

No.7 “Remembrance and Citizenship” series

THE DEMARCATIION LINE



MINISTRY
OF
DEFENCE

General Secretariat
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DIRECTORATE
OF MEMORY,
HERITAGE
AND ARCHIVES



Musée de la Résistance Nationale - Champigny

The demarcation line in Chalon.
The line was marked out in a variety of ways, from sentry boxes...

In compliance with the terms of the Franco-German Armistice Convention signed in Rethondes on 22 June 1940, Metropolitan France was divided up on 25 June to create two main zones on either side of an arbitrary abstract line that cut across *départements*, municipalities, fields and woods. The line was to undergo various modifications over time, dictated by the occupying power's whims and requirements.

Starting from the Spanish border near the municipality of Arnéguy in the *département* of Basses-Pyrénées (present-day Pyrénées-Atlantiques), the demarcation line continued via Mont-de-Marsan, Libourne, Confolens and Loches, making its way to the north of the *département* of Indre before turning east and crossing Vierzon, Saint-Amand-Montrond, Moulins, Charolles and Dole to end at the Swiss border near the municipality of Gex.

The division created a German-occupied northern zone covering just over half the territory and a free zone to the south, commonly referred to as "*zone nono*" (for "non-occupied"), with Vichy as its "capital". The Germans kept the entire Atlantic coast for themselves along with the main industrial regions. In addition, by enacting a whole series of measures designed to restrict movement of people, goods and postal traffic between the two zones, they provided themselves with a means of pressure they could exert at will. "Opening" or "closing" the line as their wants and needs dictated, they kept a stranglehold on the country and its economy.

Apart from its main road and rail crossing-points, the almost 1,200-km-long line could not be marked out systematically and, depending on the configuration of the land it crossed, posts painted in the German colours were set at more or less infrequent intervals along it. Sentry boxes and barriers were set up at crossing points signalled by notices. A similar system pertained on the French side, although it was a good deal patchier owing to lack of men and resources.

The occupying authorities kept a close watch on the demarcation line. It could only be crossed by those authorised to do so and only at official crossing points upon presentation of an identity card and an *Ausweis* (pass) delivered by the *Kommandanturen* (Offices of the German authorities, each responsible for military and civil administration of a given area). All requests had to be accompanied by a full set of documents including identity photographs, certificate of domestication and reason for crossing. As passes were only delivered in acknowledged cases of urgent need (births, burials or serious illnesses on the part of close relations), all those wishing to cross were faced with an endless series of procedures and interminable waiting periods. Administrative red tape was plentiful and deterrent.

Anyone living within ten kilometres of either side of the demarcation line could request an "*Ausweis für den kleinen Grenzverkehr*" (pass for local cross-border travel) allowing them to move across their divided *département* for a set period of time. Delivery of such passes was the job of local *Feldkommandanturen* and *Kreiskommandanturen*.

... to simple notices.



National Resistance Museum, Champigny

The occupied zone and the free zone were not the only divisions made to French soil. In August 1940, Alsace and Lorraine, both annexed by Nazi Germany, were respectively attached to the *Gau* (an administrative district in Nazi organisation) of Bade and the *Gau* of Sarre-Palatinate. The Nord-Pas-de-Calais region was placed under the authority of the *Militärbefehlshaber* (Military Governor) of Holland and Belgium. And a final zone stretched from the mouth of the Somme to the Rhone, where the river leaves Lake Geneva. Entitled the “reserved zone” by the Germans, it was commonly known as the “forbidden zone” by the French, who could only enter it with difficulty. There were reinforced control points at either end as well as along the English Channel coastline and the Franco-Swiss border.

The Italian “occupied zone” stretched from Lake Geneva to the Mediterranean, to the east of Chambéry, Grenoble and Gap, and included Nice. However, the Italians only occupied a few parts of the territory in the real sense of the term.

Finally, in the autumn of 1941 as a prelude to the building of the Atlantic wall, a new “forbidden” zone was created along the English Channel and Atlantic coastlines. Only those who had lived there for at least three months were permitted to enter and move around in it, along with alternative civilian service personnel working for the German army and SNCF field staff. It was also prohibited to telephone or telegraph there.

Up until September 1940, no letters could be sent from one zone to another. In that month, the “interzone card”, also known as the “family card”, made its first appearance. It bore a series of pre-printed formulae and only allowed correspondents to provide very

Interzone card.

Après avoir rempli cette carte, vous devez l'adresser à la correspondance d'ordre postal, pour les adresses indiquées. — Les deux faces se lisent par l'encre.

ATTENTION: Le Teneur de cette carte de famille ne peut pas accompagner l'ordre postal, ce sera son adresse et son numéro de famille.

Boulogne/Mer le 30 dimanche 1940

en bonne santé régulier

régulièrement, gravement malade, blessé

libre prisonnier

désolé sans nouvelles

La famille va bien

besoins de provisions d'argent

nouvelles bagages ont de retour à

travaille à va entrer

à l'école de a été reçu

aller à le

si

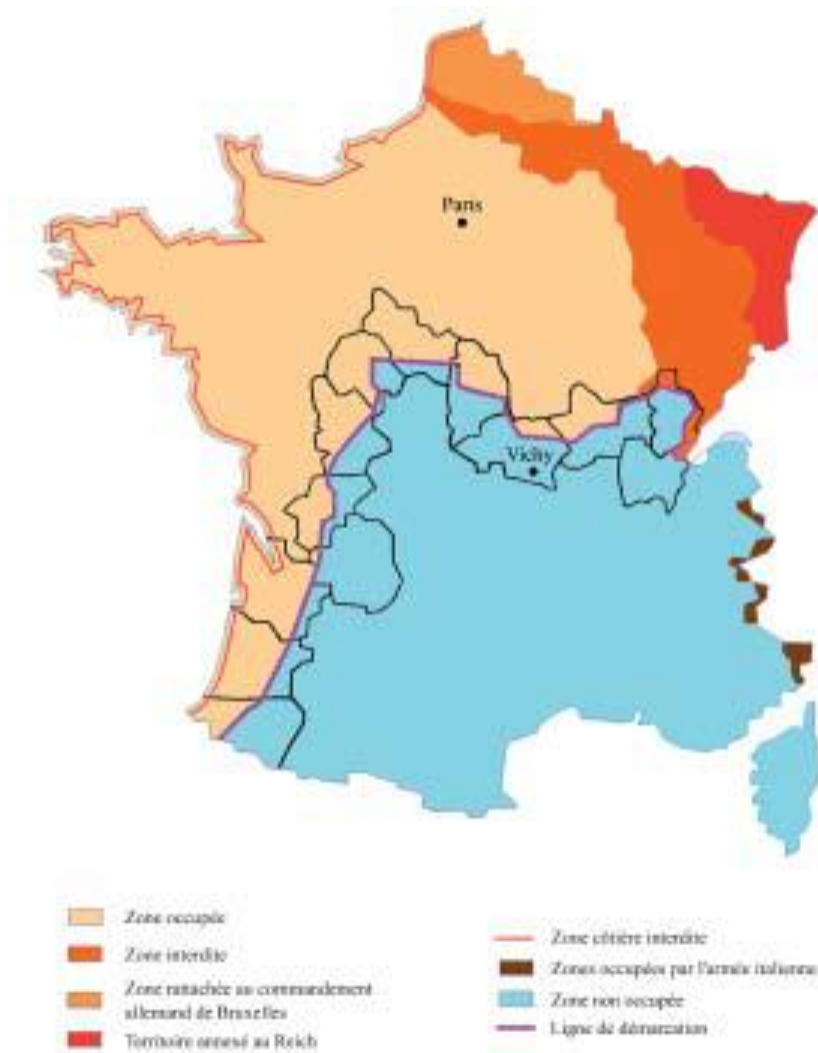
votre entrée

a été reçu

Affectionnées pensées. Sœurs.

Signature: J. Gillioy

Resistance and Deportation Museum, Bourges and Cher



The dividing up of France. The demarcation line crossed thirteen *départements*: Basses-Pyrénées, Landes, Gironde, Dordogne Charente, Vienne, Indre-et-Loire, Loir-et-Cher, Cher, Allier, Saône-et-Loire, Jura and Ain.

brief and impersonal news, as not a single word could be added to it. Unsurprisingly, letters and parcels became the first items to be smuggled across the line. Whether it was a matter of post or people, such crossings, initially the work of a few smugglers acting on their own initiative, led to the development of entire networks enabling escaped English and French prisoners of war, Alsatians and Lorrainians who refused to enlist in the German army, volunteers eager to serve Free France, and anyone else who felt threatened to cross into the so-called “free” zone. Controls became stricter and more numerous, in particular from the spring of 1941 onwards, when Wehrmacht soldiers were replaced by customs officers. Patrols and controls became the order of the day, and it was no longer unusual for pursuits to continue and shots to be fired inside the free zone itself.

As early as the summer of 1940, numbers of residents living near the demarcation line began turning their hand to smuggling people across it – on foot, by bicycle, by rowing-boat, in carts full of manure, in barrels – all possible methods were employed. Clandestine crossings were frequent right from the start, a good many of them private or commercial affairs. Nonetheless, there were few arrests before 1941.

Many men and women first undertook such ventures purely on their own account, simply to be of service to others, because they found the very idea of a border abhorrent, a yoke weighing them down, and paralysing all movement. Most of them went on to help organise escape lines. Money, civilian clothes and provisions were collected and given to escaped prisoners before their departure. Teams were set up, with memberships including railwaymen, policemen and gendarmes. Greed was not always absent from proceedings however, and there were some who did not hesitate to demand money for their services, when they didn't abandon their charges or simply hand them over to the German or French authorities.

The demarcation line was abolished in February 1943 as the Germans had occupied the whole of Metropolitan France since November 1942. It did not however disappear from German ordnance survey maps and a number of restrictions remained, in particular with regard to movement of goods. It continued to provide a means of exerting pressure right up to the end of the war, and the threat of its reintroduction weighed upon the French until the occupying forces were finally driven out.

The demarcation line in Moulins. As from 1 March 1943, people crossing the line no longer required passes.



LAPI/ National Resistance Museum, Champigny

Refugees crossing the demarcation line in Vierzon.



Resistance and Deportation Museum, Bourges and Cher

Refugees and the demarcation line:

The German advance in May and June 1940 caused millions of people to flee their homes. After the armistice, they wanted to go back where they came from. The refugees' return home was organised from summer 1940 to summer 1941. The Germans authorised the opening of crossing points while the "Armistice Army" set up stopover gites. In the autumn of 1940, however, changes began to be made to the conditions under which people could return to their homes, making it more difficult for them to do so. The Germans replaced repatriation certificates with passes, and at the beginning of 1941 only four crossing-points were allowed for: in Langon (Gironde), Vierzon (Cher), Moulins (Allier) and Chalon-sur-Saône (Saône-et-Loire). In the summer of 1941, measures were taken to bring together families of refugees who wanted to stay in the non-occupied zone.

In addition, restrictive measures were taken with regard to foreigners and Jews. As from September 1940, the latter were no longer authorised to return to the northern zone. In October 1940, passes became compulsory for foreigners who wanted to cross into the southern zone. Regulations became increasingly tough, and on 23 October 1941, the demarcation line was closed to foreigners.

Et quel serait le rôle de ses commissaires ?

De défendre auprès des pouvoirs publics les intérêts non plus d'une circonscription — mais qui rend un fameux son électoral — mais d'un secteur. Et ce commissaire délégué de secteur pourrait, nous dit-on, être un ancien conseiller municipal, à condition que le secteur dont il serait le délégué ne soit pas celui qu'il représentait, voire partiellement occupé.

Ce qui revient à dire qu'un ex-

tr. passer leur correspondance commerciale par le système con-
ventionnel, déjà, au ministère
de la Production Industrielle et
du Travail.



ORDONNANCE

contre le passage sans autorisation de la ligne de démarcation du 4 octobre 1940

Au 15 octobre 3.586.584 habitants dans la Seine

Le 15 octobre, on comptait dans le département de la Seine 3.586.584 habitants ainsi répartis :

Paris	1.883.719
Arrondissement de Paris	960.799
Arrondissements de Seine	(32.118)
Total	3.586.584

En vertu des pleins pouvoirs qui nous ont conférés par le Führer und Oberster Befehlshaber der Wehrmacht l'ordonne ce qui suit :

Sera seule toute personne qui transite sans autorisation la ligne de démarcation ce qui transiter dans la zone occupée des marchandises ou des incriminés de paiement sans autorisation préalable.

Cette ordonnance entrera en vigueur dès sa publication.

Le commissaire en chef
de la zone.

Hier, importants arrivages de terre à Paris.

— Le nombre de la viande des bœufs à des trafics allemands, dit M. Corbelli, le président du Syndicat des Viandiers à Paris, est en gros des viandes de la viande allemande :

— Il y a deux sortes de viande : les quarts allemands sous le contrôle des Prussiens. Pour marcher, rien à dire. Il faut y a aussi un « marché noir » qui échappe complètement à la surveillance de l'Administration.

Enfin, les viandes contrôlées — c'est la viande que les policiers ont — c'est pas les bœufs morts des allemands.

— Enfin en donc la viande de bœuf que vous mangiez ?

— Oui ; la viande que j'ai mangé en 1940 dans l'occupé département. En Seine, Seine-Oise et Seine-et-Marne le pila-

National Resistance Museum, Champigny

German order of 4 October 1940 bearing on illegal crossing of the demarcation line, published in *L'Œuvre* of 18 October 1940.

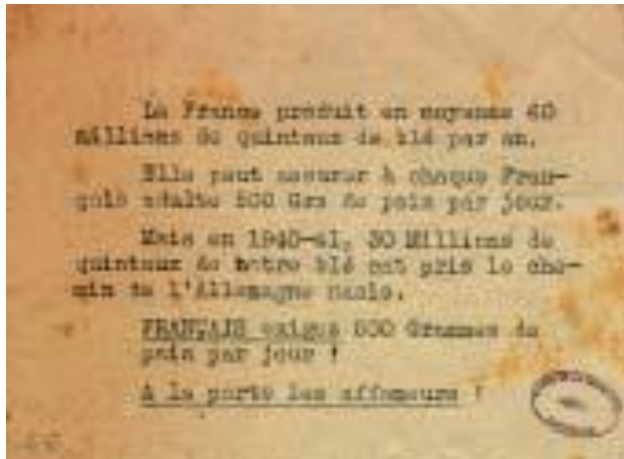
22 June 1940	Signature of the Franco-German armistice in Rethondes.
24 June 1940	Signature of the Franco-Italian armistice in Rome.
25 June 1940	The two armistices come into force.
2 July 1940	The French government sets up in Vichy.
11 July 1940	Promulgation of the French State by Marshal Pétain.
17 July 1940	Law authorising the purging of civilian and military government personnel.
18 July 1940	German order regulating postal and telephone services between the two zones.
22 July 1940	Law bearing on revision of naturalisations.
28 July-3 August 1940	Suspension of rail traffic between the two zones.
July 1940	Introduction of passes.
7 August 1940	Germany annexes Alsace and Lorraine.
3 September 1940	Laws authorising the arrest of anyone suspected of being a danger to national defence or public safety, and administrative internment of political figures.
25 September 1940	Partial reestablishment of postal relations between the two zones (introduction of interzone cards).
27 September 1940	German order prohibiting Jewish refugees to return to the occupied zone.

3 October 1940	First Vichy law on Jewish status.
4 October 1940	German order against illegal crossing of the demarcation line.
24 October	Meeting between Pétain and Hitler in Montoire; start of State collaboration.
25 October 1940	Vichy decree setting conditions for French citizens' and foreigners' movements in Metropolitan France.
13 December 1940	Dismissal and arrest of Pierre Laval; appointment of Pierre-Étienne Flandin as Prime Minister; closure of the demarcation line in reprisal.
28 April 1941	Arrival of German customs officers to keep watch on the demarcation line; Darlan, head of the government since February, negotiates easing of conditions for crossing the line.
9 May 1941	Agreement on goods and payments crossing the line.
17 October 1941	German order regulating postal traffic between the two zones (entry of ordinary postcards into circulation).
8 November 1942	The Allies land in North Africa.
11 November 1942	German troops invade the non-occupied zone ("Operation Attila").
18 November 1942	Abolition of the first French surveillance posts.
1 March 1943	Opening of the demarcation line; abolition of passes.
3 March 1943	Reestablishment of postal relations across the whole of the territory.
July 1944	Official abolition of the demarcation line.

Three men arrested for trying to cross the line illegally near Pleumartin.



Vienne Départemental Archives



National Resistance Museum, Champigny

Putting food on the table became a daily concern as the Germans co-opted 40% or more of food production for their own use. Anti-German leaflet.

Economic consequences of the demarcation line:

The demarcation line led to an imbalance between the northern and southern zones. The Germans took over the richest agricultural and industrial regions: the occupied zone produced 72.5% of wheat, 78% of barley, 80% of oats, 70% of potatoes, 87% of butter, 95% of steel and 76% of coal. Lacking the required raw materials “confiscated” to supply the German economy, the southern zone saw its industrial and agricultural sectors severely disabled if not completely paralysed. The situation became particularly difficult in areas bordering the line, with companies cut off from their workforces and farmers from their fields. Because of the higher prices charged in the northern zone, contraband and black market goods were increasingly on offer despite measures taken to stamp out such practices. Difficulties in obtaining provisions led to major food shortages, if not serious risk of starvation.

Movement of goods, like that of the people themselves, required the authorisation of the German authorities, with the closest watch being kept on north-south traffic. Matters improved a little in May 1941 when Darlan managed to obtain reestablishment of traffic of goods and payments, essentially from the non-occupied zone to the occupied zone, in exchange for concessions in Syria. Despite shortages in such areas as energy, raw materials and manpower, the economy gradually started to pick up again, only to go into a downward slide once more in 1942-1943 and collapse altogether in 1944.

All products without exception were of interest to the Germans...
Label on a wagon transporting goods to Germany



DMPA Collection

La Ligne de Démarcation, the film and the book:

The division of Metropolitan France and the consequences arising from setup of the demarcation line left a deep impression on the collective imagination. A host of books, whether eye-witness accounts or novels, along with telefilms and movies have taken this sorry period in the history of France as their subject.

In 1966, Claude Chabrol (born in Paris in 1930) devoted his first film on the Occupation to it. *La Ligne de Démarcation* is set in 1942 and is about the daily lives of the inhabitants of a little village near Dole, some of whom belong to a Resistance network committed to getting people across the demarcation line. The 90-minute black-and-white film, with a screenplay written by Chabrol in collaboration with Gilbert Renault (Vannes 1904 - Guingamp 1984), alias Colonel Rémy, includes all the stereotypical characters to be expected of the genre, as can be seen from the film poster.

In parallel, Colonel Rémy, a Gaullist from the outset, Resistance fighter and founder of the *Confrérie Notre-Dame* intelligence network, devoted 22 volumes to the same theme and with the same title, published between 1964 and 1976. Among other things, the book contains numerous testimonies collected from members of the Resistance who had helped get people across the line.



Jean-Pierre Niogret

The “Courage-Liberté” monument in Thénieux, dedicated to the memory of those who risked their lives smuggling people into the free zone.

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