under the military discipline and Pétainist influence of their officers, the soldiers and sailors had been deeply dismayed by the events of May–June 1940, and were quick to blame London for their misfortune. The demoralising speed of the German advance had reactivated suspicions, present during the phoney war, that the British had not contributed enough to the war effort; the British then had the temerity to rescue the bulk of the BEF on the back of the French army. In these circumstances, an armistice, concluded by the most patriotic and celebrated of French soldiers, had been the only solution; yet perfidious Albion had once again behaved in an ungallant fashion,

shelling the fleet at Mers-el-Kébir and interning French sailors in British ports in the most heavy-handed of operations. The manner in which the British subsequently looked after those servicemen exiled from France only exacerbated their discontent.

Counting heads: *les effectifs*

Counting the heads of the servicemen who discovered themselves in Britain during the summer of 1940 is fraught with the same kinds of difficulties as assessing the numbers of refugees. Official figures often contradict one another, and are frequently at variance with those cited in such authoritative works as Crémieux-Brilhac's *La France Libre*. There are several reasons for this. As we have seen, the majority of men rescued at Dunkirk were quickly returned to France. Of the 141,000 rescued at the start of June, 45,000 remained towards the end of that month.⁴⁵ Despite the efficiency with which the evacuations had been conducted, it was difficult keeping tabs on soldiers as they were transported across the country to rejoin the battle. Some degree of repatriation also appears to have been conducted immediately after the Armistice, although this proved increasingly difficult especially when, on 24 July, an E-boat sank the *Meknès*, transferring some 1,200 men to France, at the cost of 400 lives.⁴⁶ It is further apparent that those who rallied to de Gaulle did not do so in one mad rush; they came in dribs and drabs. To compound matters, it appears that the majority of servicemen were not 'interned' in the strict sense of the word, as was often alleged, but were held in makeshift camps from which it was not difficult to abscond; at White City, Léon Wilson recalls being able to move out of the camp almost at will, on one occasion walking as far as Charing Cross Road; there he went to a dance at the Astoria Theatre where he met his future wife.⁴⁷ He later walked as far as Shoreditch, to his fiancée's house, to continue the courtship. Elsewhere, local police authorities reported on French soldiers wandering around the countryside, without any papers, and with far less purpose than Monsieur Wilson. The final complication in counting heads is the question of desertion. To judge from Home Office files, this was commonplace in both the Free French and the Vichyite forces in Britain, although the full scale of the problem is never disclosed.⁴⁸

A memorandum in the files of French Welfare, on the size of the Gaullist forces, reveals both the difficulty in drawing up precise statistics in general and the precariousness of the general's situation in

particular. In August 1940, between 2,000 to 3,000 men were believed to belong to de Gaulle's army at Aldershot; and another 300 were thought to be under the command of Admiral Muselier in the Free French Air Force, although several of the officers were flying with the RAF. Figures for the navy were unobtainable as many men were still deciding whether to sail with the British or with Muselier,⁴⁹ described as a 'cad and a blister' by Rear-Admiral Watkins following a cocktail party in which the Frenchman accused the Royal Navy of stealing his officers.⁵⁰ Crémieux-Brilhac suggests that, at this point, the marine counted 3,200 men.⁵¹ In November 1941, we know that the Free French Navy comprised 287 officers and 3,839 ratings; 20 officers were sailing with the Royal Navy, along with 408 men.⁵² By any reckoning, it was a pitiful number. When, on 14 July 1940, de Gaulle marched his troops past the Cenotaph and the statue of General Foch in Grosvenor Gardens, provoking such headlines as 'France Celebrates Liberty. In London Only', the British public had witnessed almost the entire strength of the general's fighting men.⁵³ As Crémieux-Brilhac reminds us, the Czechs, Polish and Norwegian exiled forces were almost as impressive in numbers as the French.⁵⁴ As Mollie Panter-Downes observed, the fact that de Gaulle's men were housed at Olympia, a building associated in most Londoners' minds with Christmas circuses and the Ideal Home Exhibition, did not help the cause.⁵⁵

Outside de Gaulle's forces, it is possible to identify four other categories of French servicemen in Britain. First, there were some 1,000 wounded, housed in four major London hospitals and three large hospitals in the Liverpool and Manchester districts, presumably casualties from both Narvik and Dunkirk.⁵⁶ By August 1940, 100 of these men were still too ill to be moved. They had initially been cared for by the Centre Medical Français, based at 14 Grosvenor Gardens, London SW1. This official organisation had been set up in early June 1940 with the specific purpose of looking after French wounded from Dunkirk. At the time of the Armistice, however, 'its personnel turned out to be entirely pro-Pétain' and 'left this country for France with the French *Chargé d'Affaires*'.⁵⁷ The Centre had subsequently lost its financial support and was in the hands of just one French representative, a Mlle Herinex, who was struggling to raise enough volunteers. Nor did it receive much support from the French Red Cross Society, which was under the control of Vicomtesse de la Panousse. In the words of Bessborough, this was no match for the British Red Cross and had displayed a 'rather low standard of efficiency'.⁵⁸ The situation was so

serious that the United Associations of Great Britain and France Solidarity Committee (UAGBF), founded at the outbreak of the war, had donated £100 to the Centre, and the British Red Cross was looking at how it could assist the situation.

The second group of French servicemen were convalescents. While some of these had been sent to the Victoria Hospital at Westbury (Wiltshire), the overwhelming majority, 1,650 men and 70 officers, were housed at White City in West London. As a matter of prudence, it was deemed necessary to place the officers at the York Hotel in Berners Street where their Pétainist sentiments would be less contagious.⁵⁹ Significantly, few of these soldiers had been interned.

The third category comprised 1,000 officers and ratings of the French merchant navy 'who had said they did not wish to continue serving on their ships, but wish to return to France'.⁶⁰ They were housed at Crystal Palace, alongside French refugees, and were catered for, in part, by the LCC. Before long, the inadequacies of Crystal Palace, in particular the shortage of blankets and the fact that the men lived under glass with no nearby air-raid shelters,⁶¹ became so obvious that 380 of the officers were moved to the Bedford, Imperial and Royal Hotels in Bloomsbury.⁶² Subsequently, 240 of the men, plus 10 officers, were transferred north to the Wavertree Blind School and placed in the care of Ministry of Health Officials and Liverpool Corporation.

Their numbers, however, were dwarfed by the final contingent of servicemen: the large quantities of sailors from the French navy, 341 officers and 6,206 sailors of other ranks.⁶³ These men fell under the aegis of Western Command, which appointed Rear-Admiral Watkins as its naval liaison officer. Initially rounded up at Plymouth and Portsmouth, they lived in a series of makeshift settlements in the North and Midlands, which also housed 269 colonial troops.⁶⁴ There were seven camps in all: Aintree, near Liverpool, and the site of the Grand National (13 officers and 380 sailors); Haydock, also in the Liverpool area (52 officers and 1,305 men); Arrowe Park (55 officers and 140 men); Trentham Park, close to Newcastle-under-Lyme (49 officers and 1,829 men); Doddington, bordering Nantwich (51 officers, 307 petty officers and 880 men); Oulton Park, in the vicinity of Winsford, Cheshire (33 officers and 959 men); and Barmouth, West Wales (6 officers and 500 men).⁶⁵ Strictly speaking, Barmouth and Arrowe Park were not 'camps'. At Barmouth, the men were housed in billets in the town. Arrowe Park was more of a detention centre, housing unruly elements. According to Lady Peel of the UAGBF Solidarity Committee



Map 2 The sailors' camps in the North and Midlands

there was a further camp at Towyn in Wales, which housed 500 men and 6 officers.⁶⁶ However, French Welfare denied that there had ever been a base at Towyn; the site had been proposed, but had been quickly ruled out.⁶⁷ What is known is that, on 3 August, the camps at Aintree and Arrowe Park were scaled down, and the men placed into smaller units, with some of the officers rehoused in Blackpool,⁶⁸ described by Georges Blond, the writer and naval engineer held by the British since July, as a 'Jewish town' thanks to its seaside amusements and because of its boast that it had not yet been bombed!⁶⁹

At the races: life in the camps

In July and August 1940, the British press, in a morale-boosting effort orchestrated by Churchill, printed photographs of de Gaulle visiting Free French troops at camps 'somewhere in the south of England'.⁷⁰ It is almost certain that these barracks were those at Aldershot and Camberley, where Gaullist troops gathered, having enlisted first at Olympia. By contrast, no photographs appeared of the general visiting

the large numbers of sailors in the north-west of the country, with good reason, as these men proved almost impossible to enlist. Several reasons combined to undermine his efforts, yet a key factor was unquestionably conditions within the camps themselves, especially those sited in the Liverpool area. Even the government recognised that this sort of bivouac, while adequate for soldiers on active service, could not be accepted by 'neutral sailors awaiting repatriation ... without demur'.⁷¹ Little, however, was done to improve matters, creating a host of resentments.

Although conditions in the sailors' camps varied widely, the camps shared similar problems, suggesting that the problems that had been associated with internment camps in the First World War had not been overcome.⁷² The overriding issue was that of the accommodation itself. The best housed appear to have been those men at Barmouth who were billeted in the town, rooms incidentally 'that were urgently required by evacuees from heavily bombed districts'.⁷³ Elsewhere, the majority of men were under canvas, including a handful of officers. When, on 13 September, 29 officers were transferred from Arrove Park to Trentham, they were shocked to find only tents awaiting them. This provoked a vigorous letter of complaint from Captain Albertas who, on his arrival, had initially been offered a corner in a building occupied by British troops and officers: 'J'estime qu'il n'est pas digne d'un grand pays de traiter de cette manière des officiers qui ont combattu deux fois à côté de ses marins et dont quelques-uns ne sont plus de la première jeunesse'.⁷⁴ In the event, Albertas chose to sleep in the open air. Despite the fact the night was a fine one, his dignity had suffered and his anti-British attitude was later credited to this 'studied insult'.⁷⁵ For the most part, however, officers were under more secure cover. At Oulton, they slept in tin huts, and at Arrove Park they were housed in a cricket pavilion.⁷⁶

The shortcomings of tented accommodation were clearly recognised by the British authorities. Visiting Aintree, Haydock Park and Arrove Park in late July 1940, Dame Rachel Crowdy, Regions' Adviser to the Ministry of Information, reported, 'Tents are many of them badly pitched [*sic*], in some cases having subsided owing to the sailors having removed the tent poles in order to saw them up for firewood'.⁷⁷ The fact that many shelters were erected on unsuitable ground was also a problem. In autumn 1940, the playwright Edward Knoblock, once described by John Gielgud as 'the most boring man in London', and an author whose name gave rise to adolescent giggles among London's

literati,⁷⁸ wrote a report on the camps for his new employers, French Welfare. Of Haydock Park, he observed, 'The camp itself is on heavy clay soil, which even with the little rain till now is quite churned up ... In the rainy season this place will become a swamp.'⁷⁹ At Doddington, the tents were at the edge of a windswept lake 'very pleasant, no doubt in summer, but already very damp and chilly on the day we called – October 1st'. With winter pressing and repatriation seemingly no nearer, the pressure was on to find alternative accommodation. At Aintree, the men were placed in riding stables. This provoked a storm of protest on the part of their commanding officer, Captain de Vulliez.⁸⁰ However, on inspecting the area, the captain discovered that the stables were dry, lighted by electricity and, in some cases, heated, although extra stoves were thought necessary. At Trentham Park there were also proposals to move the men into the stables, this time the disused stalls owned by the Duke of Sutherland.

Facilities in the camps varied widely. Not all had hot and cold running water. While Arrowe Park and Oulton both had 'excellent' showers, at Doddington there was only cold water for washing and cold douches.⁸¹ When visiting the Liverpool camps in late July, Spears remarked that the washing arrangements were 'deplorable' although he admitted that the sanitary arrangements were not too poor 'considering how deplorably bad the French are in this respect'.⁸² Kitchens were also primitive. At Haydock, the men cooked in field kitchens surrounded by turf walls, a situation replicated at Arrowe Park where the men prepared meals in 'gypsy' fashion. Matters were relieved by the intervention of various charitable agencies. At Trentham, the YMCA and the Catholic Women's League intervened to set up a series of canteens, and were rewarded with a grant of £200 by the Bishop of Birmingham. Aware of the general shortages, Lady Moncrieffe, based at the International Sportman's Club, was busy getting hold of red wine and *Petit Caporal* cigarettes.⁸³ Spears thought Woodbines, that thin acrid cigarette favoured by Irish navvies, was more appropriate.⁸⁴ Yet, despite these efforts, food apparently remained in short supply and the men were offered an unchanging diet.⁸⁵ Matters were made worse by the fact that cooking utensils were scarce, a point of great concern to the senior French personnel; at Arrowe Park, the senior French officer claimed that it was beneath his dignity to eat off tin plates and to drink from mugs rather than glasses, a complaint echoed by his counterpart at Trentham. It was further believed that such officers might be destroying food to exacerbate anti-British sentiments.⁸⁶ Blond's

comment that men at Trentham killed the deer because they faced starvation should be treated as the comment of a petty propagandist.⁸⁷

Far more worrying were the shortages of hospital supplies, especially serious given the number of convalescents. Medical supervision of the camps was left in the hands of French doctors who were grossly overworked. Whereas Knoblock was generally happy with this level of provision, especially at Aintree where some of the colonial troops were suffering from malaria, Beryl Fitzgerald of the UAGBF painted a less healthy picture.⁸⁸ In her mind, the infirmary at Trentham was a 'scandal': 'I feel ashamed of being a British woman every time I go to the camp and face Dr Laglotte (the camp's doctor) in that awful infirmary.' To be fair, Rear-Admiral Watkins, who it will be recalled was in overall charge of the camps, recognised that the French doctors worked hard and 'recommended that they should be paid for their duties'.⁸⁹ It is unknown whether this recommendation was put into effect. It is further known that the doctors were struggling against widespread venereal disease, but that their officers had prevented them from reporting this.⁹⁰

Although the doctors might have been busy, the men were bored. As a government note observed, 'Nothing demoralises Frenchmen as much as idleness.'⁹¹ On his trip to the camps, Spears noted, 'What was deplorable was the lack of employment for the men. Lack of work and nothing to think about has combined to cause moral deterioration and exasperation.'⁹² While men at Haydock were drafted in to help with the harvest, elsewhere the sailors whiled away the hours smoking, playing board games and listening in to the radio, usually to broadcasts from Paris, hardly a source of pro-British feeling. Aware of the dangers of such idleness, in early August 1940 Lord Astor suggested to Aneurin Bevan, at the Ministry of Labour, that the sailors be enrolled into a French Pioneer Corps, to be involved in agricultural and forestry work, as were other exiled Europeans.⁹³ Such a move would engender pro-British sentiment, reward the men with a better rate of pay than that they were used to in the French navy, and would not contravene the Armistice terms, as they would be involved in a non-combatant role. 'Young and healthy men', concluded Astor, 'tend to deteriorate if kept in enforced idleness without discipline.' Replying on behalf of Bevan, a ministry official replied that his department was merely a technical body and, as such, could hardly begin to place 'these men in civil employment for the duration of the war until the policy has been decided by some competent authority'.⁹⁴ Preliminary enquiries had

been made as to the possible deployment of French exiled labour but, as will be seen in Chapter 5, these became bogged down with technical difficulties.

Unable to work, French sailors became increasingly anxious about money. By early August, the ratings had exhausted their pay. They had been anticipating another instalment from the *mission militaire*, but this was not forthcoming. In this situation, camp commandants had authorised the payment of 6*d* a day as a supplementary mess allowance.⁹⁵ By contrast, the officers appear to have been relatively well off receiving, depending on rank, either 4 shillings a day or 2*s* 6*d*, paid through the Vichy consulate in Bedford Square, although occasionally deductions were made to pay for damage perpetrated by the ratings.⁹⁶ When the officers came to leave White City, British officials were surprised that they possessed 'very considerable sums of English money to exchange for French',⁹⁷ as to the ratings, they had hardly a penny to their name. One explanation for this might lie in an MI5 report of September 1940, which uncovered that officers had seized a large quantity of banknotes, both English and French, at Dunkirk.⁹⁸

Letters from France were a further problem. With the eagerness for news about relatives at home, this lack of information created anxiety and deterred recruits for de Gaulle, although Free French volunteers also experienced difficulties in communicating with friends and relatives. As Stewart Savill of the French in England Fund, remarked: 'Far from being able to send an occasional gift from home, these relations are unable to send even a message to say they are alive, and their fate is a matter of constant anxiety to the men who are carrying on the fight in exile.'⁹⁹ He perhaps did not realise that such families might also have been afraid of posting such messages for fear of reprisals by the Vichy authorities, which, through the *contrôle technique*, closely monitored all mail coming in and out of the country.

Although the communications breakdown within the camps was blamed on the British, something repeated in history books,¹⁰⁰ it was in fact the Free French who were to blame, something Blond was quick to point out.¹⁰¹ In his extensive report of (probably) October 1940, Knoblock discovered that some 200,000 letters, nine-tenths dated June and July, had been held up at Carlton Gardens, which acted as a clearing house. The correspondence had at last been handed over to Rear-Admiral Watkins who employed eight people for five days to sort through the backlog.¹⁰² Problems persisted, thanks again to the Free French who acted as censors on behalf of the British government. In

September 1940, Captain Moret of the Forces Navales Françaises Libres (FNFL) handed over to the commandant of the Crystal Palace camp a list of stipulations that had to be observed by men when writing home.¹⁰³ All letters had to contain correspondence only; the content had to be 'rigoureusement personnel'; no mention was to be made of place names, individuals and affairs in England; and nothing was to be said that might endanger families still in France. Although these were, in many regards, prudent guidelines, Chartier of the Vichy consulate bemoaned the complex bureaucracy of the system.¹⁰⁴ He suggested that sailors' letters be collected by a French *vaguemaitre* – a term that baffled the English, until it was discovered it meant a type of naval orderly or baggage handler – who would put them into mail bags to be handed over to the French legation at Lisbon after censorship. The proposal was thought a sensible one, but it remains unclear whether it was ever implemented. In any case, not long after, most of the sailors had been repatriated.

Given these grumbles, it is no surprise that discipline was a problem. Haydock was the exception where morale was described as 'good' and the men 'neat'.¹⁰⁵ Maybe this was to be expected when penalties were severe: seven days in the guardhouse for hunting rabbits.¹⁰⁶ Elsewhere, matters were less impressive. On visiting the camps near Liverpool, Dame Rachel Crowdy observed, 'Waste material and rubbish is thrown all over the camping ground.'¹⁰⁷ In a later report of 16 August 1940, she remarked on the deaths among deer and ornamental geese over at Trentham, deaths, it will be recalled, that Blond had ascribed to hunger.¹⁰⁸ The trustees for the late Duke of Sutherland, who owned Trentham, were quick to present a bill for the cutting down of trees, the killing of deer and the breaking of locks, as well as letters of complaint about the use of the dairy house as a latrine.¹⁰⁹ Blond's claim that the repair costs demanded of the men ran in to millions of pounds sterling was a nonsense.¹¹⁰ At Arrowe Park, it was rumoured that the men had threatened mutiny, although on inspection this claim proved much exaggerated. A salutary respect for authority had settled in after guards had fired at a Frenchman who had walked too close to the wire.¹¹¹ Nor was it just the British authorities who were appalled at events in the camps. The Free French recruiting officer based at Stoke-on-Trent was aghast at the general lack of discipline, especially 'their carryings on with the girls'.¹¹² Interestingly, locals in the Camberley area made exactly the same complaints about the Free French troops stationed nearby. In his account of exile, Blond was quick to complain of the

seductive techniques of British women who had allegedly targeted married French sailors.¹¹³ Clearly sexual politics, and accusations of *collaboration horizontale*, were a means by which officials on all sides could assert moral superiority when fighting out their battles.

Poor discipline among the sailors cannot be attributed solely to poor living conditions. Part of the problem lay with inadequate British supervision where barbed wire compensated for the lack of patrols. In a letter to Desmond Morton, Spears complained that 'the chief difficulty in administering the French camps is the ineffectiveness and inadequacy of the assistance from the army'.¹¹⁴ The extent of this 'inadequacy' was revealed in a report for Lord Bessborough: 'Rear Admiral Watkins a short while ago asked that at least one company should be stationed at each camp as well as the 15 military police, but none of the camps have anything like this number of soldiers, and the few military police that were stationed there previously have been withdrawn. At one camp the military contingent consists of one officer and 8 men.'¹¹⁵ Nor were the British commandants necessarily of a high quality. Admittedly some passed muster. Major Orchard at Haydock Park drew particular praise, as did Captain Macbeth at Trentham Park.¹¹⁶ In the words of Blond 'un rat à moustache', Macbeth was a temporary officer who, according to Dame Rachel Crowdy, had 'lived in France thirty years and understands the French as well as they understand him'.¹¹⁷ Having taught at the Ecole d'Hydrographie at Marseille, he was a genuine Francophile and had done much to improve living conditions and mutual respect, in particular by organising a football match between French and British officers, which the French had won 4–3. Macbeth even elicited praise from the notoriously disaffected captain of the *Albertas*: 'Je rends hommage à l'activité du commandement anglais le capitaine Macbeth qui s'est employé avec les faibles moyens dont il dispose d'améliorer notre situation matérielle.'¹¹⁸ Elsewhere, however, the English commandants drew criticism. While it was acknowledged that Major Anderson at Aintree displayed a genuine concern for his men, he was thought to perform his job in a perfunctory fashion. In the words of Knoblock, he had 'grown a bit stale over his work', and was principally concerned with the British troops who were also stationed at the camp.¹¹⁹ The 'lack of discipline' and deficiencies in the 'sense of trimness in the Frenchmen's appearance' was, in turn, attributed to this lacklustre leadership. At Arrowe Park, Knoblock uncovered two senior British officers, one excellent but the other far less suited: 'rather the old blustering type of major, I

gather'.¹²⁰ It is not hard to believe that this type of job invited that genre of officer.

Given the dispiriting conditions in many of the camps and the half-hearted leadership of certain camp commanders, it is small wonder that resentment towards the British was widespread. As Beryl Fitzgerald complained to Sir Aidan Baillie, 'Had we a decent camp it might have turned potential bitterness into pro-British feeling amongst those who have been and who I hope will still be our allies in the future.'¹²¹ Yet other factors also played their part, many of which we have encountered already. To begin with, there was a residue of anti-British sentiment, only to be expected among French sailors, and hardened by events at Dunkirk and Mels-el-Kébir. Reporting on sailors in Liverpool, Noble Hall of French Welfare was informed by one medical officer that 'although he hoped Germany would ultimately be beaten, France would never forget that after she had been crushed by the enemy, her former friend and ally destroyed her fleet when it was unable to defend itself and killed more than 1,250 French sailors in cold blood'.¹²² When Sir Evelyn Wrench of the Royal Empire Society invited sixty French sailors to an evening's entertainment at the Empire Rendezvous at Liverpool, English members of the audience were astonished at the hostility expressed by the ratings, together with their failure to appreciate 'the true facts of the sinking of the French fleet at Oran'.¹²³ The manner in which the officers had been rounded up also left bitter memories. The Bishop of Liverpool reported how his wife and other French-speaking women had tended to the men at Aintree. There, the episode at Oran clearly rankled, 'but what sticks in their gizzards is the way they were taken off their ships – at 4 am – with very little notice, and by an armed guard. Somebody blundered over this.'¹²⁴ In the eyes of many sailors, the treachery of Britain had been further revealed in the abortive attack on the submarine base on Dakar in September 1940 and the blockade of French ports. Noble Hall was brusquely informed that the embargo 'was unfair to France'.¹²⁵ 'The unoccupied portion', the interviewee continued, 'had neither wheat nor cattle, and the blockade which could not stop Germany getting food from South-Eastern Europe would be very hard on what was left of France. It was a most unfriendly act.'

Such Anglophobic attitudes caused anxiety in several quarters. For his part, Lord Astor believed that the huddling of men in large camps would contribute to the spread of disorder. In a letter to Oliver Harvey at the Ministry of Information, he urged, 'Do all you can to keep the

sailors in relatively small units so that they do not go Red, or even Pink. Remember that Bolshevism is apt to spread like wildfire.¹²⁶ In a further letter to the Bishop of Liverpool, Astor elaborated on his fears and claimed that, if the men at Aintree continued to be treated like animals they would eventually return to France as ‘potential Communists with a strong anti-British bias’.¹²⁷ There is, however, little evidence to justify these fears. While discipline and morale among the ratings was undoubtedly poor, and while they often disobeyed their British guards, the overwhelming impression is that French officers still retained a measure of respect and military control.

Among the officers, the real danger was not Bolshevism, but Pétainism. Reporting for French Welfare, Noble Hall remarked that nearly all the senior personnel he interviewed ‘were in favour of the Pétain government as *honnête et seul capable de remettre de l’ordre en France*’.¹²⁸ Although he uncovered a high-ranking medical officer who had been a former member of the Grand Orient, the largest of the masonic lodges, most were Catholic with strong Action Française leanings:

They said it was not only in military matters that the world had had a lesson from Hitler. They praised the German youth movement and hoped it would be adopted in France. They talked exactly like Sir Neville Henderson did to me in Berlin. He said Pétain, Weygand, Beudoin [*sic*], Prouvoust [*sic*], were blinded by social prejudice, that at heart they hated democracy and were intolerant of everything that had sprung from the French revolution.¹²⁹

Such sentiments were also commented upon by de Gaulle’s agents. Returning home after visiting Trentham Park, Sylvia Fletcher-Moulton stumbled across a young French officer in charge of the France Libre recruiting bureau: ‘He was in despair and I don’t think enough Stoke/Trentites speak French for him to have got it off his chest before!’¹³⁰ He denounced those wanting to return to France as ‘mauvais garnements’ with ‘some obvious Nazis in their number, responsible for some violently anti-de Gaulle propaganda’.

From where did this Pétainism spring? It was, in part, ideological: a faith in traditional right-wing values, commonplace among the officer class. It also stemmed from the attitudes of the Catholic priests who visited the camps, as we shall see in Chapter 5. Social status further determined outlook. Accustomed to greater privileges and better pay than their British counterparts, French officers had greatly resented the conditions within the camps, which they saw as an affront to their

dignity.¹³¹ Most importantly, their *maréchalisme* originated from the conviction that the old soldier was motivated by the most patriotic of motives. As Blond claimed, his very name was a sufficient safeguard of national honour.¹³² To go against his authority was thus to fly in the face of reason. The war was lost, and there was little point in dragging out the suffering. In this respect, de Gaulle, together with his close associate Admiral Muselier, one of the first high-ranking recruits for the Free French and perhaps the originator of the emblem of the Cross of Lorraine, fared badly. Already known to naval men, Muselier was thought ‘unapproachable’ and lacking in charisma, a view also expressed by Blond.¹³³ De Gaulle himself was an ‘unknown’, but was associated with the army, which was blamed for losing the Battle of France.¹³⁴ He had also disobeyed his superiors. Several considered that his position might initiate a civil war.¹³⁵ This anxiety was noted by Lord Astor who spoke widely with the survivors of the *Meknès*. ‘The argument which appears to have carried most weight’, he remarked, ‘was the suggestion that France must above all remain united so as to prevent the risk of civil war or Bolshevism. Hitler made Pétain and his colleagues believe (just as earlier he convinced Hindenburg and his friends) that civil war is the worst catastrophe a nation can endure.’¹³⁶ Through the defeat of the General Strike, concluded Astor, England had maintained its unity, and it was now desirable to ‘make the French realise that even civil war with its bitterness is preferable to the imposition of permanent fascism’. Just as Pétain had dismissed the possibility of a guerrilla or civil war when put to him by Churchill at the French Cabinet meeting on 11 June 1940,¹³⁷ so too was it rejected by the French officers.¹³⁸ Order, stability, discipline: these were the values to be preserved, and it was precisely these qualities that the officers expected of their men, even though they themselves hardly set an example. Indeed, the only area in which the officers appeared anxious to impose some sort of discipline was in threatening the lower ranks with punitive action should they opt for de Gaulle. In July 1940, the registrar at Alder Hey hospital in Liverpool complained that officers from nearby Aintree had visited the wards claiming that any man who volunteered for the Free French would be under ‘penalty of death’.¹³⁹ It was frequently noted that recruitment picked up when the men were separated from their officers.¹⁴⁰ As we shall see, officers went to great lengths to stymie British propaganda.

The Randolph Hotel, Oxford: a polite exile

The neo-Gothic hotel, the Randolph, built in 1864 and facing the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford's Beaumont Street, has been the scene of many dramas: political and donnish intrigues; illicit love affairs; and literary whodunnits. In 1940, it was the home to a handful of the most prominent French naval personnel stranded in Britain at the time of Mers-el-Kébir, the hotels's interior splendour thought fitting for such high-ranking officers, described by Spears as 'a polite exile'.¹⁴¹ There were six men in all.¹⁴² The first, and most important, was Rear-Admiral Gaudin de Vilaine. A First World War veteran, who had seen distinguished service, on the battleship *Courbet*, he had been the commanding officer of all those ships that had taken refuge in Portsmouth at the time of the Armistice.¹⁴³ Angered at the manner in which his ships had been seized, he was quickly dismissive of de Gaulle. When Thierry d'Argenlieu spoke to him of rebuilding the French navy, he quipped, 'On what will you build?', adding for good measure that Muselier was nothing more than a womaniser.¹⁴⁴ Less is known about Rear-Admiral Cayol who had exercised similar functions to de Vilaine over French ships at Plymouth, except that he was already struggling to maintain control among both his men and officers, who were angered to see British civilians enjoying their summer holidays.¹⁴⁵ Additionally, there were two captains, Le Chuiton and Guillaume, as well as two other captains whose names are not disclosed in the surviving records. Indeed, there is little on these men in surviving official Foreign Office and French Welfare files, except a letter of protest from Chartier of the Vichy consulate who believed their incarceration would play into the hands of German propaganda, a charge that caused some amusement in Downing Street, which wondered which side of the war Chartier was really on.¹⁴⁶ It is thanks to the private papers of the Astor family that we can glean something of the lives and opinions of these senior personnel. While it should be stressed that these six men were held separately precisely so their opinions did not infect their juniors, there can be little doubt these views were shared by a majority of their officers.

It was while on business, visiting Chatham House transplanted to Oxford during the early stages of the war, that Lord Astor learned of the presence of Admiral Cayol, a man whom he had first known at Plymouth.¹⁴⁷ Anticipating that this wounded sea lord would be 'sulky and unapproachable', Astor was surprised at his attitude. Meeting at the Randolph, they 'reestablished friendly relations, good chat, some

laughs'. To get the 'French sailors in a friendly state of mind',¹⁴⁸ Astor made arrangements for people in Oxford to show these senior officers 'some of the colleges and buildings, plus tea'.¹⁴⁹ He further wrote to London requesting that he invite Cayol and his colleagues to the family house of Cliveden, but recognised that this would require a special dispensation as his stately pile lay outside the twenty mile restriction zone imposed on the officers in Oxford.¹⁵⁰ London was apprehensive remarking that 'Admiral Cayol ... is a very difficult person and has been a disturbing influence almost from the beginning'.¹⁵¹ Nonetheless, permission was granted and the chief constable of Oxford informed, along with strict orders that the admirals should, at no point in their journey, come into contact with their ratings.

The two admirals took lunch and tea at Cliveden on the first Sunday in August, before returning to Oxford for dinner at All Souls. The trip provoked a warm letter of thanks from Cayol, who deemed it kind in these 'moments pénibles'.¹⁵² Astor also drew up a lengthy memorandum on his impressions of the two men. He began with an assessment of de Vilaine.¹⁵³ On the 'defensive', the rear-admiral was convinced that 'Pétain, Weygand and Darlan must have been influenced by inside information unknown to us outside'. It was 'further essential to keep France united' as ultimately it would rise again 'just as Germany rose after 1918 and in Napoleon's time'. On the question of de Gaulle, de Vilaine was dismissive, calling him an 'unknown':

Has he any known respected men with him? Who are on his so-called Committee? Does it include Blum or Cot or other such discredited politicians?

Turning to the British, de Vilaine claimed that London merely wanted French ships, not sailors, an observation not far from the truth. Those men who went with de Gaulle would be 'sold' and turned into soldiers. Bemoaning the British blockade, the admiral asked 'What is America? Always late.' Warming to his themes, although 'mellowing' by the close of the evening, de Vilaine dismissed Laval as a 'politician', condemned parliament as 'out of date', and suggested what might be needed was 'some sort of military dictatorship', although Astor observed he had no liking for Hitler.

As to Cayol, he was 'admiring' of Churchill, but still resented the seizing of French ships.¹⁵⁴ He considered that he himself would have ordered the scuttling of the boats rather than let them fall into German hands. Like his colleague, he was dismissive of de Gaulle, believing his

force 'too small to be of much use'. Only later, when the tide had turned against Hitler, might it serve as a 'rallying cry'. In Astor's mind, he was a 'likeable man', with his 'heart still in the fight', but he was clearly worried about his wife and young children, as well as his son who was with French sailors at Liverpool. When out of de Vilaine's earshot, the officer was more candid, describing the events at Mers-el-Kébir as a 'shame', and bemoaning the pro-Bordeaux and anti-British sentiments of some of his colleagues.

Astor's impressions of the two admirals were borne out by a further report drafted by a L. J. Beck, an official at the Ministry of Information's offices at Chatham House, who had invited all six officers to his house in Oxford.¹⁵⁵ Of the two admirals, de Vilaine was 'the most striking and leading figure'. He seemed 'to dominate the others in every way'. He was an 'authoritarian', frequently speaking of 'the need for discipline'. Although not a practising Catholic, he expressed a strong resentment for 'politicians and Jews', bearing a particular grudge against the Jewish mayor of Le Havre, together with a more general hatred of Communists and Russians. Cayol was not such 'a strong character'. He was 'rather talkative and a bit of a bore', with less definite opinions than his superior and generally less well informed about political matters, although neither of the two admirals knew much about current affairs. Taken as a whole, Beck concluded that all six officers at the Randolph were in want of news from France, and reported that they felt they were being 'deliberately kept from seeing French papers'. While there were occasional flashes of Anglophobia, the men restrained their anti-British sentiments and spoke highly of the English people, although de Vilaine found it hard to keep his tongue, a trait put down to his Normandy ancestry. They were, at least, unanimous in their hatred of 'les Boches', but pessimistic about Britain's chances in the coming airwar. In de Vilaine's mind, the Germans were 'invincible'. Oran was a subject best avoided, yet de Gaulle cropped up regularly in conversation, albeit as a *persona non grata*. In their eyes, he had committed the unpardonable offence of having disobeyed orders. In France itself, 'il y a travail à faire', and much praise was heaped on Pétain. The admirals were especially pleased he was appointing naval men to colonial posts, although it was pointed out to them that they were unlikely to benefit as they had probably been put on to the 'retired list'. Whatever the case, their social standing and rank weighed heavily with them. In a separate letter of 19 August 1940, Heather Harvey told Astor that she had recently had Captain Le Chuiton to dinner, where

he had been terribly embarrassed by the fact that he had only one suit; his dress wear had been seized with his ship.¹⁵⁶ He was clearly bored at the Randolph, and annoyed that he could not go to the cinema because he did not possess a gas mask.

Despite Astor's good intentions, on 6 September 1940 Duff Cooper wrote to the proprietor of the *Observer* to let it be known that his Ministry considered 'de Vilaine a hopeless case and that Cayol is completely influenced by him and would not disobey his superior'.¹⁵⁷ Morale among the six officers was undoubtedly on the wane. On 9 September the admirals were described as 'increasingly reserved'.¹⁵⁸ Their ordeal was, at least, near a close. On 18 September, they quit Oxford to be repatriated. On departing, their mood was characterised as 'anxious and resigned rather than happy; but all longing to see their families again'.¹⁵⁹

Clearly, it would be hazardous to generalise about the overall sentiments of French naval officers held in Britain on the basis of British-prepared reports on six unusual and high-ranking personnel. Nonetheless, so many of their attitudes seem to reflect those of their fellow officers elsewhere in England: a respect for military discipline; an admiration for Pétain; a belief that France was somehow in need for renewal; a dislike of the Germans; a seething resentment over Mers-el-Kébir; a strong suspicion of de Gaulle; a sense that their dignity and status had been undermined, especially by the manner in which they were initially arrested; a wish to return to their families; a fear for economic security; and a mistrust of the British and their intentions. Small wonder that in August–September 1940 further efforts were made to segregate the officers from their ratings, especially in the troublesome Liverpool area.¹⁶⁰

Recruiting and proselytising

Although officers and ratings were separated, the concerns of the two bodies of men were not dissimilar, explaining why ultimately recruitment for both the British and the Free French forces was disappointing. Charles Ingold, a fighter pilot and a early recruit for the Free French, noted in his diary how, at Arrowe Park, all the men were in a hurry to return home as they considered the war lost.¹⁶¹ Even de Gaulle himself could not hide his frustration. In his memoirs, he recalls how, on 29 June 1940, he visited Trentham Park where he rallied:

a large part of the two battalions of the 13th Half Brigade of the Foreign Legion, with their leader, Lieut-Col. Magrin-Veneret, known as Monclar, and his number two, Captain Koenig, two hundred Chasseurs Alpins, two-thirds of a tank company, some elements of gunners, engineers and signals, and several staff and administrative officers, including Commandant de Conchard and Captains Dewarin and Tissier.¹⁶²

The next day at Aintree and Haydock Park, he had less luck, being turned away by the British authorities in Liverpool, lest he provoked disorder. Arrowe Park, visited a few days later, proved more rewarding, yet indifference and hostility were still the overwhelming responses. White City proved a particular disappointment, given the proximity of de Gaulle's recruiting bureau at nearby Olympia. Of the 1,600 or so troops that passed through there in the first two months of the camp's existence, only 152 signed up with de Gaulle, a further 34 with the British army, and another 35 with the Royal Navy.¹⁶³ Within the sailors' camps recruiting moved at a snail's pace. Although men at Haydock were relatively enthusiastic, by mid-September a mere 100 men a week were volunteering to serve with either de Gaulle or the British, the latter option being the more popular, largely because the pay was better,¹⁶⁴ although those who did choose thus soon became objects of derision on the part of their comrades.¹⁶⁵ It is also worth noting that in the case of those few eager to enlist, enrolment with the British Army offered a much quicker return to action than would be had by joining the Free French.¹⁶⁶ Whatever the reasons, recruitment soon tailed off. When it was learned that a majority of the soldiers at White City, and men in other camps, had plumped for repatriation, and that some vessels had already sailed for France, 'recruiting dropped badly, as the predominant desire of all these men is to return to their families in France'.¹⁶⁷

For the British, at least, these results were not overly disappointing. Although there were those Francophiles like General Spears and Lord Astor willing to lend initial support to de Gaulle's recruitment drive, elsewhere there were reservations about supporting this campaign. The Admiralty, War Office and Foreign Office all had sizeable doubts about allowing large numbers of French servicemen to remain in England. Whereas the last of these departments was apprehensive of de Gaulle himself, neither the War Office nor the Admiralty wanted to enlist large numbers of French servicemen. Dill, the CIGS, summed up such sentiments when he quipped that all French troops should be told, 'any man who wants to stay and fight here can do; and then I hope they will

all go back'.¹⁶⁸ Not only was the loyalty of the French in doubt, given the advent of the Vichy regime; they would also need to be trained – difficult in view of the language difficulties and general shortage of weapons. As Knoblock commented: 'The difference of language makes it difficult for the them to follow commands. Their habits and their ideas of food are different from ours. Besides the innate French characteristics of questioning and doubting orders might at times lead to serious misunderstandings.'¹⁶⁹ With an invasion pending, it was thus preferable to concentrate efforts on British and Imperial forces. As de Gaulle himself complained, the result was that the British only lent half-hearted support to his recruitment campaign. In his biography of Major-General Spears, Max Egremont recalls how, on 22 July at one London hospital, wounded French soldiers were asked whether they wished to stay in England.¹⁷⁰ None of the nurses involved could speak French, and the invalids were given a 10-minute period to make up their minds. Anxious for news, the men were not impressed and resented being treated like prisoners, a complaint echoed elsewhere.¹⁷¹ As one wounded soldier remarked, 'Si les Anglais nous traitent comme des prisonniers ici, vaut mieux rentrer et être des prisonniers chez nous.'¹⁷² Not that the Free French themselves were any more agile in presenting their case. One official at Saint James's Hospital in Leeds was dumbfounded at the cack-handed recruitment methods of one Gaullist officer who reminded any potential recruits that, should they enlist, they would be immediately under sentence of death; later, he was unable to field any questions about rates of pay, the position of the British and the prospect of returning to France.¹⁷³ So it seems that the example of aloofness set by de Gaulle himself was emulated by several of his officers!

While the government was not inclined to help any real recruitment drive, either for the Gaullist or the British side, it was keen to promote better Anglo-French understanding. In the short term, this would ease discipline problems among the servicemen. In the longer term, it would promote goodwill towards London when repatriation eventually took place. Such a campaign might also distract from criticism in the press. *The Times* followed the fortunes of the soldiers at White City with a feverish interest.¹⁷⁴ Far more critical of the government was the left-leaning *New Statesman and Nation*. In an article for its 'London Diary' of 10 August 1940, it rehearsed several familiar complaints about the treatment of French sailors:

I am constantly hearing fresh instances of our total failure even to try and win the support of French soldiers and sailors. A French merchant ship, for instance, arrived at Glasgow: its crew of 40 was immediately thrown into jail. Then it was transferred to an internment camp near London where they are living under canvas, idle and embittered. No effort was made to enlist the support of the men nor were British seamen from the Seaman's Union encouraged to get on friendly terms with them.¹⁷⁵

The article went on to contrast the situation with the Norwegians. Here, contact had immediately been forged between the Seaman's Union and its Norwegian equivalent. The WEA had also done its bit to encourage good relations among fellow sailors with the result that 40,000 Norwegians were helping in the war effort. The article concluded with a further criticism of government and its failure to create comradeship. It did, though, provoke a riposte from one French colonist André Clast, living in Exeter. On 17 August, the *New Statesman and Nation* published his letter in which he congratulated the WEA and the Ministry of Information for organising talks to French sailors in the Plymouth area, efforts no doubt aided by Lord Astor.¹⁷⁶ In a rejoinder to this correspondence, the editor said how pleased he was that such good work was being done in Plymouth, but still drew a contrast between the Norwegian navy and the French sailors.¹⁷⁷

Ultimately, this attempt to build bridges proved a fruitless campaign. To begin with, the British had to get to the men themselves; they might have been in British-run camps, but they were overseen by their superiors who were especially bloody-minded and threatened their underlings with retaliation.¹⁷⁸ At Liverpool, the Anglican bishop reported how the commanding officers had declined to hand out 1,000 copies of a Ministry of Information tract on the Armistice on the grounds that it was 'propaganda'.¹⁷⁹ At Haydock and Aintree, Edward Shiel, a company director with strong ties to France, was dismayed at the way in which the officers thwarted all attempts to promote propaganda,¹⁸⁰ a situation replicated at Crystal Palace and White City. Major-General Spears had a particularly torrid time when attempting to combat such actions. Visiting Aintree, where French sailors had recently been pelting their British guards with stones, he discovered that the loudspeaker wires had been cut when he attempted to address the officer body.¹⁸¹ On mentioning Vichy, hecklers called out 'the government of France'. Discovering that officers were deploying *gardes mobiles* to prevent the circulation of Gaullist propaganda, he was

fearful for his own safety and, at one point, thought he might be assaulted.¹⁸² Shortly afterwards, the Earl of Derby, who hosted a reception for French officers at the Adelphi Hotel in Liverpool, advised Spears and others not to deploy the words 'Vichy government' as it simply backed the argument that the Pétain regime was the true government of France.¹⁸³

On a day-to-day basis, the lack of good interpreters also hindered attempts to promote Anglo-French goodwill. Few of the servicemen, even among the officers, knew English, and few British troops spoke French. It appears that most interpreters were Royal Army Service Corps drivers and held non-commissioned ranks. In a letter to Western Command, Rear-Admiral Watkins stressed that several of these men had 'carried out excellent work, which has proved invaluable in providing information unobtainable and also in furthering recruiting'.¹⁸⁴ Especially commended were the six corporals and lance-corporals at Doddington and Oulton Park, who were also acclaimed by Knoblock.¹⁸⁵ 'It is regrettable', continued Watkins, 'that these men had been obliged to draw on their private means in order to entertain French sailors.'¹⁸⁶ It was thus recommended that these 'ambassadors' should be given special allowances and promotion. Further praise was heaped on the interpreters at Barmouth and Haydock, although one private at the latter camp was deemed 'incompetent and lazy'. At Trentham a lance-corporal and two privates were said to possess 'insufficient knowledge of French', while one man was to be retained because of his standing among the sailors. Worryingly, at Arrowse Park and Aintree, there were no interpreters whatsoever. Curiously, however, French Welfare and Western Command were reluctant to accept outside help. When the Manchester businessman, Edward Shiel, a fluent French speaker, offered his services, aware that men at Haydock and Aintree were willing to sign up for either harvest or fishing work until the wider situation of the war became clearer, his proposal was turned down.¹⁸⁷ At least, his *démarche* brought the situation to the attention of both the Ministry of Information and the British Council, although it remains unclear exactly what was done.¹⁸⁸

To compensate for the lack of interpreters, lectures in French were arranged. In the West Country, Lord Astor arranged for a Dr Chaput, a French Canadian and professor at the University of Exeter, to give talks to seamen at Devonport.¹⁸⁹ How successful such lectures were is open to doubt. On 14 October 1940, John Christie, 'a teacher of English', filed a report on life at Trentham Park, in which he had

No. 1
Mercredi,
24 Juillet,
1940

J O U R N A L du C A M P

Ce journal sera édité quotidiennement pour vous renseigner et vous distraire. Les dernières nouvelles vous seront données d'une façon tout a fait objective

NOUVELLES RETROSPECTIVES.

LA GRANDE-BRETAGNE RECONNAIT LE GENERAL DE GAULLE.

Le Ministère de l'Information britannique annonce officiellement que le gouvernement de Sa Majesté a décidé de reconnaître le Général de Gaulle, ancien sous-secrétaire d'Etat à la guerre dans le Cabinet Paul Reynaud et président du Comité National Français de Londres, comme "chef de tous les Français libres qui se joindront à l'Empire britannique pour défendre la cause commune des Alliés".

A ce sujet, nous sommes en mesure de démentir les bruits qui ont circulé ces jours derniers, selon lesquels des hommes politiques français entreraient dans ce Comité. Le général de Gaulle a formellement affirmé que seuls feraient partie de ce Comité des militaires et des techniciens en petit nombre.

PLEINS POUVOIRS POUR LE GOUVERNEMENT PETAIN (11 Juillet, 1940).

Au cours d'une séance secrète, heir soir, la Chambre et le Sénat ont donné au Gouvernement Pétain pleins pouvoirs pour l'élaboration d'une nouvelle Constitution suivant un programme fasciste. Le scrutin était de 569 voix pour, 80 contre, et 15 abstentions.

Le vice-président, Pierre Laval, agissant au nom du Maréchal Pétain, communiqua à l'Assemblée un message de Maréchal qui s'excusait de ne pouvoir assister à la réunion. La Constitution sera, paraît-il, présentée au peuple sous forme de référendum. M. Laval ne précisa pas si ce référendum serait appliqué dans toute la France, ou seulement dans la partie de la France non-occupée. De nombreux télégrammes émanant de députés s'excusant de ne pouvoir être présents furent communiqués à l'Assemblée. Il paraît que certains députés de droite raillèrent le nom de Daladier lorsque celui-ci fut prononcé. En plein brouhaha, M. Herriot se leva contre cette manifestation et prit la défense de M. Daladier.

D'après le "PETIT DAUPHINOIS", le préambule de la Constitution annonce: "A travers l'un des plus cruels moments de son histoire, la France doit accepter la nécessité d'une Révolution Nationale. Le Gouvernement doit avoir tous pouvoirs pour sauver ce qui peut encore être sauvé, comme pour détruire tout ce que doit être détruit. La Nation doit prendre une orientation nouvelle et doit faire partie intégrante du système continental de production et d'échange. La France doit, avant tout, revenir à la vie des champs et développer son agriculture. Il est par conséquent indispensable de mettre fin aux désordres économiques par l'organisation rationnelle de la production et de ses institutions corporatives.

Les allemands prétendant qu'il y eut de nombreuses dissensions parmi les Parlementaires français. Certains auraient demandé que les notes sténographiques soient publiées pour que leur opposition au mouvement constitutionnel soit portée à la connaissance du public.

Figure 4 The first edition of the *Journal du Camp*, a newsletter hastily improvised by the government to promote better understanding of the British war effort. This was distributed among French servicemen held in camps across the UK

spoken on English life and customs, addresses he had first delivered at the University of Lyon.¹⁹⁰ The welcome he received was not the same as that he had experienced in peacetime.

Alongside lectures, the British prepared printed material. To begin with, this took the form of amateurish roneoed newsletters, entitled *Journal du Camp*, rapidly produced by the Ministry of Information. From these, it is clear that the British favoured a 'softly-softly' approach, reporting on British successes in the war and highlighting German cruelties. Issue 7 of 31 August 1940 spoke of political developments in France, in particular the emergence of the out-and-out collaborators at Paris:

Il est évident que Paris est aujourd'hui en rivalité avec Vichy – exactement comme la Commune était en rivalité avec le gouvernement légal de Versailles en 1871. Seulement, aujourd'hui, quels sont les maîtres de Paris?¹⁹¹

The answer was Doriot and Bergerey [*sic*], the editors and ideologues of such papers as *La France au Travail* [*sic*] and *L'Oeuvre*. Issue number 8 of the *Journal du Camp*, 1 August 1940, spoke of how Vichy's efforts to mollify the invader 'ne racontent que le sarcasme, cynisme et menaces de repression futures'.¹⁹² After announcing that leading members of the Third Republic were going to be put on trial, the journal referred to a 'mécontentement général de la population'. In a further comment on life in occupied France, the paper reported on high unemployment in the unoccupied zone, angry crowds gathering at factories, food shortages and demonstrations, especially at Marseille, Lyon and Clermont-Ferrand. Ominously, the report concluded by remarking that many firearms had not been handed in to the authorities.

In preparing such propaganda, the Ministry of Information was not short of advice from interested parties. Having spoken to the French admirals at Oxford, Lord Astor urged that the following points be borne in mind:

- That de Gaulle is unknown and a young man. Reply: Among other things, when Napoleon started his career his contemporaries probably said exactly the same thing.
- The French navy would never have yielded a ship to Germany even if they had been allowed to return to France. Reply: If we were able to seize the ships Germany could have done so, especially if the ships had been laid up temporarily and the crews demobilised.

- Continue emphasising the treachery of Hitler. The French don't half understand that. Remind them that Hitler has murdered the young Nazi colleagues when he thought this necessary, has deceived his own general public, has bumped off his own German generals, etc. It is most important to keep rubbing this in: also to explain how Hitler took in the aged Hindenburg.
- Need to prepare the French for the starvation which is coming this winter – this due to Hitler, not to Great Britain.¹⁹³

Whether this advice was heeded remains unclear, but it is known that the *Journal du Camp* gave way to a far more impressive publication, entitled *France*, which had the look and feel of a proper newspaper, being produced on Fleet Street presses. Something of the controversy over this newspaper, its left-wing stance and occasional criticism of de Gaulle, will be tackled in Chapter 5; what should be noted here is its impact on the morale of French troops. French Welfare was upbeat, remarking that this fledgeling paper was 'quite a success and is being freely distributed in all of the camps although the news items are read with some scepticism'.¹⁹⁴ That scepticism was perhaps more deep-rooted than French Welfare cared to acknowledge. In the words of John Christie, the lecturer seconded to the Liverpool camps, the paper was regarded as nothing more than 'English propaganda' and was widely ignored.¹⁹⁵ It is in the Spears papers that a copy of *France*, recovered from one of the camps, may be found with the handwritten injunction, 'Lire entre les lignes.'¹⁹⁶ Beside the phrase 'Paroles d'un chef', the word 'chef' crossed out, is added 'acheté par l'Angleterre'; 'L'ex' is placed before 'Général de Gaulle'. On the reporting of the blockade, there is appended the following, 'Voilà comment les anglais traitent nos femmes et nos enfants en France. C'est vrai que M. de Gaulle lui ne risque rien. Les lieux sont bien au chaud en Angleterre.' Blond reports that when at Blackpool, officers read collaborationist papers such as *Gringoire* and *Candide*, which had been smuggled off French ships in Liverpool port.¹⁹⁷

Repatriation

With such a lacklustre response, Whitehall focused less on promoting Franco-British understanding and more on repatriation, despite the episode of the *Meknès*. Several other factors concentrated minds on this possibility. An unsigned report of 5 September 1940, for the CFR, remarked that the War Office, Admiralty and French Welfare all agreed

'that repatriation is as urgent as ever, more so in view of air raids'.¹⁹⁸ There was also the problem of morale. While a good number of the sailors were out of the public eye in Liverpool, in London it was learned that the French wounded from White City were threatening to demonstrate in front of the American embassy in Grosvenor Square to win over US public opinion and so bring pressure to bear on London to facilitate their speedy resettlement.¹⁹⁹ Moves were quickly put into place to ensure that large numbers of the internees at White City did not abscond. Conditions in that particular camp were recognised to be reasonable; the same was not true elsewhere. In view of the coming winter, which was likely to prove especially cold, the British agreed that it would no longer do to have large numbers of men sleeping in their tents 'under the stars'. Should the sailors outstay their welcome into the new year, they would have to be found new homes and would become an even costlier burden with still no prospect of them joining de Gaulle.

A further impetus to repatriation sprang from the wish to clamp down on the behaviour of the Vichy consuls, especially in Liverpool. Here, the Naval Liaison complained that 300 ratings, who had disappeared from Aintree and elsewhere, had been demobilised by the French consulate.²⁰⁰ The consulate apparently had ready the necessary English documentation for the men to travel on Portuguese and Japanese steamers, and thus back to France.²⁰¹ French officers were also assisting illegal repatriation. Léon Wilson recalls that when recuperating in a hospital outside London, after being rescued at Dunkirk, senior ranks mentioned to him that they could assist him in returning home.²⁰² What is astonishing is that the British should have allowed such behaviour to go unchecked although, as will be seen in Chapter 4, eventually the Liverpool consulate, along with those at Glasgow and Cardiff, was relocated out of harm's way.

While the Vichy consuls might have done their bit to ease repatriation, their government took retaliatory action. In addition to a feeble bombing of Gibraltar in revenge for Mers-el-Kébir, on 3 July the French seized six British-registered ships on the West African coast. On 1 August, the steamships *Hermes* and *Temple Pier* were held at Algiers, and their crews detained at Camp Carnot. While the *Hermes* had 12 British seamen on board and 57 from Calcutta, the *Temple Pier's* crew comprised 40 British ratings, including some Lascars. Through the American Consul General in Algiers, it was learned that 'the official reason for detention of crews of the two vessels is given as alleged ill

treatment of French officers and sailors in a detention camp at Liverpool. The Consul General states that such allegations are contributing to a growing animosity against British subjects in French naval circles, even among persons who have hitherto been favourably inclined.²⁰³ US representatives had thus been asked to look after the crews and help arrange their repatriation. Meanwhile, in Beirut, the French had seized the crews of the *Brodwal*, *Pegasus* and *Lesbian*. Whereas the ratings had been interned, the officers had succeeded in obtaining parole and were living in a hotel. By early October, much to the dismay of the Ministry of Shipping, there had been little success in obtaining the release of British sailors in either Algeria or the Lebanon, and it urged that a full enquiry be made into the conditions at the Liverpool camp to refute the French allegations.²⁰⁴

Although events in Africa called for an early release of the French sailors in Britain, this was no easy matter. To begin with, the men had to be rounded up. Theoretically, this should have been an easy task, yet the lack of discipline in the camps meant that several men had gone AWOL. Blond recalls that he travelled to London, and went to see Stoke City play football.²⁰⁵ Watkins was alarmed to learn that some 500 sailors had returned late one evening after their passes had expired.²⁰⁶ At Haydock, it was reported that 4 officers and 75 men were 'adrift', even though provisions had been allocated to these individuals for some time. It was thought possible that they had already been demobilised by the French Consulate-General in Liverpool or that they had joined either the Free French or the British armed forces without Watkins knowing. Blame, it was agreed, could not be attached to the British commandant as he had only one officer and 10 men to run the whole settlement. At Arrowe Park, a further four French officers were reported missing; another two had gone for two weeks, and it was supposed they had been repatriated by the French consul. For his part, Knoblock claimed some 300 men were at large in the Manchester area, many of whom were no longer wearing uniform.²⁰⁷ He had no doubt where blame lay: 'French commandants are very lax about keeping a proper list of the men in their camps.' Roll-calls were perfunctory and rare. 'It will give the police a lot of work to round these men up', he moaned. 'If they are not caught they will ultimately become a charge to the community, or, what is worse still, will fall into bad habits and end by being imprisoned.' This was also the concern of MI5 whose officers periodically dressed up as refugees and took to the streets of Soho where they mingled with French sailors, eventually asking them to

produce identity papers to prove that they were with de Gaulle, netting both Free French deserters and escapees from White City and elsewhere.²⁰⁸

The other problem holding back repatriation was the fact that the Germans would give no guarantees for a safe passage.²⁰⁹ It will be recalled that on 24 July, the *Meknès*, carrying French repatriates, was sunk by an E-boat. Rather than send the men back to the camps from which they came, they were billeted in Plymouth, Portsmouth and Skegness.²¹⁰ Guy Millard, a former Foreign Office official conscripted into the navy, witnessed the survivors arrive at Skegness.²¹¹ The men were in an 'appalling condition', many without shoes, some half naked, others in women's clothes; the officers, however, were still in uniform, having taken to the lifeboats first. The mood at Skegness was downcast except for the behaviour of one homosexual British guardsman who organised concert parties, and delighted in saying, '500 sailors in this camp and every one of them normal except me'.²¹²

Repatriation was not helped by the fact that Vichy subsequently impounded two British boats that had been earmarked for the task. As a leaflet for the men in the Crystal Palace camp explained, London and Vichy now intended to use French boats, presently in US waters, for repatriation purposes.²¹³ Given the ensuing difficulties over the suitability of the boats to be deployed, the suspicion arises that Vichy itself wanted to prolong the repatriation process as long as possible so as to create good anti-British propaganda. It also appears that, at one point, the Pétain regime hoped to break the British blockade by loading the boats with supplies from Canada and the USA, a move that was scuppered with the assistance of the Americans themselves.²¹⁴ Such delaying tactics naturally played badly with the British, one high-ranking official suggesting that the men should simply be dumped on a Moroccan beach.²¹⁵

The first men to be successfully repatriated were those invalided soldiers at White City, who left, via Liverpool, on 16–18 September. Watching the scenes by the quayside, Knoblock, Noble Hall and Hugh Astor, all of French Welfare, were not impressed: 'too many official fingers in the pie'.²¹⁶ First to arrive, on the morning of 16 September, were the *grands blessés* on stretchers. Rather than being embarked as quickly as possible they 'were kept waiting for some time on the floor of the outer shed where it was cold and drafty'. The French medical officer and the MI5 officer soon fell out with one another, the latter making matters worse by his 'tactlessness'. In Knoblock's eyes, he was

clearly not up to the job and went off in a 'huff', eventually turning up late in the afternoon 'and then did nothing but strut around'. While the examination of the men's luggage passed off without incident, it soon became clear that the Vichy consul did not have enough French currency to distribute. So it was that Western Command in Chester provided some 3 million francs to bail out the situation. The next day, 17 September, was the 'most strenuous' as it was then that the bulk of the troops from White City appeared. Arriving by train early in the afternoon, they had a five-and-a-half hour wait before embarking. They were remarkably patient despite the fact there was 'no food, no drink, no way to get it to them'. Apparently the Salvation Army had been asked to provide a mobile canteen, but had refused on learning the men were not joining de Gaulle. 'A strange attitude', observed Knoblock, 'for an institution that prides itself on following the Good Samaritan's example.' Customs and the censoring of papers followed, both procedures proving farcical, although one man was caught in possession of a bag of diamonds. The next day further special cases boarded the ships, the *Sphinx* and the *Canada*, which were ready to set sail. When they did, 'Nazi planes appeared, and amused themselves by trying to bomb us – an effort which, luckily for our French friends as well as for ourselves, was not successful.' For future embarkations, Knoblock recommended the changing of money at the original camps whence the men came, the provision of mobile canteens (at least two, providing coffee as 'they don't like tea'), and the distribution of gifts such as cigarettes and playing cards at the London stations.

Whether these recommendations were implemented remains unclear. It is known that from November onwards the steamers *Canada*, *Djenne*, *Winnipeg* and *Massilia*, the famous vessel that had carried a small number of parliamentarians from Bordeaux to North Africa, were kept busy ferrying men back to France. By Christmas 1940, 6,574 officers and men had been repatriated, and the French camps were closed down.²¹⁷

One unexpected upshot of their departure was that the British made a determined effort to improve the lot of Gaullist troops at Aldershot and Camberley. When attempts had initially been made to encourage families to show hospitality to these men, it quickly became clear that the public did not distinguish between Free French volunteers and those servicemen desirous to get home, admittedly a difficult task as their uniforms were more or less identical bar the Cross of Lorraine, a point of detail also picked up by the reporters for Mass-Observation.²¹⁸

As Bessborough remarked of the aid given to sailors in northern England, 'helping the French came wrongly to be regarded in the minds of some as service to a body of people who preferred to endeavour to return to their homes than to continue to fight against Germany',²¹⁹ a sentiment no doubt reinforced by reporting in the *Daily Express* which had labelled the sailors 'fifth columnists'.²²⁰ Similar sentiments were expressed by an outraged vicar from Chester who noted how French sailors near to his parish freely moved around and were housed in 'first-class army bell tents' on which were inscribed the signs 'Nous voulons rentrer en France'.²²¹ Further worrying news came from a Ministry of Information poll of January 1941, which displayed that the public, while overwhelmingly against Vichy, were 40 per cent pro-de Gaulle, 30 per cent anti-de Gaulle and 30 per cent uninterested. Nearly everyone canvassed believed that Anglo-French friendship in the future was either unlikely or undesirable.²²² In this regard, it is not difficult to believe that the role of other nationalities in Britain damaged the Gaullist cause. At the height of the Battle of Britain, though the heroics of Pierre Clostermann were always accepted, it seemed in government newsreels that only Czech and Polish airmen were flying alongside the RAF.²²³ This courage contrasted badly with the lack of organisation displayed at Dakar, which, according to Mass-Observation, had given rise to a general feeling that de Gaulle's men were 'ineffectual'.²²⁴

To promote better relations between the Free French and the British, in early 1941 commanding officers of units near Aldershot and Camberley were instructed to invite their French counterparts to 'regimental dances, concerts and other functions'. In addition, families in the neighbourhood, especially those who understood French, were encouraged to take the men 'to their homes for meals and friendly visits'.²²⁵ This proved highly successful. In February 1941, the whole of the Free French army in England was given seven days' leave, and virtually all the men were placed with families where they were surprised by the levels of 'generosity, hospitality and kindness shown to them by the average English person'. Such temporary billeting continued throughout the war. Georges Le Poittevin remembers how he stayed for a week at Wembley among a family who treated him as though their own son.²²⁶ To encourage further fraternisation, trips were organised to the local countryside, including picnics on the Thames between Reading and Shillingford.²²⁷ Within the camps themselves, the AVF, a Franco-British initiative, which we shall meet later in Chapter 5, was especially

active in improving facilities: better sleeping arrangements; more frequent post; and greater entertainments. In July 1943, Lieutenant-Colonel Black could say of Camberley, 'The camp is in good order and calls for no remarks; the messing of both officers and men is better than I have known in any camp.'²²⁸ In December that year, he once again remarked on the 'very good order' of Old Dean Camp, 'a very different state of affairs to formerly', and commented on how the 1,000 or so men were rapidly dispersing to elsewhere in the country, presumably in readiness for the invasion of Europe, thus necessitating the running down of the site.²²⁹

Conclusions

Ironically, the poor behaviour of service personnel awaiting repatriation had favoured the Free French, although it is certain de Gaulle would have preferred more recruits. These were never forthcoming. The overwhelming majority of French servicemen stranded in Britain at the time of the Armistice and Mers-el-Kébir always wanted to return home, regardless of the discomforts that awaited them on their arrival, and it is not difficult to ascertain why. Gaullist and British propaganda had been inept; the influence of the Pétainist officers had been disconcerting; conditions in the camps had been demoralising; boredom had set in; there was a desire to reunite with lost families; the war was considered lost; money was in short supply; de Gaulle himself seemed a dangerous element; Britain appeared untrustworthy, especially after Oran; there was peer pressure to avoid enlisting with 'perfidious Albion'; and the manner of their original round-up still rankled. Yet whatever the rights and wrongs of these matters, it is hard not to feel a certain smidgen of pity for the exiled servicemen. They had not chosen to be in Britain, they endured a hard life in the camps, and knew little of the wider events of the war. If they had been able to forecast events, it is possible that more would have remained. For their part, the British had little wish that they should stay for any longer than was necessary and, to a point, sympathised with their plight, although little was done to improve matters within the camps themselves. When, in early August 1940, unfavourable reports of life in the Liverpool region reached Downing Street, they did not concern Cabinet long; this instead was a matter for French Welfare.²³⁰ Although de Gaulle thought differently, during that autumn Britain had more pressing worries than the concerns of stranded French sailors and seamen.

As a postscript, it is worth noting here the insubstantiality of the claims, peddled by *Je Suis Partout*, that Britain was behind the assassination of Darlan in December 1942 in an act of revenge for the failure to recruit among French personnel in 1940.²³¹ Such allegations say more about the desperate and fabulous nature of collaborationist propaganda. Nonetheless, this Anglophobia was very real and was to be replicated among the French consulates still present in London and elsewhere in the period 1940–42.

Notes

- 1 (Who of her sight could ever tire? Her beauty springs each day anew. Across the straits – and O Great sire, She’s gracious, kind, fair and true), translated in R. Mengin, *No Laurels for De Gaulle* (London, Michael Joseph, 1967), p. 9. Charles was held captive by the British for several years after Agincourt and came to be known as the ‘caged songster’.
- 2 PRO FO 371 28365 Z629/123/17, ‘Report on the Work of French Welfare’ for the Committee on Foreign (Allied) Resistance, 29 January 1941.
- 3 J.-L. Crémieux-Brilhac, *La France Libre de l’appel du 18 juin à la libération* (Paris, Flammarion, 1995), p. 95.
- 4 Among the many memoirs of Free French volunteers, see Général de Boisseau, *Pour combattre avec de Gaulle* (Paris, Plon, 1981), R. Dronne, *Carnets de route d’un croisé de la France Libre* (Paris, Editions France-Empire, 1984), C. Robet, *Souvenirs d’un médecin de la France Libre* (Paris, SIDES, 1994), P. Sonnevile, *Les Combattants de la liberté. Ils n’étaient pas 10,000* (Paris, La Table Ronde, 1968), and the interviews collated by F. Moore, ‘Les Engagés de 1940. Des hommes qui, en 1940, se sont engagés à vingt ans dans les FFL, se souviennent’, in *Espoir*, no. 71, juin 1990, 14–26. On the history of the Free French Forces, see ENSTA, *Les Armées françaises pendant la deuxième guerre mondiale, 1939–1945* (Paris, Institut Charles de Gaulle, 1986), E. Chaline and P. Santarelli, *Historique des Forces Navales Françaises Libres* (Vincennes, Service Historique de la Marine, 1989), and C. Christienne and P. Lissarague, *Histoire de l’aviation militaire. L’Armée de l’air, 1928–1981* (Paris, Charles Lavanzelle, 1981).
- 5 A. Martel, ‘De Gaulle et la France Libre. L’Appel du soldat’, in A. Martel (ed), *Histoire militaire de la France* (Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1994), vol. 4, pp. 77–130.
- 6 See C. d’Abac-Epezy, *L’Armée de l’air des années noires* (Paris, Economical, 1997) and P. Masson, *La Marine française et la guerre, 1939–1945* (Paris, Tallandier, 1991).
- 7 C. de Gaulle, *The Call to Honour, 1940–1942* (London, Collins, 1955), p. 92.

- 8 R. O. Paxton, *Parades and Politics at Vichy. The French Officer Corps under Marshal Pétain* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1966).
- 9 F. Kersaudy, *Norway 1940* (London, Collins, 1990).
- 10 Among the many books on the evacuation, see B. Bond, *France and Belgium, 1939–1940* (London, Brassey's, 1990); E. Dejonghe and Y. Le Maner, *Le Nord-Pas-de-Calais dans la main allemande, 1940–1944* (Lille, Presses Universitaires de Lille, 1999); D. Divine, *The Nine Days of Dunkirk* (London, Faber & Faber, 1959); R. Collier, *The Sands of Dunkirk* (London, Collins, 1961); H. Cras, *Dunkerque* (Paris, Editions France-Empire, 1960); G. Blaxland, *Destination Dunkirk* (London, Military Book Society, 1973); N. Gelb, *Dunkirk. The Incredible Escape* (London, Joseph, 1990); N. Harman, *Dunkirk. The Necessary Myth* (London, Hodder & Stoughton, 1980); and P. Oddone, *Dunkirk 1940. French Ashes, British Deliverance. The Story of Operation Dynamo* (Stroud, Tempus, 2000).
- 11 Darlan quoted in Bond, *France and Belgium*, p. 168.
- 12 Oddone, *Dunkirk 1940*, p. 85.
- 13 A brilliant account of this meeting is provided in E. Spears, *Assignment to Catastrophe* (London, William Heinemann, 1954), vol. 2, pp. 263–96.
- 14 Figures from P. M. H. Bell, 'The Breakdown of the Alliance in 1940', in N. Waites (ed), *Troubled Neighbours. Franco-British Relations in the Twentieth Century* (London, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1971), p. 203. See also P. M. H. Bell, *A Certain Eventuality. Britain and the Fall of France* (London, Saxon House, 1974), p. 17 for a much more detailed breakdown of figures, together with times of embarkation.
- 15 F. Christol, *Comme au temps de nos pères. Ceux de la France Libre* (London, Hamish Hamilton, 1946), p. 69.
- 16 J. Delin, 'L'Opinion britannique et les français en Grande-Bretagne pendant l'année 1940', *doctorat*, Université de Lille III, 1993.
- 17 RUL Box 605, Dodgson Diary, vol. 6, September 1940, p. 310.
- 18 *Times Educational Supplement*, 15 June 1940, p. 225.
- 19 H. Long, *Change into Uniform. An Autobiography, 1939–1946* (Lavenham, T. Dalton, 1978), p. 24.
- 20 Interview with the author, London, 19 April 1994.
- 21 CCC SPRS 1/134, letter of Brendan Bracken MP, to Colin Coote, WO, 27 June 1940. Apparently the audience cheered when the episode was restituted.
- 22 IWM, Diary of C. E. Toutain.
- 23 Mengin, *No Laurels*, p. 38.
- 24 Bell, *Certain Eventuality*, p. 18.
- 25 Interview with the author, London, 19 April 1994.
- 26 G. Rennie, unpublished war diary, kindly shown to the author by Dr Tom Buchanan of the University of Oxford. The same diary is available in the IWM.
- 27 Letter to author by Professor Martin Alexander, 21 January 2002.

- 28 Interview with the author, Mauthausen, Austria, March 1995.
- 29 J. Knowlson, *Damned to Fame. The Life of Samuel Beckett* (London, Bloomsbury, 1996).
- 30 RUL MS 1066/1 Box 38 702, letter of Lord Astor to Dame Rachel Crowdy, Ministry of Information, 30 June 1940.
- 31 RUL MS 1066/1 Box 38 702, letter of Astor to Dr A. V. Alexander, also sent to Ernest Bevan and Arthur Greenwood, 30 June 1940.
- 32 M. Panter-Downes, *London War Notes, 1939–1945* (London, Longman, 1971), p.75.
- 33 Quoted in M. Ophuls, *The Sorrow and the Pity* (London, Paladin, 1971), p. 36.
- 34 De Gaulle, *Call to Honour*, p. 96.
- 35 W. Tute, *The Reluctant Enemies. The Story of the Last War between Britain and France, 1940–1942* (London, Collins, 1990), p. 70. Darlan puts the total at 143. See *Le Figaro*, 1 June 1941, in CCC NBKR 4X/10/3, ‘Dossier Darlan’.
- 36 PRO FO 1055 1, ‘Memorandum of Visits Paid to French Camps in the Neighbourhood of Liverpool’, 5 September 1940.
- 37 RUL MS 1066/1 Box 38 702, letter to Lord Astor, 30 August 1940.
- 38 PRO FO 371 24360 C13565/7736/17, CFR minutes, 30 August 1940.
- 39 Ministère des Affaires Etrangères (hereafter MAE) ZV 291, carton 95, dossier 1, telegram of 22 July 1940 to Peyrouton.
- 40 Tute, *Reluctant Enemies*, p. 66.
- 41 *Ibid.*
- 42 CCC SPRS 1/182, letter to Spears from Ernest Alterskye, 7 March 1949, who had served with Spears in the camps.
- 43 *Ibid.*
- 44 CCC NBKR 4X/10/3, ‘Dossier Darlan’, press cutting from *Le Figaro*, 1 June 1941.
- 45 CCC NBKR 4/261, letter of Noel Baker to Atlee, 28 June 1940, in which he mentions that morale was ‘rapidly falling’.
- 46 C. Williams, *The Last Great Frenchman. A Life of General de Gaulle* (London, Little, Brown, 1993), p. 114.
- 47 Interview with the author, London, 22 March 2002.
- 48 PRO HO 213 1739 203/2/111, ‘Demobilisation of Members of HM and Allied Forces. Synopsis of Information on General Files 204/13/ – Series up to 31st December 1941’, by Cann.
- 49 PRO FO 1055 8, ‘Memorandum on the French Armed Forces in Britain’, no date (summer 1940?).
- 50 CCC SPRS 1/135, letter of Watkins to Spears, 23 August 1940.
- 51 Crémieux-Brilhac, *La France Libre*, p. 95.
- 52 PRO FO 371 28368 Z10127/123/17, Memorandum of the Security Executive, 24 November 1941.

- 53 *Daily Mirror*, 15 July 1940.
- 54 Crémieux-Brilhac, *La France Libre*, p. 95.
- 55 Panter-Downes, *London War Notes*, p. 75.
- 56 PRO FO 1055 8, 'Memorandum on the French Armed Forces in Britain', no date (summer 1940?).
- 57 *Ibid.*
- 58 RUL MS 1066/1 Box 38 702, letter of Lord Bessborough to Sir Horace Wilson, 8 August 1940.
- 59 PRO FO 371 28365 Z629/123/17, 'Report on the Work of French Welfare' for the Committee on Foreign (Allied) Resistance, 29 January 1941.
- 60 PRO FO 1055 8, 'Memorandum on the French Armed Forces in Britain', no date (summer 1940?).
- 61 PRO FO 371 24357 C10102/7559/17, CFR minutes, 13 September 1940.
- 62 PRO FO 371 28365 Z629/123/17, 'Report on the Work of French Welfare' for the Committee on Foreign (Allied) Resistance, 29 January 1941.
- 63 *Ibid.* See too D. Thomson, *Two Frenchmen. Pierre Laval and Charles de Gaulle* (London, The Cresset Press, 1951), p. 162 and Chaline and Santarelli, *Forces Navales*, p. 22.
- 64 PRO FO 371 28365 Z629/123/17, 'Report on the Work of French Welfare' for the Committee of Foreign (Allied) Resistance, 29 January 1941.
- 65 PRO FO 1055 1, 'Report on French Camps', Edward Knoblock, no date (October? 1940). M. Kochan, *Britain's Internees in the Second World War* (London, Macmillan, 1983), pp. 37–40, recalls how the racecourse at Kempton Park was used as a processing centre for internees.
- 66 PRO FO 1055 1, letter of Lady Peel to Oliver Hardy, 9 August 1940.
- 67 PRO FO 1055 1, 'Report on French Camps', Edward Knoblock, no date (October? 1940).
- 68 PRO 1055 1, 'Report on Visit to French Camps in the Liverpool Area by Dame Rachel Crowdy, 29–31 July 1940'.
- 69 G. Blond, *L'Angleterre en guerre. Récit d'un marin français* (Paris, Grasset, 1941), p. 185.
- 70 See the photograph reproduced in Bell, *Certain Eventuality*. It is well known that de Gaulle disliked being promoted in this fashion and refused photographs of himself and his family, largely to shield his handicapped daughter, Anne. One of the rare photographs of the general and his wife appeared in the *Daily Herald*, 24 June 1940. See M.-L. Clausard, 'De Gaulle et la presse anglaise en 1940. Du ministre inconnu au célèbre homme d'Etat', *Mémoire de maîtrise*, University of Paris X–Nanterre, 1997, p. 149.
- 71 PRO FO 371 28365 Z629/123/17, 'Report on the Work of French Welfare' for the Committee on Foreign (Allied) Resistance, 29 January 1941.

- 72 R. Graves, *Goodbye to all that* (London, Penguin, 1960 edn), p. 73.
- 73 PRO FO 1055 1, letter of Lord Bessborough to R. J. B. Anderson, Ministry of Shipping, 2 October 1940.
- 74 PRO FO 1055 1, letter of capitaine Albertas to Rear-Admiral Watkins, 21 September 1940.
- 75 PRO FO 1055 1, 'Report on French Camps', Edward Knoblock, no date (October? 1940).
- 76 *Ibid.*
- 77 PRO FO 1055 1, 'Report on Visit to French Camps in the Liverpool Area by Dame Rachel Crowdy, 29–31 July 1940'.
- 78 J. Mortimer, *Summer of a Dormouse* (London, Penguin, 2000), p. 175.
- 79 PRO FO 1055 1, 'Report on French Camps', Edward Knoblock, no date (October? 1940).
- 80 *Ibid.*
- 81 *Ibid.*
- 82 PRO FO 1055 1, 'Major General Spears' Report on the Situation in the Camps Occupied by French Sailors in the Neighbourhood of Liverpool, 31 July 1940'.
- 83 RUL MS 1066/1 Box 38 702, letter of Lady Moncrieffe to Lord Astor, 19 November 1940.
- 84 CCC SPRS 1/134, note of 3 July 1940, and a cigarette once favoured by the author in different days!
- 85 G. Thierry d'Argenlieu, *Souvenirs de guerre, juin 1940–janvier 1941* (Paris, Plon, 1973), p. 107.
- 86 PRO FO 1055 1, 'Report on Visit to French Camps in the Liverpool Area by Dame Rachel Crowdy, 29–31 July 1940'.
- 87 Blond, *L'Angleterre*, p. 150.
- 88 PRO FO 1055 1, letter of Beryl Fitzgerald to Sir Aidan Baillie, French Welfare, 10 September 1940.
- 89 PRO FO 1055 8, 'Report by Admiral Dickens on the French Camps, 6 September 1940'.
- 90 CCC SPRS 1/135, Report of Watkins to Dickens, 13 August 1940.
- 91 CCC NBKR 4/261, 'Employment and Morale of French Troops in Great Britain', 15 July 1940.
- 92 PRO FO 1055 1, 'Major General Spears' Report on the Situation in the Camps Occupied by French Sailors in the Neighbourhood of Liverpool, 31 July 1940'.
- 93 RUL MS 1066/1 Box 38 702, letter of Lord Astor to Aneurin Bevan, 2 August 1940.
- 94 RUL MS 1066/1 Box 38 702, letter of Scott, Ministry of Labour, 7 September 1940.
- 95 PRO FO 1055 1, 'Report on Visit to French Camps in the Liverpool Area by Dame Rachel Crowdy, 29–31 July 1940'.

- 96 PRO FO 371 24353 C10337/7407/17, intercepted letter out of Haydock.
- 97 PRO FO 1055 1, 'Report on French Camps', Edward Knoblock, no date, (October? 1940).
- 98 CCC SPRS 1/135, note of MI5 to Spears, 6 September 1940.
- 99 RUL MS 1066/1 Box 38 702, letter of Stewart Savill to Lord Astor, 12 November 1940.
- 100 Martel, 'De Gaulle et la France Libre', and Masson, *La Marine*, p. 193.
- 101 Blond, *L'Angleterre*, p. 101.
- 102 PRO FO 1055 1, 'Report on French Camps', Edward Knoblock, no date (October? 1940).
- 103 LMA LCC We/M (1) Box 12, letter of Moret to Commandant of the Crystal Palace Camp, September 1940.
- 104 PRO FO 1055 1, letter of Speaight, Foreign Office, to Brennan, French Welfare, 4 October 1940.
- 105 PRO FO 1055 1, 'Report on French Camps', Edward Knoblock, no date (October? 1940).
- 106 PRO FO 371 24353 C10337/7407/17, intercepted letter.
- 107 PRO FO 1055 1, 'Report on Visit to French Camps in the Liverpool Area by Dame Rachel Crowdy, 29–31 July 1940'.
- 108 PRO FO 1055 1, letter of Crowdy to Bessborough, 16 August 1940.
- 109 CCC SPRS 1/134, letter of 26 June 1940.
- 110 Blond, *L'Angleterre*, p. 150.
- 111 PRO FO 1055 1, 'Major General Spears' Report on the Situation in the Camps Occupied by French Sailors in the Neighbourhood of Liverpool, 31 July 1940'.
- 112 PRO FO 1055 1, letter of Hon. Sylvia Fletcher-Moulton to Lady Reading, 13 October 1940.
- 113 Blond, *L'Angleterre*, p. 112.
- 114 PRO FO 1055 1, letter of Spears to Morton, 28 August 1940.
- 115 PRO FO 1055 8, 'Report by Admiral Dickens on the French Camps, 6 September 1940'.
- 116 PRO FO 1055 1, 'Report on French Camps', Edward Knoblock, no date (October? 1940).
- 117 PRO FO 1055 1, letter of Dame Rachel Crowdy to Bessborough, French Welfare, 16 August 1940. See, too, Blond, *L'Angleterre*, p. 148.
- 118 PRO 1055 1, letter from le Capitaine de Frégate *Albertas* to contre-amiral Watkins, 21 September 1940.
- 119 PRO FO 1055 1, 'Report on French Camps', Edward Knoblock, no date (October? 1940).
- 120 *Ibid.*
- 121 PRO FO 1055 1, letter of Fitzgerald to Sir Aidan Baillie, MP, 10 September 1940.

- 122 PRO FO 1055 1, 'Note for Lord Bessborough', 21 September 1940, by H. Noble Hall.
- 123 PRO FO 1055 1, letter of Sir Evelyn Wrench, to Duff Cooper, Ministry of Information, 16 August 1940.
- 124 RUL MS 1066/1 Box 38 702, letter of the Bishop of Liverpool to Lord Astor, 14 August 1940.
- 125 PRO FO 1055 1, 'Note for Lord Bessborough', 21 September 1940, by H. Noble Hall.
- 126 RUL MS 1066/1 Box 38 702, letter of Lord Astor to Oliver Harvey, 8 August 1940.
- 127 RUL MS 1066/1 Box 38 702, letter of Lord Astor to the Bishop of Liverpool, 12 August 1940.
- 128 PRO FO 1055 1, 'Note for Lord Bessborough', 21 September 1940, by H. Noble Hall.
- 129 *Ibid.*
- 130 PRO FO 1055 1, letter from Sylvia Fletcher-Moulton to Lady Reading, 13 October 1940.
- 131 PRO FO 1055 1, 'Report on French Camps', Edward Knoblock, no date (October? 1940).
- 132 Blond, *L'Angleterre*, p. 92.
- 133 Masson, *La Marine*, p. 131. See, too, E. Muselier, *De Gaulle contre le gaullisme* (Paris, Editions du Chêne, 1946).
- 134 PRO FO 1055 1, 'Major General Spears' Report of the Situation in the Camps Occupied by French Sailors in the Neighbourhood of Liverpool, 31 July 1940'.
- 135 PRO FO 1055 1, 'Memorandum of Visits Paid to French Camps in the Neighbourhood of Liverpool, 5 September 1940'.
- 136 RUL MS 1066/1 Box 38 702, letter of Lord Astor to Oliver Harvey, 8 August 1940.
- 137 On this meeting, see Spears, *Assignment*, pp. 133–59.
- 138 PRO FO 1055 1, 'Memorandum of Visits Paid to French Camps in the Neighbourhood of Liverpool, 5 September 1940'.
- 139 PRO FO 371 24339 C7797/7328/17, letter of Registrar to Major Allen, 22 July 1940.
- 140 CCC SPRS 1/135, Memorandum by Watkins, 27 August 1940.
- 141 CCC SPRS 1/135, letter of Spears to Sir Ronald Tree, MP, 1 August 1940, who had invited the French entourage to his house, Ditchley Park, north of Oxford.
- 142 RUL MS 1066/1 Box 38 702, letter of Lord Astor to AV, 9 September 1940.
- 143 Tute, *Reluctant Enemies*, p. 67.
- 144 Thierry d'Argenlieu, *Souvenirs*, pp. 75–6.
- 145 Sonnevile, *Les Combattants*, p. 13.

- 146 PRO FO 371 24358 C7920/7559/17, letter of Chartier to Morton, 31 July 1941.
- 147 RUL MS 1066/1 Box 38 702, letter of Lord Astor to AV, 31 July 1940.
- 148 *Ibid.*
- 149 RUL MS 1066/1 Box 38 702, letter of Lord Astor to Oliver Harvey, Ministry of Information, 1 August 1940.
- 150 RUL MS 1066/1 Box 38 702, letter of Lord Astor to AV, 31 July 1940.
- 151 RUL MS 1066/1 Box 38 702, letter of AV to Lord Astor, 1 August 1940.
- 152 RUL MS 1066/1 Box 38 702, letter of Cayol to Lord Astor, no date (early August 1940).
- 153 RUL MS 1066/1 Box 38 702, unsigned and undated document.
- 154 *Ibid.*
- 155 RUL MS 1066/1 Box 38 702, letter of L. J. Beck to Lord Astor, 23 August 1940.
- 156 RUL MS 1066/1 Box 38 702, letter of Heather Harvey to Lord Astor, 19 August 1940.
- 157 RUL MS 1066/1 Box 38 702, letter of Duff Cooper to Lord Astor, 6 September 1940.
- 158 RUL MS 1066/1 Box 38 702, letter of Lord Astor to AV, 9 September 1940.
- 159 RUL MS 1066/1 Box 38 702, letter of Heather Harvey to Lord Astor, 19 September 1940.
- 160 RUL MS 1066/1 Box 38 702, letter of Heather Harvey to Lord Astor, 5 August 1940.
- 161 G. Ingold, *Un matin bien rempli ou la vie d'un pilote de chasse de la France Libre, 1921–1941* (Paris, Charles Lavauzelle, 1969), p. 106.
- 162 De Gaulle, *Call to Honour*, p. 94.
- 163 PRO FO 371 28365 Z629/123/17, 'Report on the Work of French Welfare' for the Committee on Foreign (Allied) Resistance, 29 January 1941.
- 164 PRO FO 1055 1, 'Report on French Camps', Edward Knoblock, no date (October? 1940).
- 165 Letter to the author by Georges Le Poittevin, 8 February 2002.
- 166 Interview with Léon Wilson, 22 March 2002.
- 167 PRO FO 1055 1, 'Report on French Camps', Edward Knoblock, no date (October? 1940).
- 168 Quoted in Bell, *Certain Eventuality*, p. 197.
- 169 PRO FO 1055 1, 'Report on French Camps', Edward Knoblock, no date (October? 1940).
- 170 M. Egremont, *Under Two Flags. The Life of Major General Sir Edward Spears* (London, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1997), p. 199.
- 171 CCC SPRS 1/134, letter of Virginia Cloe to Spears, 22 July 1940.
- 172 CCC SPRS 1/134, letter to Spears from C. Coote, War Office, 11 July 1940.

- 173 PRO FO 371 24355 C8460/7559/17, letter from Miss Ruth Newling to Halifax, 1 August 1940.
- 174 Various editions for July and August 1940.
- 175 *New Statesman and Nation* (hereafter *NS & N*), 10 August 1940, vol. XX, no. 494, p. 130.
- 176 *NS & N*, 17 August 1940, vol. XX, no. 495, p. 160 and PRO FO 1055 8, 'Memorandum on the French Armed Forces in Britain', no date (Summer 1940?).
- 177 *NS & N*, 17 August 1940, vol. XX, no. 495, p. 160.
- 178 RUL MS 1066/1 Box 38 702, letter of Lord Astor to Dame Rachel Crowdy, Ministry of Information, 4 July 1940, in which he mentioned that on board French battleships in Cornwall notices announcing the Armistice terms had gone up stating that anyone who disobeyed these would be treated as *francs-tireurs* and retaliation would be taken against their families in France.
- 179 RUL MS 1066/1 Box 38 702, letter of the Bishop of Liverpool to Lord Astor, 14 August 1940.
- 180 PRO FO 1055 1, letter of Edward Shiel, to French Welfare, 20 July 1940.
- 181 Egremont, *Under Two Flags*, p. 200.
- 182 PRO FO 1055 1, 'Major General Spears' Report of the Situation in the Camps Occupied by French sailors in the Neighbourhood of Liverpool, 31 July 1940'.
- 183 CCC SPRS 1/135, letter of the Earl of Derby to Spears, 23 August 1940.
- 184 PRO FO 1055 1, Report from Rear-Admiral Watkins to HQ, Western Command, 9 September 1940.
- 185 PRO FO 1055 1, 'Report on French camps', Edward Knoblock, no date (October? 1940).
- 186 PRO FO 1055 1, Report from Rear-Admiral Watkins to HQ, Western Command, 9 September 1940.
- 187 PRO FO 1055 1, letter of Edward Shiel, to French Welfare, 20 July 1940.
- 188 PRO FO 1055 1, letter of H. B. Brennan to T. P. Tunnard-Moore, acting secretary of Advisory Committee on British Teachers Abroad, British Council, 17 August 1940.
- 189 RUL MS 1066/1 Box 38 702, letter of Lord Astor to Oliver Harvey, 26 July 1940.
- 190 PRO FO 1055 1, letter of John Christie, 14 October 1940.
- 191 LMA LCC We/M (1) Box 12, *Journal du Camp*, no. 7, 31 August 1940. Issues are also to be found in RUL MS 1066/1 Box 38 702.
- 192 LMA LCC We/M (1) Box 12, *Journal du Camp*, no. 8, 1 August 1940.
- 193 RUL MS 1066/1 Box 38 702, letter of Lord Astor to Oliver Harvey, 5 August 1940.
- 194 PRO FO 1055 1, 'Memorandum of Visits Paid to French camps in the Neighbourhood of Liverpool, 5 September 1940'.

- 195 PRO FO 1055 1, letter of John Christie, 14 October 1940.
- 196 CCC SPRS 1/135, contains the document.
- 197 Blond, *L'Angleterre*, p. 139.
- 198 PRO FO 1055 3, Memorandum of 5 September 1940.
- 199 PRO FO 371 24355 C8461/7559/17, Foreign Office Minute 13 August 1940. In an interview with the author (22 March 2002), Léon Wilson had no recollection of this episode.
- 200 PRO FO 371 24356 C9280/7559/17, note of 28 August 1940.
- 201 PRO FO 371 24353 C10337/7407/17, intercepted letter from Haydock.
- 202 Interview with the author, London, 22 March 2002.
- 203 PRO FO 1055 1, letter of Theodore C. Achilles, American Embassy to Sir George R. Warner, Foreign Office, 19 September 1940.
- 204 PRO FO 1055 1, letter of R. J. B. Anderson, Ministry of Shipping, to Lord Bessborough, 2 October 1940.
- 205 Blond, *L'Angleterre*, pp. 44–8, 169.
- 206 PRO FO 1055 1, Communication Sheet, from Watkins to General Officer Commanding HQ Western Command, 30 September 1940.
- 207 PRO FO 1055 1, 'Report on French Camps', Edward Knoblock, no date (October? 1940).
- 208 PRO FO 371 24360 C13565/7736/17, CFR minutes, 28 November 1940.
- 209 Blond, *L'Angleterre*, p. 68 naturally claims the contrary.
- 210 PRO FO 1055 8, 'Memorandum on the French Armed Forces in Britain', no date (summer 1940?). See M. Gilbert, *The Second World War* (London, Collins, 1991), p. 111. Blond was also on the *Meknès*. See Blond, *L'Angleterre*, pp. 71–2.
- 211 PRO FO 371 24355 C8323/7559/17, letter received in the Foreign Office, 12 August 1940.
- 212 *Ibid.*
- 213 LMA LCC We/M (1) Box 12, leaflet 'Le Repatriement des marins français'.
- 214 PRO FO 371 24357 C11430/7559/17, telegram to Washington embassy, 28 October 1940.
- 215 CCC SPRS 1/135, Memorandum of 27 August 1940 by General Finlayson.
- 216 PRO FO 1055 6, 'The Embarkation of French Wounded at Liverpool', by Knoblock, 23 September 1940.
- 217 PRO FO 371 28365 Z629/123/17, 'Report on the Work of French Welfare' for the Committee on Foreign (Allied) Resistance, 29 January 1941.
- 218 M-O FR 566, 'Public opinion about the French: opinion trends, 1939–1941', report dated 1 February 1941.
- 219 PRO FO 371 24347 C13466/7328/17, letter of Bessborough to de Gaulle, 2 December 1940. This led Bessborough to ask de Gaulle to speak at the

- Savoy to broadcast his cause. When he failed to reply, the Foreign Office mischievously toyed with the idea of forwarding this particular example of the general's rudeness to the Royal Thames Yacht Club, which wished to put him up as an honorary member.
- 220 Blond, *L'Angleterre*, p. 124.
- 221 CCC SPRS 1/135, letter from Rev. H. E. B—, 22 August 1940, destined for *The Times*, yet not published.
- 222 PRO FO 371 28419 Z150/150/17, CFR minutes, 30 January 1941.
- 223 Letter to the author from Professor Martin Alexander, 21 January 2002.
- 224 M-O FR 566, 'Public opinion about the French: opinion trends, 1939–1941', report dated 1 February 1941.
- 225 PRO FO 1055 10, 'Report of visit by Lt.-Col. C. Black DSO, on Friday, 14th February, 1941'.
- 226 Letter to the author, 2 March 2002. Such kindness, he continues, was probably the reason why he stayed in England, marrying a British girl from a family with whom he stayed while convalescing from illness.
- 227 PRO FO 1055 10, 'Rapport sur une visite à Old Dean Camp en compagnie du Sous Chef de l'Etat Major Français', by Lt.-Col. Black, 4 June 1941.
- 228 PRO FO 1055 10, Memorandum, 5 July 1943, by Claud Black.
- 229 PRO FO 1055 10, 'Report on a Visit to the French Centre of Military Instruction, Old Dean Camp, Camberley, by Lt.-Col. Claud Black, WO, 1.12.43'.
- 230 J. Colville, *The Fringes of Power. Downing Street Diaries* (London, Hodder & Stoughton, 1985, vol. 1, p. 243, although in his own memoirs Churchill expresses concern over the camps. See *The Second World War* (London, Collins, 1949), vol. 2, p. 150.
- 231 *Je Suis Patrouil*, 7 January 1943. I am grateful to David Smith for this reference.