

Times of Betrayal & Defiance



The Occupation of France

In July of 1940, Nazi forces invaded France. To minimize casualties, the French government signed a treaty with Germany, splitting the country in two. Germany and Italy agreed to occupy the northwestern half of the country, and the French government maintained control of the southwestern half, known as Vichy France. The Vichy government, however, remained sympathetic to the Nazi ideology, particularly in their actions against the Jewish people.

The Jewish community in France faced many anti-Jewish laws and regulations due to the Nazi occupation. Lucien Moreau and his family struggled with these laws, as well as a betrayal by those close to him during his family's struggle for survival.



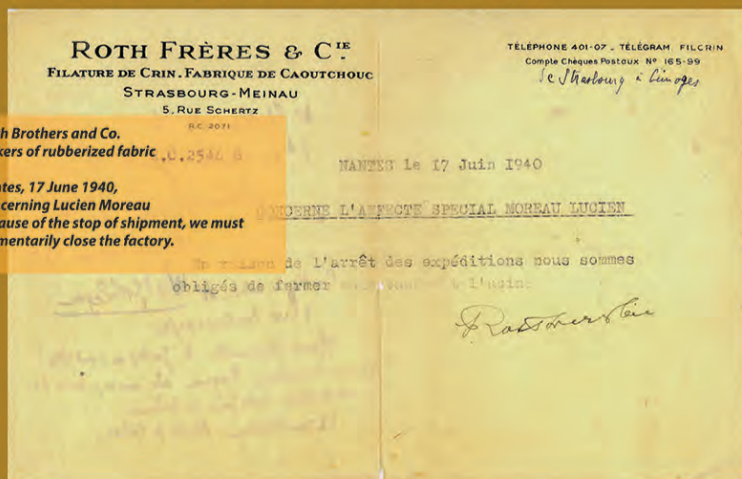
Lucien Moreau holding his daughter Collette. Image from Olivier Bourgoïn

Adolf Hitler visits Paris with architect Albert Speer (left) and artist Arno Breker (right), June 23, 1940. National Archives and Records Administration



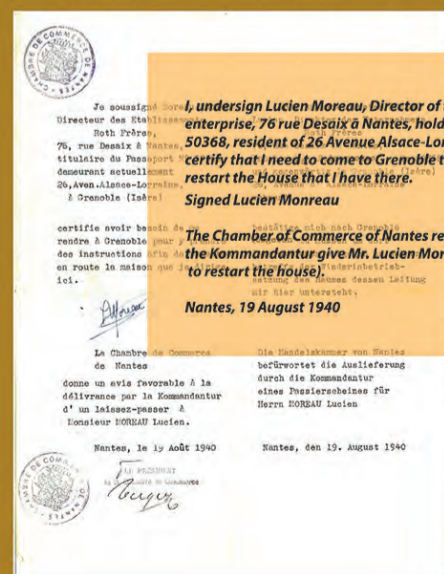
When Germany gained control of France, the Nazis ordered all Jews to close their businesses and turn in all raw materials. Lucien Moreau, a Christian, was the director of a Jewish owned mattress company which was affected by the new laws. As a result of the new laws, he was forced to lay off the employees of the company and close the warehouse. Lucien, hoped the invasion would be short lived, and requested the local government on behalf of the owners to reopen the warehouse to no avail. Little did he know that the closure of Jewish businesses was only the beginning of what would come to be known as the Holocaust.

This telegram is from the Jewish business owners Lucien worked for.



Roth Brothers and Co.
Makers of rubberized fabric
Nantes, 17 June 1940,
Concerning Lucien Moreau
Because of the stop of shipment, we must
momentarily close the factory.

This letter is from the Chamber of Commerce of Nantes granting Lucien permission to restart his house.



I, undersign Lucien Moreau, Director of the Roth Frères enterprise, 76 rue Desaix à Nantes, holder of passport No. 50368, resident of 26 Avenue Alsace-Lorraine in Grenoble, certify that I need to come to Grenoble to get instructions to restart the house that I have there.

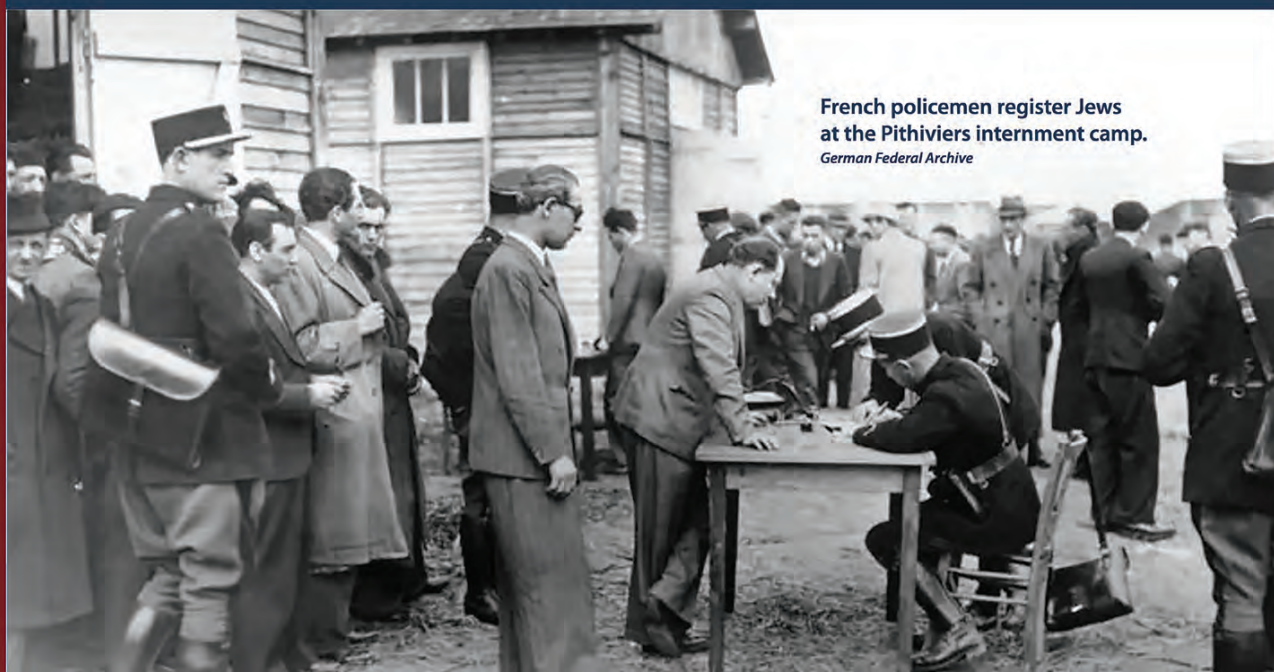
Signed Lucien Moreau
The Chamber of Commerce of Nantes recommends that the Kommandantur give Mr. Lucien Moreau permission to restart the house.
Nantes, 19 August 1940



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Times of Betrayal and Resistance



French policemen register Jews at the Pithiviers internment camp.
German Federal Archive

Throughout France, Jewish people were evicted from their homes and forced to move. The French community stood by and watched while their neighbors were arrested or forcibly deported to concentration camps. Though many felt powerless to help, others worked to oppose the Nazis and help those who had been dehumanized and stripped of their civil rights.

Fighters from the French Resistance helped hide Jewish children, worked to sabotage Nazi war efforts, and gathered intelligence for the Allies. Resistance fighters were always vulnerable to the danger of being caught by the authorities, but often the more pressing fear was personal betrayal, being sent to camps, or being murdered.



Simone Segouin, a woman in the French Resistance near Chartres, August 23, 1944.

National Archives and Records Administration

Two Jewish women in occupied Paris wearing yellow badges in June 1942, a few weeks before the mass arrest of Jewish people.

German Federal Archive



A member of the French Resistance poses with his gun at Châteaudun.

United States Army Signal Corps

Many non-Jewish members of the community embraced Nazi culture during this time of transition in power, but a few resisted. Lucien stood by his Jewish employers by helping them hide the factory's raw materials from the Nazis, knowing he could be punished for doing so. During this time, a man Lucien had considered his best friend reported him to the Nazi authorities. After being interrogated and threatened by the police, Lucien knew he had to flee immediately. Lucien was able to escape to his family's home in the Burgundy region of France, traveling at night on his bicycle and hiding in cornfields during the day.

Monsieur le Chef de la Kommandatur
Place de l'Opéra.

Je viens vous signaler par la présente que l'Entreprise de filature Roth ff Maison Juive de Strasbourg, repliée à Nantes par suite des événements 32 Rue Georges Sand, a sous trait à la réquisition des Autorités Allemandes un stock considérable de matières premières Caoutchouc-crin caoutchouté etc etc.

Ces marchandises ont été amenées à Paris par leur représentant Mr Moreau et se trouve entreposées chez Mr Chatelain fabricant de literie ((7 Cité de l'Ameublement)) qui occupe le rez de chaussée et 3 étages loués tout exprès, et au 19 Quai d'Austerlitz à Paris.

Un Français Anti Juif

P.S. La Maison Roth possédait également un dépôt de marchandises à M.(Montjean-Château) près d'Angers.

This letter was written in disguise by Lucien's best friend at the time notifying the German police that Lucien had been helping Jewish business owners.

The Head of Kommandatur,
Place de l'Opéra

I am notifying you that the cloth making business of the Roth's, a Jewish business in Strasbourg, moved to Nantes after the events at 32 Rue Georges Sand, and is avoiding turning over a large amount of rubber, which has been requisitioned by the German authorities. This merchandise was sent to Paris by their representative, Mr. Moreau, and can be found stored in the home of Mr. Chatelain, a maker of bedding, at (7 Cité de l'Ameublement). He lives on the ground floor and rents 3 other floors at 19 Quai d'Austerlitz à Paris.

An Anti-Jewish Frenchman

P.S. The Roth House also possesses a store of merchandise at Montjean-Château, near Angers.



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Liberation



Lucien Moreau's family home.
Image from Olivier Bourgoin



French women accused of collaboration with the Nazis paraded through the streets.
German Federal Archive



Crowds of French patriots line the Champs Elysees after Paris was liberated on August 26, 1944.
United States Library of Congress

In 1944, France was liberated from the Nazis. Immediately after liberation, the people were eager to punish those who had supported the German regime. Women known to have been romantically involved with German soldiers were shamed by having their heads shaved and were often publicly beaten and terrorized. There were also cases of Vichy government officials being executed without trial by the newly liberated people.

As law and order was restored, most collaborators in France were put on trial for their actions; but very few were executed. After liberation, Lucien filed a lawsuit against his supposed "best friend" for reporting him to the Nazis. The man and his wife wrote letters begging Lucien to forgive them and save them from prosecution. Lucien was not interested in forgiving them, writing back a lengthy response that denied their request. He then notified his legal team that the couple had been harassing him.

5 August, 1945

You are certainly not going to be surprised to recognize my writing. I hate to have to ask you for your forgiveness. My dear Lucien, you must have been so hurt when you recognized the handwriting of your best friend, who you had always been so kind to. Yes, it's true, it's very dreadful, and now he suffers and suffers from an evil that imprisons him. He acted in a moment of madness, gripped by jealousy, in an extremely difficult moment when everything seemed to be coming down around him. My dear Lucien, I hope once I tell you about all that happened to us, then you will understand everything.

14 August, 1941

I should have written sooner but I was afraid that you would recognize my handwriting and not want to open it. Yes, Lucien, I have done terrible things to you...I really have no excuse...if you don't see me around anymore it is because that I am ashamed to be seen by you.

I have done you much harm. I am ready to face my cowardice. We feel ashamed of our betrayal and are begging for forgiveness. I am ashamed to face you. I do not want you to think that I believed the Boches (Germans) because I have always fought them.

These letters were written by the man and his wife who turned Lucien into the Germans. They are both asking Lucien for forgiveness for what the husband had done and the wife attempts to defend his actions.

5 Septembre

Monsieur le Président de la Cour de Justice
VERSAILLES.

Monsieur le Président,

Courant JUIN, j'étais convoqué au Quai de l'Horloge pour reconnaître l'écriture d'une lettre me dénonçant aux Allemands. J'ai reconnu aussitôt l'écriture de Monsieur ROUVERON, 17 rue de la Montagne à ATHIS-MONS (860).

A ce moment le policier m'ayant convoqué, m'a dit: «Monsieur habite la Seine et Oise, il faut donc nous désoler de ne pas le connaître».

Le 5 Août, je recevais donc une lettre affolée me demandant pardon, etc., etc... Monsieur ROUVERON ayant été convoqué par le Commissaire de police d'ATHIS MONS, auprès duquel il a reconnu son geste infâme.

Monsieur le Commissaire de police d'ATHIS MONS lui a donc conseillé qu'il m'écrive d'urgence, me demandant que je vous écrive pour arrêter cette affaire, je me demandais que c'était l'attitude de ce Monsieur s'il avait appris que son meurtre après l'avoir questionné, a été le dénoncer aux Boches.

Je ne puis avoir de pardon pour Monsieur ROUVERON, plus qu'en FÉVRIER 41, date de sa lettre, il savait très bien que sa lettre avait été lue par les Allemands en Octobre 1940, donc il savait que son nom était connu.

Je vous adresse ce courrier, surtout parce que je ne veux pas de lettres, de coups de téléphone, de menaces de suite à lui et sa femme si je n'arrête pas l'affaire, etc., etc., et que jamais ce qui peut passer dans une tête pareille si l'affaire ne trop.

En attendant d'apprendre prochainement que l'affaire sera terminée, je vous prie de croire, Monsieur le Président, à l'assurance de ma parfaite considération.

This letter is from Lucien to the President of the Special Court of Justice notifying them of the ongoing harassment from the former friend and his wife.

5 September

The President of the Special Court of Justice, Versailles

Mr. President,

In June, I was summoned to the Quai de l'Horloge in Paris to identify the handwriting on a report which was sent to the Germans.

I recognized the writing of Monsieur Rouveron of 17 rue de la Montagne in Athis-Mons (SEO).

On the 5th of August, I received a distraught letter from Monsieur Rouveron, begging for my forgiveness after he had been questioned by the police commissioner in Athis-Mons and confessed his actions.

The Police Commissioner in Athis-Mons advised him to write to me in hopes that I would then ask you to be lenient on him and put an end to this whole affair. I asked myself, what would he have felt if his best friend had reported him to the Germans.

I cannot forgive Monsieur Rouveron, especially because in February of 1941, when he reported me to the Germans, he knew full well that I had already been severely interrogated by the Germans in October of 1940. He knew where he could've sent me.

I address this letter to you, above all because I am harassed by the letters, phone calls, and suicide threats from him and his wife if I don't stop my lawsuit, etc., etc. And one never knows what else they will try if the case drags on too long.

I hope that the case will run its course quickly.

Monsieur President, please accept that I have made up my mind.



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Rebuilding



Cherbourg, France after liberation.
National Archives and Records Administration

At the end of World War II, Europe began the process of rebuilding. The war had impacted nearly everything, and it would take many years to rebuild the buildings, bridges, and farmland destroyed in the conflict. Food rationing would continue in France for years, as poor weather and fields filled with landmines and unexploded bombs made it very difficult to grow enough food for everyone.



Brest, France after liberation
US Army photograph from the Archives
Municipales et Communiquaires de Brest



Aerial photo showing French village after bombing raid in June 1944.
Imperial War Museum

Beyond repairing the physical damage left by the war, the people of Europe also had to rebuild their families, friendships, and national identities. Those who had participated in the Resistance were celebrated for their bravery and patriotism.

When French Jews returned home after the war, they were met with mixed feelings. Many found that their former homes and property had been sold off; others were asked to reimburse their neighbors for maintaining their businesses during the war. While many former French Jews would eventually immigrate to Israel, American-sponsored relief agencies assisted in helping a large number of Holocaust survivors return to France and provided them with housing, food, and vocational training after the war. In the end, France became home to the second largest Jewish population in Europe.

Nearly everyone in France had lost something or someone in the war and most were eager to return to their normal lives. After the war Lucien, helped his employers rebuild their business, he was promoted to the highest levels of the company and stayed working with them until he retired.



National Archives and Records Administration

As part of the Marshall Plan, the United States sent equipment to France to help with the rebuilding efforts.



Economic Cooperation Administration

Poster created by the US Economic Cooperation Administration, to promote the Marshall Plan in Europe. It includes versions of the flags of those Western European countries that received aid under the Marshall Plan.



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