

The surveillance of exile: the Vichy consulates

Whom have you come here to insult? England in her people or France in her exile? Leave freedom in peace!

(Victor Hugo on Napoleon III's visit to England)¹

The history of Vichy at London is usually told as the secretive and mysterious negotiations conducted in late 1940 between Churchill and Pétain, a line of communication manned by such self-appointed intermediaries as the Canadian diplomat Jean Dupuy and the enigmatic Professor Louis Rougier. This is the so-called 'double game' strategy, the notion that Pétain hoodwinked the Germans by professing his genuine interest in collaboration while persuading Britain to ease its blockade on France and so allow General de Gaulle to carry the torch of resistance overseas. Contrary to what is sometimes thought, the double-game theory was not an invention unveiled at the marshal's trial in 1945 by his defence lawyer Jacques Isorni; instead it originated in the minds of those Pétainists of the first hour who refused to believe that their hero was consorting with the Germans unless he possessed some ulterior motive, especially when he met Hitler at the hitherto unknown railway station of Montoire-sur-Loir on 24 October 1940, their railway carriage parked conveniently near a tunnel so it could be shunted to safety should the RAF appear on the horizon. Jules Roy remembers being informed, 'trust the old fox, he's going to con Adolf.'² While chastising Pétain for his government's anti-Semitism, as late as 1942 the right-wing Resistance journal *Défense de la France*, founded in the cellars of the Sorbonne, acknowledged that in his foreign policy the marshal was 'resisting' and that this was 'too shrewd a game to be played in public'.³ It was, though, those unreconstructed Pétainists such as Isorni, Rougier and Louis-Dominique Girard who, in the aftermath of the marshal's disgrace of 1945, resuscitated the

mythology of a double game. Girard, a former member of Pétain's entourage and later the author of a sensationalist biography of his hero, disclosing details of the marshal's many mistresses,⁴ encapsulated the sense of this supposed diplomacy in the title of his 1947 publication, *Montoire. Verdun diplomatique?*⁵ a work that so scandalised the Ministry of the Interior that it was classified alongside works of pornography and thus banned from being displayed in shop windows.⁶ It is tempting to believe that had it really contained erotica rather than dreary, and forged, annexes about Franco-British relations then the senile old man, held prisoner on the Île d'Yeu, and suffering from visions of naked women, would have bothered to read it. When presented with a copy by his wife, he put it to one side complaining that it was far too long; only later did he enthuse about its contents, and even then it is unclear whether he had actually read the thing. After all, reading had never been his forte, unless it was the romantic tales of Sir Walter Scott.

The sterling endeavours of diplomatic historians, notably R. T. Thomas, Jean-Baptiste Duroselle and Robert Frank, have since exposed the double-game theory as pure fantasy, something dreamt up in the febrile minds of purblind *maréchalistes*.⁷ While it is certain that London maintained a dialogue with Vichy during 1940, this was in the forlorn hope, entertained most especially by the Foreign Office, which despaired of de Gaulle, that the marshal's regime might reconstitute itself in Algeria, taking the sizeable French navy with it. Pétain would have none of this. In unconscious imitation of Lord Nelson, another warrior keen to thwart Anglo-French understanding who placed his blind eye to the telescope and declared 'I see no ships', in December 1940 the Vichy leader immediately denied having received proposals from Churchill stating that Britain would assist France militarily so long as it re-entered the fight from North Africa.⁸

There remains an underside to this London–Vichy dialogue, a story that has never been told and which has been previously dismissed as unimportant, namely the life of those Vichy consuls, both in London and other major cities, who remained in Britain after the severing of diplomatic relations in July 1940. Certainly de Gaulle was wary of their presence. While the soot-stained brick frontage of the Vichy consulate in Bedford Square could not compare with the Regency grandeur of the white-marbled Carlton Gardens, the very presence of these officials was a source of discomfort and a reminder of his own parlous position. That few volunteers, whether expatriates or the marooned sailors of

Narvik and Dunkirk, enlisted in the Free French was frequently blamed on these consuls, notably those at London, Liverpool and Newcastle, who were believed to be illegally assisting refugees and service personnel with repatriation. With hindsight, it is easy to scoff at such paranoia, but it was perfectly understandable, given the general's precarious footing, and was to some extent justified. It should be further stressed that the British, too, kept a close watch on the consular staff, fearful lest they constituted a fifth column and instigated discontent among the many French communities.

This is the history of that potential fifth column. Rather than being the story of secretive, double-talk conversations between London and Vichy conducted by shady emissaries, it is an illustration of how the remorseless wheels of petty bureaucracy – form-filling, passport applications and personal references – kept turning despite the breakdown of diplomatic relations. The history of the consuls is also that of uninspiring men, caught up in bewildering circumstances, who had to please two masters, Vichy and the British, and who inevitably ended up satisfying neither. It is, moreover, a tale of subterfuge, a deliberate attempt to promote Pétainist sentiment among the French in Britain and, indeed, on occasion, to assist with repatriation. Whether the Vichy consuls were engaged in more nefarious activities – the compiling of lists of Gaullist and Allied sympathisers in order that retaliatory action could be taken against their families in France, and the passing on of military and political intelligence – remains a moot point.

The diplomatic community in London: adieu

On 26 June 1940, a day after the terms of the Franco-German Armistice had been broadcast, a po-faced Charles Corbin, French ambassador to Britain and a veteran advocate of Anglo-French friendship, made his way to the Foreign Office. There he was received by the Foreign Secretary Lord Halifax, to whom he made known both his resignation, a 'sad decision', and the urgent need for 'new representation in London'.⁹ The embassy, he continued, would for the time being be placed in the capable hands of Roger Cambon, the descendant of a long line of Cambons who had worked for the *entente cordiale*, although it was not long before he too had resigned.¹⁰ Both men had quickly understood what the new Pétain administration augured. For his part, Cambon remained in London throughout the war, never missing an air raid even at the height of the Blitz.¹¹ Corbin persevered in Britain until

July 1940, when he made his 'tender farewell' to diplomatic friends and colleagues.¹² Believing it undiplomatic to remain in a nation that had repeatedly attacked his own country – both on the airwaves and on the sea where the Royal Navy imposed a strict blockade – he eventually resurfaced in Rio de Janeiro in mid-August 1940. It is sometimes claimed, notably by de Gaulle's biographer Jean Lacouture, that he remained in South America for the duration of the war.¹³ This was not the case.¹⁴ Increasingly despondent at the situation in France, in late 1940 he published a statement from Brazil, which in private he denied, claiming that he was awaiting instructions from Pétain to serve in some capacity at Vichy.¹⁵ February 1941 found Corbin in Lisbon en route to France, a journey that dismayed Daniel Roché, the Anglophile second secretary of the French legation in Dublin, who feared the former ambassador would be arrested by the Germans on trumped-up charges pounded out of his one-time London colleagues.¹⁶ In a meeting with Sir Ronald Campbell, British ambassador at Lisbon, Corbin constituted a sorrowful picture: 'he struck me as rather bitter and distinctly flabby ... There is no fight in him and he gives the impression of a broken man.'¹⁷ Haunted by Mers-el-Kébir and Dakar, he harped on about 'the ghastly spectacle of starving children', their condition a direct result of Britain's blockade. A month later, in Madrid, he likewise struck Sir Samuel Hoare, ambassador to Spain, as 'defeatist', arguing that while Britain might not be beaten, Germany was 'invincible'.¹⁸ Once in France, it was believed his 'black mood' lifted and in 1942 it was rumoured that he had the good sense to turn down an offer from Pétain to become Vichy's representative in Washington, preferring retirement in the south of France where in his private correspondence, which seems to have been read by the British, he readily criticised the marshal's policies.¹⁹

With Corbin, an open admirer of British tradition and culture, unwilling to make a categorical stand against Vichy, what hope was there for the other French representatives in London, the several hundred or so staff of the embassy (typists, clerks as well as professional diplomats), and the predominantly military contingent, some seven to eight hundred strong, who belonged to the naval, air and military missions that had arrived with the outbreak of war, and who had often mobilised members of the existing French colony 'en place'?²⁰ Disturbing reports of anti-British behaviour, especially on the part of the military missions, many of whom were not full-fledged diplomats but still enjoyed diplomatic immunity, arrived on the desks of govern-

ment officials thick and fast in June/July 1940. In the lull between the creation of the Pétain government and the declaration of the Armistice, Sir Desmond Morton was visited by John Miller, a chartered accountant attached to the French Military Purchasing Commission, who reported how two members of that body, a Colonel M— and A— W—, had been making ‘the most bitter remarks about this country’ and were looking to leave as quickly and ‘as unobtrusively as possible’.²¹ Together, these men had asked Miller to draw cheques to the value of 4,200 sterling, all in one-pound notes, valuable foreign currency for the French government, and had requested lists of all purchases made by the French Armaments Commission in this country, sensitive information that disclosed the whereabouts of war industries. The prime minister himself had been alarmed by these developments, and was personally convinced that members of the missions ‘were actively working against our interests’.²² Further evidence was soon at hand. On 6 July, the French chargé d’affaires complained about the treatment of one diplomat who, on the initiative of MI5, had been stopped while embarking for France and questioned at length about the materials he was carrying in his diplomatic bag, and at Vichy there were complaints that personnel of the naval mission had been arrested for speaking in Breton to sailors.²³ While cases of potential spies were relatively few, the possibility of French representatives distributing anti-de Gaulle propaganda remained ever present. In late July 1940, the Foreign Office flatly turned down a request from the French consul for five non-commissioned officers from the missions to visit troops at White City to handle the distribution of wages lest they peddled anti-Allied sentiments.²⁴

At least on this occasion, the proper diplomatic channels had been deployed. On 4 July, a day after Mers-el-Kébir, Corporal Boyle of the Field Security Police filed a report on a recent incident at Olympia where de Gaulle was recruiting.²⁵ Three suspects had been held after breaking into the barracks. They claimed to belong to the French naval mission, but it transpired they were clerks attached to the French naval attaché, living at the nearby Maison of the Institut Français. While none of the men had national registration cards, they were all carrying diplomatic passes issued by the embassy. The ringleader, a thirty-four year old, who claimed to have been living in England for seven years, said their task had simply been to contact a particular officer, whose name he refused to surrender. It soon transpired, however, that their real job was to discover the number of ratings there and to distribute

'seditious propaganda'. Witnesses reported how the men had claimed that it was unpatriotic to fight for de Gaulle; he was not their leader; the English had let them down. One even had the temerity to quiz an English sergeant on the whereabouts of British regiments. The three men also possessed considerable quantities of cash for purposes they would not disclose. They were detained overnight, apparently in the lavatories. When police called on one of the men's wives, she was quite unsurprised that her husband had been arrested. His release, and that of the others, was secured by two senior officers of the naval attaché, although this did not prevent a furious exchange of words with a Free French colonel who questioned the diplomatic immunity of the naval mission.

It is highly possible the above men were in the employ of Capitaine de Vaisseau de Rivoyre, former naval attaché to the French embassy, who quickly decided against joining de Gaulle, placing his trust instead in French civilisation, which he hoped would ultimately defeat the barbarian.²⁶ It is more likely that such talk hid a defeatist attitude, which was revealed in a leaflet he designed for Olympia.²⁷ In this, he claimed that men were being persuaded to support the Allied cause by 'false representation', that de Gaulle was under warrant of arrest, and that war would shortly commence between Britain and France; so it was that Frenchmen who had enlisted in de Gaulle's forces, despite their ships having been seized by the British, would soon be fighting their brothers. As Maurice Hankey wryly observed, 'Olympia seems to have been fairly lively.'²⁸ In a similar vein, another high-ranking member of the naval mission was belatedly discovered to have been distributing a letter among sailors at Southampton warning that they would be treated as *francs-tireurs* if they joined de Gaulle.²⁹ None of these propagandists quite managed to live up to the sinister image of one 'little fellow with a bandage on his head', originally a native of Jersey, perhaps a member of the naval mission, working as interpreter among French sailors at Euston station where he also dished out defeatist opinions to anyone who would listen.³⁰

Given these anecdotes, it is little surprise that few among the diplomatic staff and the missions volunteered for either de Gaulle or the British. On 10 July 1940, an ad hoc meeting of the Vansittart Committee noted that a mere 'eight members of the French Armaments Mission had placed their services unconditionally at the disposal of His Majesty's Government'.³¹ A similar number had requested permission to leave for the USA. Nor is it any surprise that

their numbers should have been so low. The example of Corbin was hardly inspiring. As François Coulet observed, there was also a strong sense of collective discipline among the diplomatic staff: it was their professional responsibility to obey their government's orders, even if they were uncomfortable with them.³² Walking along the corridors of the French embassy on 17 June 1940, shortly after the broadcast of Pétain's speech, Robert Mengin overheard one military attaché remark, 'In wartime, a man can't just resign. Resignation equals desertion. One receives an order, one carries it out, and no nonsense.'³³ Mengin himself sought a return to France in order to be reunited with his baby in Brittany, but on arriving at Plymouth in early July 1940 he could not find a single French sailor in sight as 'they were all behind bars – prison bars'.³⁴ More British-based diplomats might have broken ranks and put aside family worries had their colleagues within France come to Britain. This was not to be. Lacouture cites the example of Roland de Margerie, a professional civil servant, an associate of Reynaud and an early admirer of de Gaulle, who ultimately considered it his duty to serve his country in France not in London, much the same decision that was reached by the famous resister Jean Moulin who stayed at his prefectural post at Chartres only to be ousted by Vichy in October 1940.³⁵ Nor did de Gaulle – the 'rebel', the 'dissident', the 'unknown quantity' – cut much ice with a body of men accustomed to following orders, and who had not figured explicitly in his appeal of 18 June when he called on 'soldiers, engineers and skilled workers of the armaments industries' to join his cause.³⁶ Lacouture suggests that it was unfortunate that the general cancelled a dinner party with leading diplomats in early July.³⁷ Yet given de Gaulle's failure to recruit when he visited the servicemen's camps, this remains a dubious argument. His autocratic and high-minded attitude might further have damaged his cause. It was partially this that alienated Aléxis de Léger, secretary-general of the Quai d'Orsay, who met with de Gaulle on 22 June, and who quickly decided his destiny lay in the USA. Léger was courageous in his decision. Other diplomats were fearful for their families in France. Miller, the accountant who spoke with Morton, mentioned that those officials with relatives in southern and central France were keen to be reunited as soon as possible so as to safeguard their collective futures.³⁸ Those with kin in occupied France apparently believed they could ensure their families' safety by trading information about Britain to the Gestapo. Such anxieties were also noted by other British observers, Noel Baker wondering whether the missions should be

outwardly 'interned', yet privately allowed to go about their business and help the Allied cause, so as to give these men and their families the necessary 'cover'.³⁹

There remains a further reason why a majority of the diplomatic and mission staff were unwilling to rally to the Allied cause, that is a latent anti-British sentiment. This might seem strange emanating from a body of men led by such eminent Anglophiles as Corbin and Cambon, and which included such characters as Paul Morand, a member of the Economic Mission, and a man fascinated by the Anglo-Saxon world, having written eloquently about London and his travels in the USA.⁴⁰ Mengin recalls how none of the senior embassy staff wanted to be the one who had to hand over the papers breaking off relations with the UK.⁴¹ Moreover, several of these officials had been selected precisely because of their command of the English language and knowledge of English customs. Perhaps the answer to this question is again supplied by Mengin, who stayed in London throughout the war, without joining de Gaulle.⁴² When, in September 1939, he travelled to Britain from France he was struck by the contrast between the mournful atmosphere he had observed in Paris and the gaiety in London. His diplomatic colleagues had an answer: 'The English did not have 6 million men mobilized; and anyway they are insensitive, a stolid lot.'⁴³ Such views were replicated in a document authored by Morand in July 1940 and intended for his Pétainist masters, but which was known to the British. Set in the context of the explosive events of that summer, this painted 'a most disparaging report about the French embassy in London'.⁴⁴

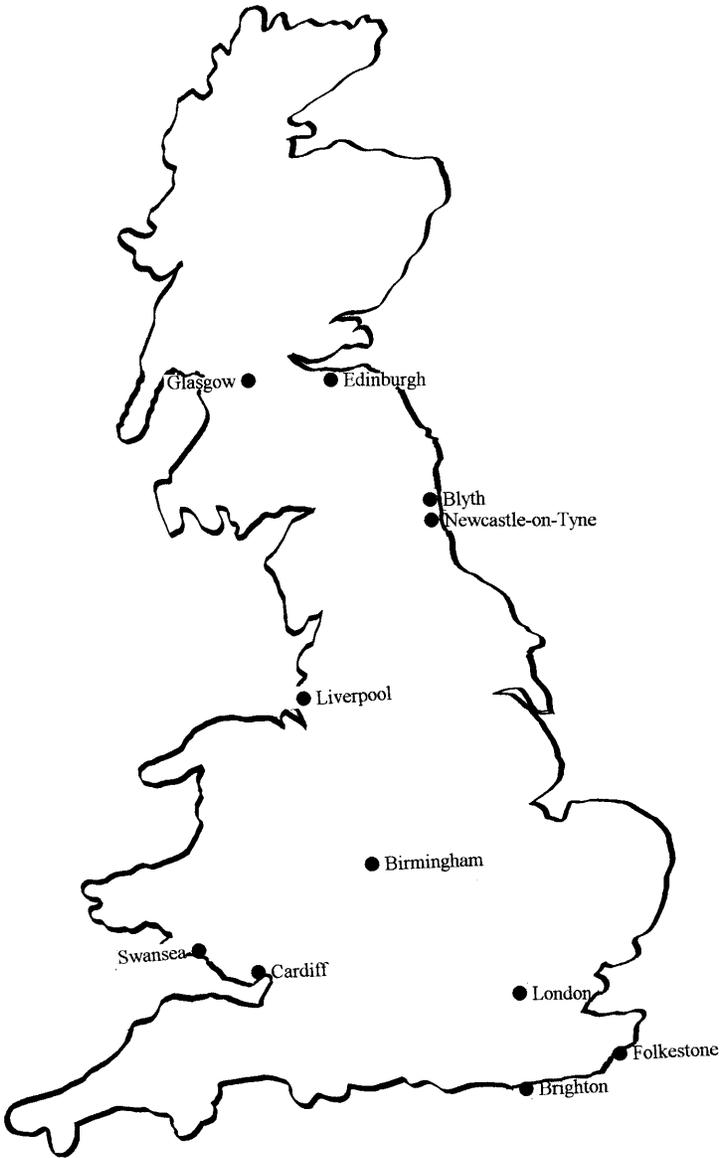
If members of the diplomatic staff and the missions were eager to leave, the British were only too glad to assist them in this whenever possible. Vichy was also anxious to help with resettlement, at least in the case of the diplomatic personnel, contrasting with the lethargic manner in which the regime approached the question of repatriating servicemen, suggesting that those stranded soldiers and sailors made good anti-British propaganda. So it was in later July that the diplomatic staff, accompanied by their families, congregated at Addison Road station in North London, significantly not one of the main termini where they might have become the target for public hostility, to catch a train for Liverpool docks.⁴⁵ All in all, some 600 or so embassy personnel quit in total, sailing on the *Orduna* on 19 July and arriving at Lisbon four days later.⁴⁶ The missions were, however, another matter, largely because many of them were in possession of sensitive military intelligence.⁴⁷ Thanks to this, in early July 1940 the War Cabinet discussed

the possibility of segregating elements of the missions, some to be accommodated in Cheltenham Ladies' College where they could cause no mischief; the girls, it should be added, had already been evacuated preventing mischief of another nature.⁴⁸ It was appreciated, however, that the numbers to be isolated should stay small so as not to alienate any French who might wish to join the Allied cause.⁴⁹ When news of possible segregation reached the French chargé d'affaires, he vigorously protested, pointing out that these individuals could 'hardly swim across the Channel'.⁵⁰ It may well have unsettled members of the missions themselves. Spears drew a graph of the mood of these men for the period 27 June to 19 July plotting how their morale passed through 'unshakeable resolve', 'determination', 'prudent mood', 'dolce', 'procrastination', 'flaccid', and 'complete negation of all action'; appended is a handwritten cartoon of two particularly fortunate members of the mission, granted permission to leave in July, sailing away from Angleterre cocking a snook at their former home.⁵¹ News of segregation also seemed to have caused consternation among 'well-disposed elements' of the London-based colony, giving rise to unfounded fears about general internment.⁵² In the event, British action was not draconian. A small number, ten altogether, who had been engaged in subversive activities, such as Capitaine de Vaisseau de Rivoyre, were to be detained for the duration of the war,⁵³ although it seems that most of these were repatriated at the close of the year. Those pertaining to 'the Food, Textiles, Oil, Timber, Coal, Economic Warfare and Sea Transport Missions, together with the French Representatives of the Air and Shipping Executive Committees' were free to leave immediately if they so desired.⁵⁴ Non-commissioned officers, other ranks and civilian personnel of the military, naval, air and armaments missions were also given grace to depart. Officers and senior personnel belonging to these bodies were, however, to be detained, at least for the time being. It was proposed to repatriate these officials after a three-month time lag by when the information they possessed would be out of date.

Interestingly, Vichy happily colluded in British plans. In 1940, the regime was not prepared to surrender everything to the Germans, and appreciated that knowledge about Anglo-French military capabilities best remained out of harm's way across the Channel. So it was that several months elapsed before these individuals pertaining to the missions were repatriated, via a boat to Marseilles, although by this stage, December 1940, some had clearly developed cold feet about

returning, opting instead to stay in London.⁵⁵ Those kept indefinitely belonged to the air mission, and included technical experts such as Professor D— who deployed argument after argument to be allowed to go home: to look after his ‘orphaned nephews’, to cater for his students,⁵⁶ and to tend for his wife.⁵⁷ It was understood his real reason was to take up a prestigious post at the Sorbonne, proving that the unpropitious circumstances of enemy occupation are no bar to academic ambition. All these complaints cut little ice with the Foreign Office, and D— stayed. It should also be pointed out that the British were eager to hold a small number of French back to trade them off for the repatriation of British officials held in France.

With the departure of the embassy staff and the subsequent withdrawal of the missions, Vichy no longer possessed any diplomatic representation in London.⁵⁸ This partially explains why those curious London–Vichy dialogues were conducted through semi-official emissaries and the Spanish government. There remained, however, the UK French consulates, which were designated to look after ‘various non-political matters on behalf of Vichy’.⁵⁹ Thought had been given to expelling these straightaway given that British consular staff had been ousted from French colonies in North and West Africa, as well as in the unoccupied zone. Their stay of execution rested on the needs of those large numbers of French who were based in the British Isles. In 1941, the Foreign Office recorded that consulates were open in London, Liverpool, Newcastle-on-Tyne, Cardiff, Swansea and Edinburgh, together with representation in other large towns, some 15 consular offices in total.⁶⁰ The numbers of consular officials and their staff are hard to assess, but may have amounted to over 200, most concentrated in London. Some of the representatives were merely consular agents who doubled up their day jobs with looking after immigration enquiries and trading arrangements; the remainder were professional diplomats, often well travelled around the globe. Additionally, a small number of staff were retained in the liquidation missions appointed to tidy up the financial aftermath of the Franco-British war effort: the financial mission (8 people); the armaments mission (2); the sea transport mission (7); the textiles mission (7); the food purchasing mission (1); the petroleum mission (3); the coal and minerals mission (4); the Liquidation des Services de l’Attaché Naval (2); and the Services de l’Attaché de l’Air (1).⁶¹ What is extraordinary is that such a paltry number of men and women were to cause so much trouble, and so greatly agitate both the British and Free French.



Map 3 The principal Vichy consular offices in 1940

Agents consulaires or agents provocateurs?

With the breaking off of diplomatic relations, the British had anticipated that the consular staff would be headed by Paul Morand who possessed the cumbersome title of *Agent pour la liquidation des affaires économiques et commerciales du gouvernement français en Grande Bretagne*.⁶² He, though, left for France on 19 July 1940 with the other embassy staff.⁶³ This was to the relief of the Germans who viewed him as a ‘propagandiste anglophile’.⁶⁴ It was also to the relief of the British who had been perturbed by rumours that he was thinking of joining de Gaulle.⁶⁵ In British eyes, he was a defeatist, a ‘weak character’, who had never concealed his pessimism from his staff.⁶⁶ His leaving was ultimately credited to the fact that he was a friend of Pierre Laval and was in possession of property in both the German and Italian occupied areas of France. Paradoxically for a man who, in 1940, had been deemed self-interested and weak willed, a year later he would publish *Chroniques de l’homme maigre*, a eulogy to self-discipline and a critique of the indolence and lack of spirit among his fellow countrymen.

Morand’s place was taken by Jacques Chartier, a career civil servant, and a *conseiller* in the French Diplomatic Service. He introduced himself to the Foreign Office on 19 July 1940 where he cut a poor impression, his initial concerns largely revolving around himself. While he possessed a diplomatic passport and his British identification papers were in order, he had lost his valued yellow pass as secretary-general to Morand’s economic mission. Having purchased the car of the ill-fated Captain de Rivoyre, who before his detention had taken to inviting officers ‘of very good standing and family’ to his house where he had put pressure on them to return to France,⁶⁷ he was also anxious for petrol coupons. He further wished his official title to be the same as Morand’s, so that technically he was only acting head of the liquidation missions, rather than acting head consul and thus Vichy’s chief diplomatic representative in Britain. Knowing what we do about the pusillanimous nature of his character, which will become increasingly clear in the ensuing pages, this might well have been because he wanted an ambiguity to surround his position, enabling him to wriggle out of any embarrassing situations. This was not easy to do. It was through Chartier that Vichy quickly made known it would not accept the accreditation of Neville Bland and W. H. B. Mack as consuls to Vichy, unless mission staff were released immediately and the British desisted from dropping propaganda leaflets on Morocco.⁶⁸ To Vichy itself,

Chartier feebly reported that London would not allow him to treat current issues, and he later complained bitterly about his material lot.⁶⁹ As we shall see, it was events in September 1940 that forced him to acknowledge his wider responsibilities, although these never extended to facilitating high-level Anglo-French dialogue as is sometimes claimed in older histories.⁷⁰

Initial reports about Chartier's political attitude were not encouraging. Like Morand, he was described as a defeatist, and the fact that he had not brought his wife and children to England, despite their being resident in the Normandy resort town of Trouville, only a short boat trip across the Channel, counted against him. When asked about their safety, he replied that the Germans would not harm them.⁷¹ It was further known that he had not assisted those of his staff who wished to stay in London, leaving them without money, and threatening them with the prospect of a concentration camp should they ever wish to return to their homeland. De Gaulle was also quizzed about Chartier. While he admitted he did not know him, his men had quickly formed the opinion that he 'was more than pro-Vichy'.⁷²

Although supposedly only acting head of the liquidation missions, Chartier quickly conducted his own *épuration* of diplomatic staff in Bedford Square. Through Roché in Dublin, who broke with Vichy in October, it was learned that the new consul was trying to 'get all the old regime' out of the Consulate-General, attention focusing especially on Bougnet, a *consul de carrière*, who acted as an archivist.⁷³ According to Roché, a regular conduit of information about the goings-on among Vichy consular staff, Bougnet was 'a sound fellow', anxious to stay in London and facilitate Anglo-French relations, whereas Chartier wanted him off his turf to take up the far-flung consular post in Newcastle that had recently become vacant. When the Foreign Office spoke to Chartier about this, he launched into a highly personal attack on Bougnet, describing him as 'lazy, obstinate, only intent on keeping his post, where he drew a disproportionately high salary for doing nothing'.⁷⁴ Bougnet, he continued, exercised a destabilising effect on his staff and refused to take orders. That Roger Cambon was asked to vouch for the unpopular archivist was perhaps evidence of his pro-British views, the real reason why Chartier wanted him out of London.

With such a man at the helm, it was inevitable that anti-British and anti-Free French activities, practised by some of the mission staff, should have continued. Nonetheless, it should be stressed that not all consuls were so-minded, maybe because some were well integrated

into British life; indeed, one or two were, in fact, British and immediately resigned their posts at the time of the Armistice, for instance a W. B. D. Shackleton of Bradford who also worked as a solicitor.⁷⁵ For those who remained in position, autumn 1940 brought with it frequent visits by local police officers, acting on the behalf of the Foreign Office. The officers were encouraged, in general conversation while pretending to be carrying out other duties, to press their interviewees on political matters, a task that must have taxed the investigative capabilities of the ordinary constables involved. Alternatively, intelligence had been gathered by speaking to the consul's associates and drinking partners.

Through such ham-fisted techniques, and through the tough leather prose of police reports, it is subsequently possible to identify three groups of consular officials. The first were those, notably at Manchester, Birmingham, Swansea, Blyth and Brighton, who had clearly flagged their pro-Allied sentiments, and who remained in post merely for financial reasons or out of the belief that this was the best way of harming Pétain's cause. A good example is that of the Brighton official, born in Saint-Sauvant in 1873 and a resident in Britain since 1916, who coupled his consular duties with acting as a minister in the local French Protestant Church. For many years he had held extreme Germanophobe views and regularly insulted Germans in the street. At the time of Dunkirk, he had visited men in hospital and advised them not to return to France. Although he had not resigned his office, he had admitted this was only because he could not afford to lose his income, and readily broadcast his admiration for de Gaulle.⁷⁶

A second group of consuls were more ambiguous in their allegiance, although it was clear the British had collated no hard evidence against them. In North and South Shields, there were no grounds to 'doubt' the consul's pro-Allied views, maybe to be expected of a man with a Jewish wife, but it was noted that he was generally uncommunicative and unpopular with the locals; across in Sunderland, the consul, down on his luck thanks to the war terminating his business activities and now to be found working as a chauffeur, had grumbled that 'England had not given France all the help it might have done', but that was it; and in Bristol, the consul, who doubled up as teacher of French in a nearby secondary school, had denounced the Pétain regime as a 'puppet government', unrepresentative of the real France, while on other occasions he had been far less willing to speak in such a manner, something that the police thought in itself suspicious.⁷⁷ In Folkestone, the consul himself was thought to have definite 'pro-British tendencies', yet his son, a 'brave' boy

who worked part-time as a messenger for the local air warden, had been reported for defeatist talk, albeit only on one occasion. He was alleged to have said that the 'war was costing 6 millions a day and to save this it would be better if we gave up and came under Germany as we should probably be better ruled'.⁷⁸ The air warden-cum-informant had subsequently been pressed to talk to the consul himself, but had been unwilling to sharpen his investigative abilities further.

The third group of consuls were those known to be openly 'working actively against us', assisting in the repatriation of servicemen and the distribution of propaganda.⁷⁹ Significantly, these were all professional, career diplomats based in Swansea, Liverpool, Newcastle and Glasgow, port towns and key strategic areas, where sizeable numbers of French troops were stationed, both Free French and servicemen awaiting their voyage home. From Newcastle emanated the report that the French consul, one Jacques Le Serre, was refusing any assistance to sailors anxious to get in touch with de Gaulle, and that such men were having to be processed through Customs and Immigration.⁸⁰ Over in Swansea, the Consul Guy René Brun, who had been prevented from leaving the country on account of the technical intelligence in his possession, had quickly got himself 'into trouble with the police by working against General de Gaulle among French sailors at Falmouth'.⁸¹ MI5 had also taken an interest in his case, discovering that he had occupied a consular position in Saarbrücken, which he had been forced to vacate because of currency irregularities.⁸² It was further uncovered that he spoke good German, was in regular contact with three German women, frequently spread anti-British views, and had devised pro-Vichy propaganda for French merchant seamen.

Further north in Liverpool, the behaviour of the consul, Jacques Dufort, was even more brazen. In early September 1940, Lieutenant-Colonel Macbeth, in charge of Trentham Park, was amazed to be visited by one of his internees who naively confessed that he had been given permission by the consul to travel to Liverpool where a berth awaited him on a steamer of the Yeoward Line along with his papers, which were all in order.⁸³ Even more naively, the man wanted to leave immediately for the port in a lorry being used by de Gaulle's recruiting agents! Dufort also intervened in the case of one soldier in Carlisle who had been required to attend the local police station on a weekly basis where he had allegedly been pressurised into joining de Gaulle's men. This behaviour was 'all the more regrettable', continued the consul, as the man in question had no intention of following these suggestions

and had been declared 'unfit' for service.⁸⁴ Such an intervention was only one case among several.

The fullest report on consular misdeeds was filed by Glasgow police in the case of Camille Henry Alfred Parent de Curzon.⁸⁵ This minor aristocrat had been in trouble with the authorities before. In 1937, the police had received a report from the Italian tutor whom he employed to coach his son. Fearful for his job and personal security should he later go abroad, the hapless teacher complained that the consul was making his life unbearable because of his republican and liberal views, which conflicted with the monarchist politics of de Curzon himself and his White Russian assistant, who worked as a caretaker in the consular office. In 1940, the consul had interfered in the activities of the Glasgow branch of the Franco-Scottish Society, which had organised a campaign to raise money for French families whose menfolk were fighting in the army. De Curzon had taken charge of this venture, appointing a board of trustees, which was described as 'very ill selected'. On 10 September, the Executive Committee of the Franco-Scottish Society, on which the consul sat *ex officio*, had assembled for a meeting at which one of the members had suggested to de Curzon that he should resign on ground of ill health and take a holiday. He had replied that he was 'too busy'. 'Busy doing what?', he was quizzed. 'Writing reports', he replied. 'Writing reports about what and to whom? You cannot have any communication with your government at present.' 'I just file my reports for future reference', adding he could not afford a holiday. When the meeting got properly under way, it was suggested that the Society should organise a series of lectures on 'The Spirit of France', maybe inviting the former Popular Front minister, Pierre Cot, to which the consul objected saying that this would be an 'insult' to his government, as would any lecture about the defeat of France. To cool tempers, de Curzon had been asked to leave the room temporarily while the Committee could take stock, but he had misinterpreted this request as one to depart permanently and had gone off in a huff, only to reappear at a further meeting where he disputed a recommendation that the Society should recognise only 'de Gaulle's party' as the true representation of France. Refusing to assist at further sessions, he had nonetheless attended a lecture by Denis Saurat, held at the Royal Philosophical Society, in which he sat silently at the back of the hall making notes. A devout Catholic, a staunch monarchist and rather 'German in appearance and outlook', de Curzon was generally unpopular with the French community in the city, the police

concluded, but was too 'stupid' to involve himself in espionage, merely contenting himself with the diffusion of Pétainist sentiments

Whether Chartier personally involved himself in such skulduggery remains unclear. It was believed that if he did exercise any influence it was when interviewing servicemen and other nationals over passport applications in the privacy of his own office, and it appears that he was concerned chiefly with men of status.⁸⁶ When, in late 1940, the journalist Bret visited the consulate to obtain a visa for North Africa, where he felt he could be of more value to the war effort, he kept a close watch on what he said on interrogation by Chartier; in Bret's own words, this was the first time in his life when he knew to keep his mouth shut.⁸⁷ Others, too, were wary of Vichy's man in London. On bumping into Chartier at the Foreign Office, Palewski, one of de Gaulle's closest associates, timidly asked, 'Am I condemned to death?'⁸⁸

That Chartier's immediate officials were involved in subterfuge seems less contentious. From Crystal Palace, where a contingent of French sailors was housed, came complaints from the Ministry of Shipping that one of the London French consular staff had been distributing unfavourable propaganda about de Gaulle although, to be fair, the Foreign Office noted that this complaint might have emanated from Admiral Muselier who had been bitterly disappointed because of his own failure to recruit.⁸⁹ Meanwhile, the attention of Special Branch had centred on two officials belonging to Bedford Square who were known to be carrying large amounts of money and circulating among members of de Gaulle's forces, where they readily spread disturbing rumours.⁹⁰ The two individuals had yet to be identified, probably because they kept their associations with the consulate from view, but clearly a sojourn at Pentonville awaited them when they were apprehended.

At this point, the question must be asked whether Chartier and his cronies were involved in more sinister practices, notably in collecting military intelligence and in collating lists of de Gaulle's volunteers to be relayed to Vichy for subsequent action to be taken against the men's families in France. After all, consulate offices had been used for spying purposes in the past. Robert Graves recalls how, before 1914, the German consulate had been a regular conduit of information for Berlin.⁹¹ The prudence of Bret when interviewed by Chartier will also be recalled, as will the behaviour of the French missions. Nevertheless, evidence of the consuls as spies is not convincing. There is nothing in the German Foreign Ministry Archives to suggest that the consulate at

Bedford Square was relaying intelligence to Berlin via Vichy or Paris.⁹² Admittedly, it is unlikely that Vichy, anxious to cling on to whatever authority it possessed, would have shared such information with Berlin in the first place; whatever the case, surmise suggests that little of value came out of Pétain's London base. As we have seen, Vichy provincial consuls were clumsy and under constant surveillance. They also lacked the necessary equipment to communicate with their government. This was even true of Chartier, the only consul who had regular contact with his government. In August 1940, he requested use of the cypher facilities within Bedford Square.⁹³ The head of MI6, known merely as 'C', who undoubtedly possessed a mole inside the Consulate-General, was keen that this wish be granted so that any communication with Vichy could be monitored, although it was admitted that Chartier was unlikely to send out any sensitive information as his cypher was so primitive it was probable the Germans had already decoded it, as indeed the British appear to have done. The Foreign Office, however, was opposed as reciprocal arrangements had not been granted to British consuls who had recently been allowed to return to Lyon and Pau. Clearly British secret dispatches out of France were of a superior sort. So it was that Chartier was forced to telegramme *en clair*, meaning that his contacts with Vichy were open for all to read and were thus largely confined to run-of-the-mill information. As he himself acknowledged to his Vichy masters, in a telegram of 22 August, the cypher had been denied him for fear that he would report on the activities of French political refugees in the United Kingdom.⁹⁴ In a later telegram of 12 September, Baudouin, Vichy's Anglophobe Foreign Minister, expressed his sympathy to Chartier, acknowledging that he had a difficult job on his hands having to deal with the British.⁹⁵

While it remains almost certain that Chartier secreted intelligence through diplomatic bags, these took an eternity to arrive in France, going first through the Spanish embassy in London and then via Madrid; the material must have been long in the tooth when it reached the hotels of Vichy. Suggestions, probably made by Spears, that Chartier was responsible for spreading news of the Dakar expedition, and was thus responsible for its failure, are risible given what we know about the lack of security cover in the preparations for this ill-fated adventure.⁹⁶ Similar allegations that Chartier was writing to the Germans, via the Dublin legation, using secret ink should also be treated with a pinch of salt, especially as the Dublin officials had mostly defected from Vichy;⁹⁷ nor is there anything in the German archives to

verify such stories.⁹⁸ As we shall see, the value of Chartier's reports was questionable in other respects, often echoing what he believed his government wanted to hear. In this situation, it is probable that the consuls, and then only some, restricted themselves to assisting in repatriation, the diffusion of propaganda and the distribution of monies, intended as bribes to dissuade servicemen from enlisting with either de Gaulle or the British.

Such activity was damaging and destabilising enough, and Chartier only avoided expulsion thanks to the inability of the British to pin anything definite on him and because of his worth to 'C'. This did not stop British Intelligence making life difficult for him by conveying to Vichy rumours about his duplicitous behaviour.⁹⁹ Indulgence was not, however, accorded to the consuls at Liverpool, Swansea and Newcastle. On 29 September Chartier was invited to an interview at the Foreign Office where he was informed that the government was withdrawing the 'exequaturs' (effectively an expulsion order) for consuls involved in 'anti-allied activities'.¹⁰⁰ At this, Chartier's face apparently 'grew longer', perhaps because he feared his name was in the frame, or that some of his London agents had been rumbled. When told the identities of Brun, Dufort and Le Serre, he 'almost clapped his hands in glee'. He said Brun was 'a ridiculous creature', and he 'was very glad that he had got into trouble'. Le Serre was 'a lunatic', and was already to be recalled by Vichy. As to Dufort, he had retired, but had then obstinately stuck to his post. Once Chartier had lunch with him and his Jewish wife along with her two sisters, and 'he had felt that he was sitting in the Warsaw ghetto'. If only the British had forewarned him, he continued, arrangements would have been made through Vichy for their withdrawal. Yet as he was only in charge of the liquidation missions, a reference to the title he had assumed in July, he disingenuously added that he could have done little. Maybe he later regretted this remark, as soon after the Foreign Office pressed him to clarify his position, thus forcing Chartier to acknowledge the wider remit he had always possessed as Vichy's chief representative in Britain.

There ensued negotiations as to who should fill the vacancies at Liverpool, Newcastle and Swansea, Chartier putting his own names forward, no doubt again to increase the scope of his patronage and cement his own position (the case of Bougnet will be recalled), and the British eagerly weighing up the probity of the suggestions. Meanwhile, the chief consul behaved disloyally to his dismissed colleagues, partic-

ularly Dufort and his family who, on their withdrawal from Liverpool, had taken up residence in suburban Wembley, expressing a strong wish to stay in England, unlike all those sailors the consul had helped resettle in France. Maybe in a misguided attempt to please the British, or more probably in an attempt to assert his own command, Chartier would have none of this, refusing to give the family money and divesting himself of any responsibility in their regard, something that they interpreted as a threat.¹⁰¹ In the event, they were repatriated at the close of the year. Chartier 'has gone from bad to worse', noted one Foreign Office official at the close of 1940.¹⁰² Little did he know what 1941 was to bring.

La conduite consulaire: conduct unbecoming

Through his pro-Vichy views, his sanctioning of anti-Gaullist propaganda and his ready willingness to abandon his colleagues when it suited him, Chartier had made few friends among his British hosts who saw through his double-talk, yet the Foreign Office was prepared to tolerate him because of the help he gave to refugees, and his willingness to help out with the passports of Free French volunteers who were arriving in large numbers at the start of 1941. No doubt his indirect value to MI6 also played a part in their calculations. Yet Chartier had made dangerous enemies in the shape of Carlton Gardens and the Spears Mission which, at this point, was often willing to act as the *porte-parole* of de Gaulle's organisation, often parroting the same complaints, usually about supposed snubs to the general himself, and adopting similar causes. So it was that, in February 1941, their line of fire centred on Bedford Square, and Chartier in particular, who was said to be 'aiding and abetting deserters from the Free French forces'.¹⁰³ While it will be recalled that the French soldiers and sailors belonging to the camps in northern England had by then been sent home, some stragglers were still at large in Liverpool and Manchester. Ultimately, however, it was the outside developments of the war, notably in Syria, that brought about Chartier's forced withdrawal.

Suggestions that Bedford Square was facilitating the repatriation of Free French deserters were to lead to an almighty row within British circles. When, on 25 February 1941, the Spears Mission made these allegations, it did not mince its words: 'Under our very noses the Vichy Consulate is doing deadly harm to the FFF.'¹⁰⁴ Our own army, continued the general, would not accept a situation where a soldier could visit

the offices of the ILP (Independent Labour Party) and obtain money, demobilisation papers and a railway ticket. So it was that 'the French Consulate constitutes fifth-column activities of a most dangerous sort since they tend to undermine the moral and efficiency of an allied force'. Berating the MI5 for adopting a theological attitude to Bedford Square's responsibilities, Spears suggested the intelligence agency should adopt as a motto, 'See no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil'. The general also warned French Welfare not to have any further dealings with Bedford Square, and urged Bessborough's organisation to launch an enquiry into how such repatriations could be stopped in future. Behind this complaint undoubtedly lay an attempt to spike the guns of the CEAF whose dealings with French refugees, often through the consulate, caused continued outrage in Carlton Gardens. Reading between the lines, it may also be that Spears and the Free French had deliberately attempted to set up the consulate by sending two rather dubious individuals as agents provocateurs to Bedford Square to ask delicate questions.¹⁰⁵

This somewhat maladroit piece of diplomacy, worthy of de Gaulle himself in its brusqueness, went down badly in Whitehall where it caused 'alarm and despondency'.¹⁰⁶ Copies were quickly withdrawn except from one or two people. Bessborough was clearly still a recipient as he denounced the memorandum as 'tantamount to an accusation against us of treason'.¹⁰⁷ He then went on to explain why French Welfare, and for that matter Chartier, could not possibly help with any desertions, men who were apparently dressing up as refugees and obtaining forged papers. Betraying a somewhat naive faith in bureaucratic procedures, Bessborough explained that this would be impossible as 'by arrangement with the Home Office and MI5 any civilian refugee who wishes to be repatriated must fill in an Exit Permit form supplied to him by the French Consulate General'.¹⁰⁸ This document, together with the refugee's registration card, was then forwarded to Passport Office, which processed the necessary paperwork under the vigilant eye of MI5. The upshot, claimed Bessborough, was that the emigration authorities at the quayside were armed with a list of all refugees granted authority to quit the British Isles, and only those on the list were given permission to embark. Meanwhile, Carlton Gardens supplied to MI5 and local police forces the names of all deserters. Bessborough drew further reassurance from the fact that Chartier supplied to his own office the names of French sailors and soldiers who had approached the consulate requesting repatriation. Should any man

have once belonged to de Gaulle, his case was given extra special attention. In this way, all possible loopholes had been closed.

To disprove the watertight nature of these procedures, Muselier brought to the attention of the Foreign Office the case of one F— B—, an Alsatian sailor, who had recently been discharged from the Free French Navy on the grounds of ill health.¹⁰⁹ While in the waiting room of the CEAF, there to collect charitable handouts, B— had been joined by another man, a former member of the crew of the *Courbet*, who had refused to enlist in the Free French. While in conversation, they had been approached by a third man from the same ship who confessed ‘that he was a deserter’. This individual then ‘volunteered the information’ that the CEAF regularly helped fugitives such as him by supplying them with the identity papers and false documents of refugees who had already left the country. Thanks to these papers, the deserters had then been able to avoid the attentions of the police, although quite how they circumvented the system described above by Bessborough remains unclear. Failing to address this point, Muselier claimed the leadership of the CEAF was behind this scheme, especially the Baron de P—, formerly secretary-general of French Teachers in Great Britain. While there was no direct evidence linking Chartier to the scam, this was attributed to his ‘cunning’ rather than his ‘innocence in the matter’.

Whether the CEAF was truly behind this particular bolt-hole remains doubtful. As already implied, this appears to have been yet another attempt to smear a rival, and non-Gaullist, organisation. As to whether Chartier and his associates were more generally facilitating repatriation, the answer is probably yes, but not in the numbers the Free French alleged. ‘What sort of proof will be required to convince you that Chartier’s activities are dangerous?’, thundered Spears in a letter to Bessborough of 4 March 1941.¹¹⁰ While it cannot be discounted that this proof might have since disappeared, little further evidence was forthcoming, other than vague allegations, notably that an Italian waiter with fascist sympathies overheard officers’ conversations at the Savoy, subsequently passing on his information to Chartier.¹¹¹ As to Muselier, his complaint may well have been a reflection of the precarious footing of Free French Forces at the start of 1941. Many of the volunteers for de Gaulle had signed six-month engagement forms in June/July 1940, contracts that were now coming to a close. It was widely known that morale and overall discipline within the general’s forces was not good, especially after the fiasco that was the

Dakar expedition and the return of those stranded sailors at the close of the year. Reports about the poor organisation within the general's forces were legion, and caused the Foreign Office some concern. Among many disturbing tales was that of a young Frenchman, an escaped POW, who had smuggled himself out of France to enlist with de Gaulle.¹¹² When he arrived at the recruiting depot, he found this 'dirty' and 'generally unattractive'. Nor was life in the garrisons at Camberley and Aldershot especially appealing. While the military discipline of these sites was judged to have improved, the social life and amenities were virtually non-existent, partially thanks to the attitude of the British themselves who, it will be recalled, had failed to distinguish between Free French and servicemen awaiting repatriation. As Lieutenant-Colonel Claud Black of the War Office reported to French Welfare, 'the local population, both military and civil, tend to be very preoccupied with the various problems which the war brings in its train, and the question of entertaining the French does not occur to most people'.¹¹³ Spears made similar observations, and was especially struck by an interview with a Breton boy who said he was 'quite all right in London, but in Camberley, Aldershot etc, the reception he and his companions get from the British troops and civilians in restaurants and especially "dancings" is anything but cordial'.¹¹⁴ Acknowledging that the Bretons 'are not the most adaptable of people', Spears considered it a pity not more could be done to improve levels of hospitality, if only to stop the 'bagarres' that frequently broke out with the locals. For his part, Black knew of only one scuffle, an unseemly argument in a Reading canteen.¹¹⁵ It will be recalled from the previous chapter that it was only in 1941, when most non-Free French servicemen had been repatriated, that real efforts were made to improve life in these barracks.

Thus it may well have been that, in his complaints about Chartier, Muselier was exercising a more general frustration about recruitment. This did not stop yet another round of enquiries into the activities of the consuls, although once again this produced little incriminating evidence. For instance, in January 1941 the Cardiff police filed a report on Pierre Chesnais, the local attaché in the city.¹¹⁶ A professional diplomat, he had first served in Wales in 1931–32, before being transferred to Montréal, Philadelphia and Vienna. At the outbreak of war, he was stationed at Warsaw; he had subsequently escaped to France, via the Balkans, and was posted to Amsterdam, only for the German invasion to necessitate another transfer, first to London and then to Cardiff. A

known Anglophile, Chesnais had, on several occasions, made known his fervent desire for a British victory and had not been caught up in any murky business; his pro-Allied views were even noted in Vichy where they were brought to the attention of Laval.¹¹⁷ As before, Liverpool was the real trouble spot, despite the appointment of a new consul. The Home Office and Admiralty complained of 'constant interference' and thundered that it was 'a scandal that the French Consular Officials should be allowed to exercise anything like the powers they have got'.¹¹⁸ Meanwhile, in Glasgow, de Curzon continued to aggravate the natives. Having been invited to the board of the Allied Seaman's Reception Centre, he had proved a real nuisance and had to be 'frozen out',¹¹⁹ proof that the city's elders had not taken stock of his earlier comportment.

To cauterise an open wound, in early 1941 the Foreign Office took long overdue action against the troublesome consular offices. Complex negotiations were conducted with Chartier for the removal of the Liverpool consulate to nearby Newcastle-under-Lyme and the Glasgow office to Edinburgh, where they would be less troublesome. Aware that these moves amounted to a loss of face, in a telegram to his masters, Chartier attempted to put the best possible gloss on the situation, a gloss that was applauded by the Foreign Office, which was fearful that any action might provoke retaliation against the remaining British consuls in France.¹²⁰ So it was that Chartier explained to Vichy that Liverpool was in a 'forbidden zone', denied to aliens; the move mattered little, however, as Newcastle-under-Lyme was only 50 kilometres away.¹²¹ The French representative, a Monsieur Delessart, could still visit the Liverpool area, although Chartier made no mention of the fact that he would need the permission of the local police, and a special permit should he ever wish to visit the docks themselves. Turning to Glasgow, Chartier again pointed out that this city lay in a 'forbidden zone', and remarked that the consul there had often spoken of the advantages of being based in Edinburgh. At Swansea, Chartier concluded, another consulate had moved, this time to the city outskirts, because the consular buildings had recently been destroyed (presumably by bombing).

Time was also running out for Chartier himself. What appears to have been the cause of his downfall was not the complaints of the Spears Mission or the Free French, nor the alleged repatriation of Gaullist deserters. Instead, it was matters abroad. Under the command of the Anglophobe Admiral Darlan, Vichy had become ever more unre-

liable in the eyes of the Foreign Office, which now saw little point in trying to appease the regime. Within domestic affairs, Darlan had taken Vichy down an authoritarian, technocratic route, presiding over the persecution of Jews, Communists and others. More importantly, in his foreign policy Darlan had sidled up to Germany in a way Laval would never have done, hoping that a tough anti-British position would persuade Germany into making concessions to France, in particular by granting it a colonial and naval role in the New Order that Hitler was building. So it was that Darlan ordered British consuls out of France and warned Chartier's colleagues in London to have as little to do with the British as possible.¹²² When, in May 1941, Darlan met Hitler at Berchtesgaden to do a deal over the supply of Rommel's Afrika Korps through Syria, Britain and France were, in the words of Robert Paxton, virtually engaged in an undeclared 'naval war'.¹²³ Significantly, such developments deeply troubled British public opinion, which was more anti-Vichy than ever before.¹²⁴ 'They're beyond words', remarked one respondent to Mass-Observation about the marshal's men, 'I can't say anything bad enough to describe them.'¹²⁵ 'There's only one word for them – traitors. They're worse than Hitler', was the reply of another.

It was in this context that, on 21 April 1941, the consul was warned that his position was tenuous;¹²⁶ on 6 May he was requested to quit London, arriving at Lisbon three days later. Once in Portugal, Vichy immediately requested information as to what he was doing there, the regime's ignorance of his fate further evidence of the consul's difficulties in communicating with his masters.¹²⁷ Nonetheless, before his departure, he had apparently agreed to present to Vichy 'a faithful account of his position in this country',¹²⁸ in effect a bland statement of protocol authored by the Foreign Office. He chose instead to write his own document, which was intercepted by the British. If this was the type of intelligence that Chartier had been returning to France on a regular basis, then it was of dubious value. Even allowing for the natural indignation of the Foreign Office, it was described as 'grossly biased [*sic*]' and 'highly inaccurate'. Speaight was under no illusions; 'This is just what one would have expected of M. Chartier.'¹²⁹ 'It is what he thinks Darlan would like to hear', he continued, '... the intention is evidently to give the impression that we are rotten with the same lack of public spirit, industrial discontent and disorganisation, and abuse of privilege as wrecked the Third Republic.' It was 'the work of a clumsy and pedestrian propagandist', but was not something to be forgotten. 'We must remember this against Chartier', concluded Speaight, 'when

he comes fawning up to us again at the Peace Conference.'

What had Chartier said to cause such offence?¹³⁰ Clearly written with the technocratic Cabinet of Darlan in mind, the document comprised a damning indictment of the British war effort. The events of June 1940, began Chartier, had brought the English face to face with reality, and the recognition that it would require 'un effort colossal' to overcome German power. Convinced that the Franco-British alliance, together with the contribution of its air force and navy, would suffice to ensure naval supplies and effect a blockade of enemy ports, the English had dangerously neglected their military preparations. Chartier recalled how the Labour government had foreseen how disarmament would give an example to the rest of the world and how the City, recognising the advantages of this, immediately gave its approval. Everything the British had done in the military arena, up to the day war was declared, was 'futile', designed to fool the French who demanded serious preparations. Hore-Belisha might have introduced work conscription, but this had been riddled with exemptions so as to render it useless. Everything relating to equipment, arms, munitions, war factories, was still to be created and organised. Amazingly, as soon as the French signed the Armistice, these factories doubled and tripled their efforts, food supplies were overhauled and put on a different footing. Warming to his theme, Chartier claimed conscription had been 'un faux'; the British had preferred to rely instead on the French army. Moving on to politics, he spoke of how the replacement of Chamberlain by Churchill had been well received, but how an important opposition was now brewing among intellectuals, parliamentary circles and elements of the middle classes. It was important not to underestimate this opposition, claimed Chartier, as elections gave little indication as to popular feelings. The three main political parties had come to an agreement not to contest seats that became vacant. Churchill could thus count on the support of parliament and effect ministerial reshuffles without worry. Decrying the prime minister for his autocratic tendencies, Chartier claimed that the Cabinet was not of the quality of yesteryear, lacking a Lloyd George, although praise was heaped on Lord Beaverbrook for his efforts in promoting war production.

Praise was also extended to the working classes for their goodwill and hard work. This Churchill had achieved by bringing socialists into his government such as Attlee, Alexander, Morrison and Dalton. Secret deals between capital and labour had further reduced the possibility of

strikes and industrial unrest. Even so, among socialists there was an unease about the way in which industrial relations were being managed: organisation was still slipshod; hours were far too long; specialists were not well distributed among factories; and frequently the workforce was left idle because important machine tools had been torpedoed en route from the USA. As in 1914–19, women had been drafted in to replace those men conscripted to fight.

The final paragraphs of Chartier's letter concerned everyday life in wartime: censorship; rationing; the black market. It concluded with another swipe at government and the manner in which it kept news of all dissent quiet. Recently, claimed Chartier, prominent politicians had been overtaken by a scandal concerning Czech bonds. A commission of enquiry had been set up, comprising MPs, and one member had been found guilty of behaving 'indiscrètement', although this had not prevented him from occupying an administrative post in the air force. So it was that this growing number of scandals was hushed up, ended Chartier.

Small wonder that the Foreign Office was outraged. 'The perniciously hostile flavour which colours every sentence of this horrible document', remarked Hankey, 'confirms more fully than it was possible to expect the duplicity of M. Chartier.'¹³¹ Indeed, Chartier's wish to have it all ways became evident in his subsequent actions. On quitting Britain, he expressed a wish to be sent to Australia 'since he professed to be anxious to keep up his connections with the Empire,' although it is more likely he knew the uninviting state of affairs in occupied and unoccupied France.¹³² Should there be any possibility of Canberra agreeing to this, both the Foreign Office and Downing Street decided that the Commonwealth authorities should know about the 'unpleasant document' found among his papers at the time of his expulsion. As Downing Street remarked, 'it was typical of Chartier that he should produce such stuff to please his masters at Vichy while at the same time assuring us of his devotion to the allied cause. We now hear through the United States Embassy that he has been speaking well of us at Vichy, but it is quite consistent that he should do so in conversation with persons known to be anglophile while taking a very different line with the others.'¹³³ Chartier, it was announced, will always say 'what he thinks will please his listener, especially if the listener is in a position to help his career'. Although evidence is fragmentary, it seems that the Foreign Office line was correct. At the end 1941, Chartier was making trouble for Jalenques, his successor at Bedford Square.¹³⁴

Further dirt on Chartier was subsequently produced by the Trading with the Enemy Branch.¹³⁵ Before his expulsion, he had apparently been 'collecting patent fees in this country due to Frenchmen': 'He had no authority from this branch to do so and thus became, at any rate technically, liable to proceedings under the Trading with the Enemy Act.' More significantly, it transpired that the liquidation missions had been collating information 'to which they were not entitled', but which had then been communicated across the Channel by none other than Chartier himself. How valuable such information really was remains questionable. Overall, Vichy's senior representative in Britain had been more of a nuisance, an obsequious Uriah Heep figure rather than an accomplished spy or, indeed, diplomat.

Endgame

Chartier's replacement was Jalenques, another career diplomat in Bedford Square. When he introduced himself to the Foreign Office, he was courtesy personified, yet he too did not give a favourable impression. In a report of 25 May 1941, he was described as a 'poor creature, completely lacking in character', who lived on patent medicines and suffered from perpetual colds.¹³⁶ At the close of the year, it was even speculated whether the developments in Syria had led him to consider switching sides. In a minute of 28 November 1941, Speaight reflected, 'I imagined that his conscience was at last compelling him to break with Vichy on political grounds, but it now appears he is only concerned with his personal position.'¹³⁷ Promises of better pay and promotion had apparently bought off any possibility of defection. Nonetheless, the Foreign Office was prepared to be indulgent towards him as 'whatever his shortcomings, he is on the whole as helpful to us as his position allows and his sympathies are, so far as I can judge, genuinely pro-British'. Indeed, he performed his consular duties with panache, happily renewing passports for Frenchmen in Britain, even when he knew they were supporters of de Gaulle. In the eyes of the Foreign Office, far more important was that he granted travel visas for British officials wishing to cross occupied France on their way to Switzerland, not even bothering to inform his Vichy masters. 'He could easily be less obliging', concluded Speaight, 'and it seems worth while to keep him sweet by allowing him occasional favours which cost us nothing.'

While permitting such indulgence, in the aftermath of Chartier, a close check was kept on Jalenques to ensure that he was not abusing his

position. Still allowed to telegram merely *en clair*, he was quickly told in no uncertain terms that he could report matters only in an objective, as opposed to an interpretative, sense.¹³⁸ This inevitably led to conflict. When in 1942 Britain accepted refugees from the newly liberated colony of Madagascar, Jalenques intended to send his government several lengthy telegrams, which related 'in immense and redundant detail' the problems encountered by civilian officials and officers on their arrival.¹³⁹ These further alleged that there had been a 'breach of faith' on the part of the British in the interpretation of the Protocol of Surrender, and it was feared that they might amount to a propaganda gift to the Germans. Jalenques was thus forced to rewrite his communiqués which were read by the British before being deposited in the diplomatic bags for Lisbon.

By that stage, however, Jalenques could do little damage as most of his officials had already been returned to France, leaving him to preside over a skeleton staff at Bedford Square. With Britain and Vichy at daggers drawn in Syria, a Foreign Office memorandum of 10 June 1941 had asked 'whether the time has come to expel the remaining French consuls in the United Kingdom and the members of the various liquidation missions'.¹⁴⁰ It also appears that the transfer of the consuls at Liverpool and Glasgow had not done the trick. In a letter to Jock McEwen MP, the Foreign Office confessed that the regional consuls, especially in the ports, could still report 'on important aspects of our war effort'.¹⁴¹

Preparations for expulsion were accordingly put in place. Before this, however, various government departments were asked whether they still considered the liquidation missions fulfilled a useful function. The Treasury replied that it was

anxious to retain the Financial Mission since, without it, it would be difficult, if not impossible to work the Reciprocal Advances account whereby Vichy provides *francs* for payments to British subjects in unoccupied France (we are spending over a million pounds a year under this head which would otherwise have to be found by converting dollars into francs), while any British creditors of the French government whose claims are being met through this account would have to go unpaid.¹⁴²

For its part, the Ministry of Supply considered that the armaments and textiles missions were performing a useful service; some contractors might be adversely affected if these liquidation offices were thus shut down.¹⁴³ As to the Mines Department, it felt that the coal and minerals mission could carry on, but that its staff should be cut from

four to two. The Ministry of Food also wanted the food purchasing mission to remain.¹⁴⁴ In its reply, the Ministry of War Transport still regarded the sea transport mission as helpful, although it was not thought essential for it to stay.¹⁴⁵ The Admiralty, likewise, no longer thought there a need for the Liquidation des Services de l'Attaché Naval while the Ministry of Air reached the same conclusion about the Liquidation des Services de l'Attaché de l'Air, although it was hoped that its one member, with whom it had established cordial relations, would not be expelled.

Having canvassed the opinions of the above departments, the Foreign Office outlined three possible courses of action:

- (a) to expel all the consuls and members of the liquidation missions;
- (b) to expel all the consuls but leave the missions;
- (c) to expel the provincial consuls leaving only the Consulate-General in London with its staff and the missions that are normally attached to it.¹⁴⁶

Point 'a', continued Speaight, had 'little to recommend it' since there was little point in initiating action against the missions, some of which still served a useful function. Point 'b', he continued, was 'the course recommended by MI5'. While the security services acknowledged that most of the consuls were individually harmless, their offices inevitably provided a focal point for disaffected Frenchmen who might otherwise join de Gaulle. If the consuls were not by now assisting with repatriation, they were certainly distributing money to French refugees whose financial insecurity might otherwise have led them to sign up with either the British or the Free French. The drawback of option 'b' was that Vichy might, in any case, withdraw the liquidation missions, and retaliate 'by expelling our Consuls in Indo-China'. This would make the whole business of passport procedures a real nightmare. Considering point 'c', Speaight argued that this would avoid the pitfalls of point 'b', but reiterated the fact that the London consulate was the 'most dangerous from a security point of view' and the one most likely to do harm to de Gaulle's cause.

Given the complicated pros and cons of these arguments, it was wondered whether a decision should be postponed, pending the conclusion of events in Syria.¹⁴⁷ Ultimately, however, in mid-to-late June an announcement was made that largely followed the course of action outlined in point 'c'. This declared 'all the French Consulates, including Honorary Consulates, in the United Kingdom and in

Northern Ireland, apart from the French Consulate General in London, are to be closed forthwith'.¹⁴⁸ The liquidation missions would stay.

When Jalenques was informed of the decision, he manifested a greater loyalty to his colleagues than had Chartier and looked for ways and means by which he could hang on to at least some of his staff. Now that the provincial consulates were to be closed down, he pointed out, not unreasonably, that his office in London would have expanded functions. It was thus necessary that he should be allowed to employ more administrators, perhaps members of the London colony, or maybe some of the provincial consuls.¹⁴⁹ In the event, he plumped for this latter option, employing the services of Chesnais, the ex-French consul at Swansea, and the ex-consular agent at Folkestone.¹⁵⁰ Although the Foreign Office had no wish that Bedford Square should become a rest home for redundant consuls, in the eyes of the police and MI5 Jalenques's two recommendations were acceptable: both wanted to remain in England and both had strong ties with the British, the latter being married to an Englishwoman. It will be recalled that earlier police enquiries had found nothing amiss about the two men. At one point in these negotiations, Jalenques appears to have been fearful how Vichy would react to the expulsions, fearing personal retribution. When he sought advice from the Foreign Office as to how he should present the British actions,¹⁵¹ he discovered officials less than sympathetic. 'I told him', wrote Mack, 'that from our point of view we had no objection to the Post Master, or anyone else at Vichy, knowing what we thought of the Vichy Government's collaboration with Germany.'

With such exchanges out of the way, the Home Office and MI5 got on with the task of counting how many French consular officials were on British soil, in readiness for expulsion. Given the brouhaha that had surrounded their actions, it might have been expected that this would have been an easy task. Yet, as is the case of nearly all the 'forgotten French', their numbers were elusive. Being diplomatic staff, they were often exempted from the requirement to register with police.¹⁵² The ensuing enquiries thus produced numerous anomalies, discrepancies in the spelling of names, and discoveries that officials had come and gone without proper authorisation.¹⁵³ By mid-July 1941, the Foreign Office still lacked 'confidence in the accuracy of the list' of consular officials, despite several updates and revisions.¹⁵⁴ As soon as one list appeared, it was supplanted with another, replete with spelling corrections and pencilled additions.¹⁵⁵

Just as it had proved difficult to repatriate French soldiers and sailors

in the autumn of 1940, so too was it difficult to relocate the consular officials. On 14 July 1941, the Foreign Office wrote to Jalenques to inform him that it was intending to ferry the consular party across to New York; Vichy could then arrange the subsequent return crossing to France.¹⁵⁶ As no neutral ship would be available for some time, it was suggested the group might wish to sail on board an English boat leaving in August. There was, however, no hurry in getting the various parties away and, if they so wished, they could remain in London, where accommodation would be arranged for them, until a neutral ship was eventually found.

Vichy had other ideas. Whether desirous to assert its autonomy, whether genuinely concerned for the safety of French officials sailing under the British ensign in U-boat-infested waters, or whether just bloody-minded, the Pétain government made known to Jalenques that it was seeking its own solution to the problem.¹⁵⁷ Ever eager to save on hotel bills, the British were happy to listen to these proposals, although they soon articulated objections to the two suggestions that emerged. The first, favoured by Jalenques, was for the consular party to be transferred by air, from Britain to Lisbon, and then to France. As the Foreign Office objected to British aircraft being used for this purpose, the possibility arose of Vichy planes coming over, and the views of Air Ministry officials were sought.¹⁵⁸ Unsurprisingly, they were intensely hostile to the idea. As a Foreign Office note records, 'The Air Ministry has strong objections, both because the Vichy pilots could not be prevented from seeing things, and because it is undesirable that the party should reach enemy-controlled territory a few hours after leaving the UK, possibly bringing scraps of red-hot info about targets with them.'¹⁵⁹

The other proposal was for Vichy to send a ship over. This suggestion was far more to the liking of the Foreign Office. Such a ship might even carry on board UK citizens stranded in the south of France. Arrangements had been made for the return of these unfortunates the previous winter, but the Armistice Commission at Wiesbaden had not been able to guarantee a safe passage.¹⁶⁰

With so many possibilities being canvassed, deadlock ensued. Because there was no guarantee of a safe transfer, Vichy was unhappy at the shipping of the consular party to New York on board a British ship, and again demanded a neutral vessel.¹⁶¹ In response, the Foreign Office told Jalenques flatly that 'as the Germans torpedoed ships of all nationalities indiscriminately, the party would be no less safe under a British than under a neutral flag'. Perhaps betraying his Pétainist

colours, the Consul-General disagreed, insisting once again on a neutral passage to New York or an airlift to Lisbon. This latter option was given some thought. As places did occasionally become available on the Lisbon air service, run by BOAC, it was speculated whether the consuls could be repatriated in dribs and drabs, although it was admitted that those with children could not be expected to travel in this manner as it was important to keep the families together.

So it was that repatriation became dependent on standby air tickets to Lisbon becoming available through the travel agents, Thomas Cook. This hare-brained scheme soon ran into difficulties. While the Foreign Office insisted that it was 'most unsatisfactory' that these people should be 'hanging about indefinitely',¹⁶² the Ministry of Air responded that Vichy staff came low on its list of priorities.¹⁶³ 'we simply cannot have these people occupying precious seats on the UK–Lisbon Service in the place of priority passengers who are advancing the war effort. We also are reluctant to take these people at the expense of our own people on our compassionate standby list.'¹⁶⁴

As the search for a neutral ship continued, the frustrations of the French diplomatic staff awaiting repatriation can only be guessed at. It seems likely that they shared the sentiments of their colleagues belonging to the missions who had experienced lengthy delays following their expulsion in July 1940. As one of this party had lamented at the time, 'I am in a foreign country in a false situation, unable to work or to move from where I am, and almost without friends.'¹⁶⁵

For this individual, both the British and the French were to blame for the hold-up, yet then, as in late 1941, the real problem was Germany. In October, there emerged a further possibility that the stranded French diplomats could sail on a British ship to Lisbon, alongside a Finnish diplomatic party, safe conduct arrangement having been secured from the Germans through Swedish channels, even though the Germans had not been told that French personnel would be on board;¹⁶⁶ indeed, the Germans were under the impression that all consular staff had left immediately after the Syria affair in June.¹⁶⁷ It was hoped that Jalenques would leap at this chance as he was now known to be the unhappy recipient of numerous letters of complaint from his colleagues demanding an explanation for the delay. It transpired, however, that the safe passage assured by the Germans was not as watertight as previously imagined; they had merely agreed to take 'certain precautions', demanding in turn a welter of information about the vessel, to be supplied 'in good time' to Berlin.¹⁶⁸ Because of the

delay, the Ministry of War Transport declared that the vessel could no longer be kept waiting, and deployed her for other work 'from which she cannot be released in less than a month'.¹⁶⁹

Repatriation was further held up as various of the consular staff asked to remain in Britain. Some did so for principled reasons. One such was Saffroy. Employed at the French Consulate General in London before the Armistice, he had then been 'loaned out on a temporary basis to the French Legation at Dublin about the time when Vichy broke off diplomatic relations'.¹⁷⁰ While he was strongly opposed to Vichy, he thought he could still do a useful service by remaining in post and relaying information to the Foreign Office 'where he has many friends'. He had eventually decided Vichy was 'beyond hope' and resigned, ensuring that his letter of resignation to Darlan reached the British press. He now wished to cooperate with the Free French, but wanted to do so on his own terms and was not anxious 'to give immediate and unconditional allegiance to General de Gaulle'. The Foreign Office fully sympathised with this attitude and agreed he could 'fill a useful role'. It was thus thought helpful that Saffroy should not be subject to the full rigours of the Aliens Restrictions Act, and he was allowed to move freely between his house in London and country cottage in Essex. Similar leniency was also extended to Roché, second secretary to the Dublin legation, who had resigned in similar circumstances, and who had since returned to England after his temporary spell in Ireland.

Others appear to have got cold feet at the last minute. Such was C—A—. ¹⁷¹ Born in 1913 at Moulins, he was a vet in civil life, but at the outbreak of war had become a second-lieutenant in the French army attached to the Direction de la cavalerie et du train.¹⁷² In this capacity, he had assisted in the conveyance of horses from Canada to France. When France fell, he was en route home from Canada on board the SS *Nevada*. The ship docked instead at Glasgow and, along with members of the crew, he was sent to White City to await repatriation. He had subsequently been released and had taken up residence in the Royal Hotel, alongside other French officers. He had only stayed there a matter of days before he was employed by the French consulate, although he still maintained he was an officer in the French army and was not a diplomatic official. Working with Lieutenant Vacher, tidying up the financial affairs of those soldiers who were leaving for France, he had initially demanded to be repatriated among their number, but had a last-minute change of heart. Without informing his Vichy superiors,

in early December 1940, he applied to join the Free French and demanded that his name be taken off the repatriation list.

While A— may have been genuinely attracted to de Gaulle, in other cases it appears that family and job interests came before politics. This was the case of M— who had replaced Chesnais as the vice-consul in Cardiff. He had initially been suspected of anti-British feeling, but subsequent police enquiries had revealed that he had close contact with a French family in the city who testified to his trustworthiness: 'The members of this family are all very pro-British and enthusiastic supporters of the Free French movement. It is thought that if this family had the slightest reason to suspect M— of having any feeling hostile to this country the existing friendship would at once end.'¹⁷³ Nonetheless, such feelings did not stop M— from wanting to return to France: 'As he depends upon his post in the French Consular Service for his livelihood ... he feels that his early return to France may be the means of his obtaining any vacant post existing in the service.' He was thus fearful that a 'delay in return' might mean any vacancy in the French Diplomatic Service being filled by someone else. Ultimately, however, he decided that his professional interests would be best looked after by Carlton Gardens. As a Foreign Office note of 10 September 1941 reads: 'With a wife and family to support M. M— has evidently felt bound to hedge before committing himself finally to the Free French.'¹⁷⁴ Hedging his bets he clearly was. He said nothing of his intentions to Jalenques, who was doing his utmost to help his family, and it remains unclear whether ultimately he stayed or was repatriated.¹⁷⁵

Far more blatant in the protecting of his own interests was de Curzon, French consul in Edinburgh, who it will be recalled had been an object of intense suspicion in 1940. In a letter to the Foreign Office of June 1941, he requested that he should be allowed to stay, at least until August. Having lived in Britain since 1919, with only a four-year break when he was attached to the French embassy in Brussels, he protested his pro-British views. Moreover, he made known that all of his children had been born here: 'It is very hard for me to be told to go by my friends – particularly at a time when two of my children are to pass examinations in July and risk losing a full year of studies and preparation if they are not here to sit for these examinations.'¹⁷⁶ Such plaintive letters were treated with scorn by the British. As one official remarked, 'It is clear from this that M. de Curzon is a rather stupid individual who was not doing much harm even when he was Consul at

Glasgow.¹⁷⁷ Nonetheless, de Curzon's case was not treated unsympathetically. As he was no longer considered to be a security threat, and as it was not easy to find safe passages for repatriation, he was permitted to stay in the capacity of a private individual, expressly forbidden to engage in any further consular duties. As a postscript, 1942 found de Curzon back in France where he filed a report on the French community in Scotland to Darlan, although in truth this was more a report of consular responsibilities in Glasgow and Edinburgh interlarded with attacks on particular individuals.¹⁷⁸

As the archival trail goes cold in late 1941, it is difficult to know how exactly the repatriation of personnel was conducted. It seems likely, despite the protests of the Air Ministry, that individuals were found seats on flights to Lisbon, or were transported by boat to the USA and then back to France. The eventual fate of the consular staff in Bedford Square, however, is known. Betraying their lack of political prescience to the very end, in November 1942 they all opted to rally to the ill-fated General Giraud, whom the Americans hoped they could use to win over French forces in North Africa.¹⁷⁹ Maybe this was not a surprising decision. Having refused to side with de Gaulle, and recognising the hopelessness of the Vichy position in late 1942, this at least offered some prospect of saving face, although it seems unlikely that it guaranteed them a future in the French diplomatic service. From November 1942, therefore, Vichy had no representation whatsoever in London. Although in the following year it requested that the Swiss government should act as a protecting power for those French nationals in the British isles, this request was flatly turned down.

Conclusions

As with so many of the groups making up the 'forgotten French', the Vichy consuls did not have a particularly happy time in Britain. They were under suspicion from the outset, and were always *personae non gratae* in the eyes of the Free French, the Spears Mission and MI5 who worked tirelessly for their expulsion. Whether they truly constituted a threat to national security remains doubtful, otherwise they would surely have been expelled sooner. The greatest danger was posed in the summer of 1940 when there were numerous mission staff who had the financial wherewithal and propaganda facilities to undermine the morale of Gaullist volunteers. Such activities were abruptly halted, however, and only a limited number of individuals were involved.

Thereafter, some consuls, especially in Liverpool, Newcastle, Cardiff and London, clearly assisted with the repatriation of soldiers, forging papers and circumventing immigration procedures. They may also have collated intelligence, but it must have been difficult to have communicated this to their government. The figure of de Curzon writing his reports and making notes of a lecture springs to mind. Only the Consulate-General in Bedford Square had the ability to speak directly to Vichy, but even its potential was seriously limited, forced to telegram *en clair* and make use of diplomatic bags. Given the contents of Chartier's letter on his expulsion, the value of his intelligence must also be doubted. Yet whatever the case, there was certainly no intention, on the part of either Chartier or his government, to pass on any information to the Germans. The fact that Vichy still had some diplomatic presence in London was always a source of unease in Berlin lest this became a channel of communication for high-level Anglo-French dialogue, especially after Syria.

Whether Chartier and his cronies could ever have coped with such dialogue must be doubted. These were not, by and large, thoughtful, intelligent or far-sighted men. The cream of the diplomatic staff had gone in July 1940, leaving those whose ambitions were clearly of a different level. They were not cut out for spying, for complex diplomatic exchanges or for political decision-making. They were at their best when form-filling and stamping passports. Ultimately, it was what they represented that caused so much offence. Whether Bedford Square possessed a portrait of Marshal Pétain on its walls is not known, and on many occasions it resorted to using notepaper with the masthead 'République française', either to curry favour or simply because it was short of stationery.¹⁸⁰ But the very fact that Vichy possessed some symbol of its authority on British soil was always going to create difficulties; and when, in 1941, the spinelessness and immoral character of the marshal's regime became transparent, the fate of the consulates was sealed.

Notes

- 1 Hugo quoted in F. M. Wilson, *They Came as Strangers. The Story of Refugees to Great Britain* (London, Hamish Hamilton, 1959), p. 139.
- 2 R. Vinen, *France, 1934–1970* (Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1996), p. 37.
- 3 *Défense de la France*, no. 9, 25 January 1942, reproduced in D. Veillon, *La Collaboration. Textes et débats* (Paris, Livre du Poche, 1984), pp. 128–9.

- 4 L.-D. Girard, *Mazinghem ou la vie secrète de Philippe Pétain* (Paris, privately published, 1971).
- 5 L.-D. Girard, *Montoire. Verdun diplomatique?* (Paris, André Bonne, 1947). See, too, L. Rougier, *Mission secrète à Londres. Les Accords Pétain-Churchill* (Paris, La Diffusion du Livre, 1948).
- 6 J. Simon, *Pétain, mon prisonnier* (Paris, Plon, 1978), p. 141.
- 7 R. T. Thomas, *Britain and Vichy, 1940–1942* (London, Macmillan, 1979), J.-B. Duroselle, *L'Abîme. Politique étrangère de la France, 1939–1944* (Paris, Imprimerie Nationale, 1982) and R. Frank, 'Vichy et les britanniques, 1940–1941. Double Jeu ou double langage?', in J.-P. Azéma and F. Bédarida (eds), *Vichy et les français* (Paris, Fayard, 1992), pp. 144–63.
- 8 Thomas, *Britain and Vichy*, p. 80.
- 9 PRO FO 371 24352 C7463/7407/17, letter of Lord Halifax to Sir Ronald Campbell, 26 June 1940.
- 10 H. Nicolson, 'Les deux Cambon et mon père', *FL*, vol. 3, no. 16, 16 February 1942, pp. 285–90.
- 11 R. Mengin, *No Laurels for de Gaulle* (London, Michael Joseph, 1967), p. 23.
- 12 A. Cadogan, *Diaries* (London, Cassell, 1971), entry for 17 July 1940, p. 314.
- 13 J. Lacouture, *The Rebel* (London, Harper Collins, 1986), p. 239.
- 14 MAE ZV 291, Jules Henry to Vichy, 13 August 1940. See too A. Werth, *De Gaulle* (London, Penguin, 1965), p. 109–10.
- 15 PRO FO 371 42115 Z7345/7345/17, note of October 1944.
- 16 PRO FO 371 28336 Z1777/82, letter of Roché to Ralph Stevenson, Private Secretary to the Foreign Secretary, 4 January 1941.
- 17 PRO FO 371 28337 Z1432/82/17, letter of Sir Ronald Campbell to Sir A. Cadogan, 13 February 1941.
- 18 PRO FO 371 28337 Z1808/82/17, letter of Samuel Hoare, 4 March 1941.
- 19 PRO FO 371 42115 Z7345/7345/17, note of October 1944.
- 20 PRO FO 371 24352 C7407/7407/17, Minute of 9 July 1940.
- 21 PRO FO 371 24352 C7407/7407/17, letter of Sir Desmond Morton to Gladwyn Jebb, 20 June 1940.
- 22 PRO FO 371 24352 C7407/7407/17, War Cabinet Conclusions, 1 July 1940.
- 23 PRO FO 371 24352 C7407/7407/17, Minute by R. M. Makins, 6 July 1940, and MAE 2V 291, 'Note pour le Ministre. Relation Sommaire de la Situation à Londres de 17 juin au 20 juillet', 20 July 1940.
- 24 PRO FO 371 24355 C8132/7559/19, Minute of 1 August 1940.
- 25 PRO FO 371 24339 C7797/7328/17, Report of 4 July 1940.
- 26 Amiral Thierry d'Argenlieu, *Souvenirs de guerre, juin 1940–janvier 1941* (Paris, Plon, 1973), p. 61.
- 27 PRO FO 371 24339 C7797/7328/17, leaflet of 15 July 1940. The same leaflet can be found in CCC SPRS 1/135.

- 28 PRO FO 371 24339 C7797/7328/17, note by Hankey, 18 July 1940.
- 29 PRO FO 371 24354 C12579/7407/17, undated report of 1940.
- 30 PRO FO 371 24339 C7797/7328/17, Report of 4 July 1940.
- 31 PRO FO 371 24352 C7407/7407/17, Record of meeting, 10 July 1940.
- 32 F. Coulet, *Vertu des temps difficiles* (Paris, Plon, 1967), pp. 74–5.
- 33 Mengin, *No Laurels*, p. 58.
- 34 *Ibid.*, p. 85.
- 35 Lacouture, *The Rebel*, p. 239.
- 36 D. Schoenbrun, *The Three Lives of Charles de Gaulle. A Biography* (London, Hamish Hamilton, 1966), p. 100.
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- 38 PRO FO 371 24352 C7407/7407/17, letter of Sir Desmond Morton to Gladwyn Jebb, 20 June 1940.
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- 40 See especially P. Morand, *Londres* (Paris, Plon, 1933) and the many commentaries on his literary endeavours: M. Burrus, *Paul Morand, voyageur du Xxe siècle* (Paris, Séguier, 1987), G. Guitard-Auviste, *Morand (1888–1976). Légendes et vérités* (Paris, Hachette, 1981) and P. Thibault, *L'Allure de Morand. Du modernisme au Pétainisme* (Birmingham, AL, University of Birmingham, 1992).
- 41 Mengin, *No Laurels*, p. 93.
- 42 This move guaranteed that he was a suspicious personality in the eyes of the British who, unbeknown to him, regularly read his correspondence, albeit without discovering any incriminating evidence. Private information.
- 43 Mengin, *No Laurels*, p. 23.
- 44 PRO FO 371 28336 Z1777/82/17, letter of Roché to Ralph Stevenson, 4 January 1941.
- 45 P.-L. Bret, *Au feu des événements. Mémoires d'un journaliste. Londres-Alger, 1929–1944* (Paris, Plon, 1959), p. 193.
- 46 MAE ZV 292, telegram of 15 July 1940.
- 47 MAE ZV 292, telegram of Bressy to Vichy, 4 July 1940.
- 48 PRO FO 371 24352 C7407/7407/17, War Cabinet Conclusions, 2 July 1940.
- 49 PRO FO 371 24352 C7407/7407/17, War Cabinet Conclusions, 3 July 1940.
- 50 PRO FO 371 24352 C7407/7407/17, Minute of 9 July 1940.
- 51 CCC SPRS 1/136, 'Chart of morale, 12 June–19 July 1940'.
- 52 PRO FO 371 24352 C7407/7407/17, Minute by Makins, 9 July 1940.
- 53 PRO FO 371 24352 C7407/7407/17, Record of meeting, 10 July 1940.
- 54 *Ibid.*
- 55 PRO FO 371 24358 C13252/7559/17, Repatriation of French military missions, 9 December 1940.

- 56 PRO FO 371 24354 C13132/7407/17, letter of Mack to Morton, 23 December 1940.
- 57 PRO FO 371 24352 C8319/7407/17, letter of Lord Cadogan to Cadman, Foreign Office, 12 August 1940, to which D—'s letter is attached.
- 58 PRO FO 371 42031 Z4476/4184/17, note of 14 July 1940.
- 59 *Ibid.*
- 60 PRO FO 371 28424 Z6364/179/17, letter of Michael Law, Foreign Office, to Captain Jock McEwen MP, 28 July 1941.
- 61 PRO FO 371 28367 Z5986/123/17, personnel of the liquidation missions, 14 July 1941.
- 62 PRO FO 371 24352 C8131/7407/17, Minute of 19 July 1940.
- 63 MAE ZV 291, telegram of Chartier to Vichy, 22 July 1940.
- 64 MAE ZV 291, Memorandum of Arnal, Directeur politique adjoint, for minister, 26 July 1940.
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- 66 PRO FO 24355 C7854/7559/17, Report of 22 July 1940 by the Director of Naval Intelligence.
- 67 M. Egremont, *Under Two Flags. The Life of Major-General Sir Edward Spears* (London, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1997), p. 199.
- 68 MAE ZV 291, telegram of Chartier, 23 July 1940.
- 69 MAE ZV 291, Chartier to Vichy, 22 July 1940, and 4 January 1941.
- 70 See A. Hytier, *Two Years of French Foreign Policy, 1940–1942* (Westport, Greenwood Press, 1974).
- 71 PRO FO 371 24355 C7854/7559/17, Report of 22 July 1940 by the Director of Naval Intelligence.
- 72 PRO FO 371 24353 C8821/7407/17, letter of Morton to Strang, 18 August 1940, in which Morton remarks that he had known Chartier at the Ministry of Economic Warfare and did not trust him then.
- 73 PRO FO 371 24353 C9977/7407/17, Foreign Office note, 17 October 1940.
- 74 PRO FO 371 24353 C9977/7407/17, Foreign Office note, 26 October 1940.
- 75 PRO FO 371 41990 Z5811/3375/17, letter to Foreign Office 5 September 1944, saying he was ready to take up the job he had resigned in June 1940.
- 76 PRO FO 371 24353 C9977/7407/17, Report of Brighton CID, 11 October 1940.
- 77 Reports to be found in PRO 371 24354 C12690/7407/17.
- 78 *Ibid.*
- 79 PRO FO 371 24353 C9977/7407/17, Foreign Office Minute, 21 August 1940.
- 80 PRO FO 371 24353 C9230/7407/17, letter from Flag Officer in Charge, Tyne area, to Admiralty, 19 August 1940.

- 81 PRO FO 371 24353 C9977/7407/17, Committee on Foreign (Allied) Resistance, 18 September 1940.
- 82 PRO FO 371 24353 C10440/7407/17, MI5 letter to Foreign Office, 22 September 1940.
- 83 PRO FO 371 24353 C10440/7407/17, letter of Macbeth to Watkins, 7 September 1940.
- 84 PRO FO 371 24353 C10440/7407/17, letter of Consul-General, Liverpool, to Carlisle Police, 29 July 1940.
- 85 PRO FO 371 24353 C10440/7407/17, Report of Glasgow police, 11 October 1940.
- 86 Interview with Léon Wilson, London, 22 March 2002.
- 87 Bret, *Au feu des événements*, p. 209.
- 88 G. Palewski, *Mémoires d'Action, 1924–1974* (Paris, Plon, 1988), p. 146.
- 89 PRO FO 371 24353 C10105/7407/17, letter of the Ministry of Shipping to Steel, Foreign Office, 17 September 1940, to which a note of 24 September 1940 is attached.
- 90 PRO FO 371 24353 C9977/7407/17, note of 22 August 1940.
- 91 R. Graves, *Goodbye to all that* (London, Penguin, 1960 edn), p. 50.
- 92 PA-AA R29585–R29606, PA-AA R29570–4 and PA-AA 1106, 1120b, 1158b, 1158c, 1228–31, 1295–6, 1361, 2483.
- 93 PRO FO 371 24353 C9080/7407/17, contains the lengthy correspondence tackling this issue.
- 94 MAE ZV 291, telegram of Chartier to Vichy, 22 August 1940.
- 95 MAE ZV 291, telegram of Baudouin to Chartier, 12 September 1940.
- 96 CCC NBKE 4/259, 'Memorandum on the Activities of Undesirables Still at Large in England', no date.
- 97 CCC SPRS 1/137, Memorandum by Spears of 25 February 1941.
- 98 PA-AA R29585–R29606, PA-AA R29570-4 and PA-AA 1106, 1120b, 1158b, 1158c, 1228–31, 1295–6, 1361, 2483.
- 99 PRO FO 371 24353 C9977/7407/17, note of 26 October 1940.
- 100 PRO FO 371 24353 C10562/7407/17, note by Mack, 29 September 1940.
- 101 PRO FO 371 24354 C13903/7407/17, Foreign Office Minutes of 6 November 1940 and 26 November 1940. An attached MI5 report of 11 December 1940 makes it clear the security services wanted them out.
- 102 PRO FO 371 24354 C13903/7407/17, note of 26 November 1940.
- 103 PRO FO 1055 8, letter from Lord Bessborough to Spears, 27 February 1941.
- 104 CCC SPRS 1/137, 'Activities of M. Chartier', 25 February 1941.
- 105 CCC SPRS 1/137, letter of Captain Knox to MI5, 20 February 1941.
- 106 CCC SPRS 1/134, note by Sommerville-Smith, 1 March 1941.
- 107 PRO FO 1055 8, letter from Lord Bessborough to Spears, 27 February 1941, also in CCC SPRS 1/134.
- 108 *Ibid.*

- 109 PRO FO 371 28365 Z1456/123/17, 'Undesirable Activities of French Men in the UK', 26 February 1941.
- 110 CCC SPRS 1/134, letter of 4 March 1941.
- 111 CCC NBKR 4/259, 'Memorandum on the Activities of Undesirables Still at Large in England', no date.
- 112 PRO FO 371 24344 C11509/7328/17, letter of 24 October 1940.
- 113 PRO FO 1055 10, Report of 14 February 1941.
- 114 PRO FO 1055 3, Minute of the CFR, 6 February 1941.
- 115 PRO FO 1055 10, Report of 14 February 1941.
- 116 PRO FO 371 28421 Z801/179/17, letter of T. Holdsworth, Cardiff police, 14 January 1941.
- 117 MAE ZV 291, note of général de division aérienne to Laval, 3 June 1942.
- 118 PRO FO 1055 8, letter of Dickens to Spears, 27 February 1941.
- 119 PRO FO 371 28422 Z1996/179/17, letter of Norman, Ministry of Shipping, to Mack, 14 March 1941.
- 120 PRO FO 371 28422 Z2551/179/17, Minutes by R. L. Speaight, 1 April 1941.
- 121 PRO FO 371 28422 Z2551/179/17, telegram by Chartier, April 1941. See, too, MAE ZV 291, telegram of Chartier to Vichy, 9 May 1941, in which he makes clear the archives of the Liverpool consulate had been destroyed.
- 122 MAE ZV 292, Darlan circular, June 1941.
- 123 R. O. Paxton, *Vichy France. Old Guard and New Order, 1940–1944* (New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1972), p. 116.
- 124 M-O FR 523B, 'Attitudes to other Nationalities, 10 December 1940'. Of 101 people questioned, 71 were 'unfavourable' in their assessment of Vichy, 7 'favourable', 14 'half and half', and 9 'vague'.
- 125 M-O FR 713, 'Feelings about Vichy France', 26 May 1941.
- 126 MAE ZV 292, Chartier telegram to Vichy, 11 May 1941.
- 127 MAE ZV 291, Vichy telegram to Chartier, 9 May 1941.
- 128 PRO FO 371 28422 Z2551/179/17, handwritten note by Speaight, 11 June 1941. Charter's statement, authored by the British, is contained in MAE ZV 292.
- 129 PRO FO 371 28422 Z2551/179/17, handwritten note by Speaight, 11 June 1941.
- 130 PRO FO 371 28422 Z2551/179/17, letter of Chartier, impounded on 7 June 1941.
- 131 PRO FO 371 28422 Z2551/179/17, handwritten note by Hankey, 9 June 1941.
- 132 PRO FO 371 28422 Z2551/179/17, letter of Speaight to G. Kimber, Prime Minister's Office, 13 June 1941.
- 133 PRO FO 371 28424 Z6007/179/17, letter of G. Kimber, Downing Street, to R. R. Sedgwick, 14 July 1941.

- 134 PRO FO 371 28426 Z10235/179/17, Minute by Speaight, 28 November 1941.
- 135 PRO FO 371 28424 Z5941/179/17, letter of R. H. Landman, Trading with the Enemy Branch, to A. B. Hutcheon, Consulate Department, Foreign Office, 9 July 1941.
- 136 PRO FO 371 28423 Z4343/179/17, Report of Mack, 25 May 1941.
- 137 PRO FO 371 28426 Z10235/179/17, Minute by Speaight, 28 November 1941.
- 138 MAE ZV 291, note du directeur politique adjoint at Vichy, 30 December 1942.
- 139 PRO FO 371 32114 Z6061/6061/17, Minute of 24 July 1942. On the wider issue of refugees from French colonies, see T. P. Maga, *America, France and the European Refugee Problem, 1933–1947* (New York/London, Garland, 1985).
- 140 PRO FO 371 28423 Z5154/179/17, 'Action Against French Officials in the United Kingdom'.
- 141 PRO FO 371 28424 Z6364/179/17, letter of Michael Law, Foreign Office, to Captain Jock McEwen MP, 28 July 1941.
- 142 PRO FO 371 28423 Z5154/179/17, 'Action Against French Officials in the United Kingdom', 19 June 1941.
- 143 PRO FO 371 28367 Z4966/123/17, letter of D. W. Barrington, Ministry of Supply, to Speaight, Foreign Office, 6 June 1941.
- 144 PRO FO 371 28423 Z5154/179/17, 'Action Against French Officials in the United Kingdom', 19 June 1941.
- 145 See too PRO FO 371 28366 Z4921/123/17, letter from Sir Cecil Kisch, Petroleum Department, to Speaight, 10 June 1941.
- 146 PRO FO 371 28423 Z5154/179/17, 'Action Against French Officials in the United Kingdom', 10 June 1941.
- 147 PRO FO 371 28423 Z5154/179/17, note by W. H. B. Mack, 12 June 1941.
- 148 PRO FO 371 28423 Z5154/179/17, note of 16 June 1941.
- 149 PRO FO 371 28423 Z5154/179/17, Minute by W. H. B. Mack, 18 June 1941.
- 150 PRO FO 371 28424 Z5795/179/17, letter of Harry Hohler, Foreign Office, to MI5, 11 July 1941. This letter refers to a meeting between Jalenques and Speaight on 7 July 1941 where numbers at the London consulate had been discussed.
- 151 PRO FO 371 28423 Z5237/179/17, Minute by W. H. B. Mack, 20 June 1941.
- 152 PRO FO 371 28423 Z5701/179/17, letter of MI5, to Miss Davies, Home Office, 20 May 1941.
- 153 PRO FO 371 28423 Z5701/179/17, letter of Harry Hohler, Foreign Office, to Miss Davies, Home Office, 16 July 1941.
- 154 PRO FO 371 28423 Z5701/179/17, Minute by Hankey, 11 July 1941.

- 155 See the lists in PRO FO 371 28426.
- 156 PRO FO 371 28424 Z6006/179/17, letter of Speaight to Jalenques, 14 July 1941.
- 157 PRO FO 371 28424 Z6298/179/17, Minute of Speaight, 21 July 1941.
- 158 PRO FO 371 28424 Z6298/179/17, letter of Speaight to Mackenzie, 23 July 1941.
- 159 PRO FO 371 28424 Z6298/179/17, note by Speaight, 24 July 1941.
- 160 PRO FO 371 28424 Z6298/179/17, Minute of Speaight, 21 July 1941.
- 161 PRO FO 371 28424 Z 6535/179/17, note of Speaight, 1 August 1941.
- 162 PRO FO 371 28425 Z7449/179/17, Minute of Hankey, 3 September 1941.
- 163 PRO FO 371 28425 Z7449/179/17, letter of Captain J. J. Hebertson, Ministry of Air, to W. L. Dunlop, Foreign Office, 29 August 1941.
- 164 PRO FO 371 28425 Z8021/179/17, letter from Air Ministry to H. Jones, Foreign Office, 18 September, 1941.
- 165 PRO FO 371 28366 Z2283/123/17, letter of J— R—, 26 February 1941, intercepted by MI5.
- 166 PRO FO 371 28425 Z8021/179/17, Minutes of Hankey, 26 September 1941.
- 167 MAE ZV 292, telegram of French representative to the Armistice Commission to Darlan, 22 February 1942.
- 168 PRO FO 371 28425 Z8021/179/17, note of 27 September 1941.
- 169 PRO FO 371 28425 Z8021/179/17, note by Hankey, 14 October 1941.
- 170 PRO FO 371 28341 Z9774/82/17, letter of Speaight to E. N. Cooper, Home Office (Aliens Department), 18 November 1941.
- 171 PRO FO 371 28426 Z10402/179/17, letter of F. W. Turness, Home Office (Aliens Department) to under-secretary of state, Foreign Office, 8 December 1941.
- 172 PRO FO 371 28424 Z6060/179/17, Police report of 27 June 1941.
- 173 PRO FO 371 28425 Z7722/179/17, letter of Clayton, Home Office, to Mack, Foreign Office, 8 September 1941, which gives details of a letter from Cardiff City Police to Clayton, 4 September 1941.
- 174 PRO FO 371 28425 Z7722/179/17, note by Hankey, 10 September 1941.
- 175 PRO FO 371 28425, Z7294/179/17, note of Mack, 10 September 1940.
- 176 PRO FO 371 28423 Z5282/179/17, letter of de Curzon to Speaight, 20 June 1941.
- 177 PRO FO 371 28423 Z5282/179/17, Minute of 20 June 1941.
- 178 MAE ZV 291, de Curzon to Darlan, 28 March 1942.
- 179 PRO FO 371 42031 Z4476/4184/17, note of 14 July 1944.
- 180 It is interesting to note that at the close of the war, officials at Vichy started to use notepaper headed 'République française'. Examples may be found in AN F¹⁷ 13390.