



May 1940. Turning west, Hitler's Nazi army slashes through northern France, forcing the French and British armies to retreat across the Channel. On June 17, Marshal Henri-Philippe Pétain, hero of World War I, forms a new government and broadcasts a radio message calling on the French "to cease fighting." Stunned by defeat, few French desired collaboration with the occupying Germans, but it was the policy chosen by Pétain's government.

But there was another, more dangerous, option. From London, General Charles De Gaulle famously appealed to the French, "This war is not finished . . ." This launched the Resistance, and a young man of 20, André Heintz, secretly joined the fight against the Nazis in the fall of 1940.

During our May 2007 trip to Normandy to plan a D-Day Tour, scheduled for May-June of 2008, André Heintz, a lifelong resident of Caen in Normandy, met with history professors Chuck Holden, Gail Savage, and me to talk about his activities with the French Resistance. We spent a Sunday afternoon with Heintz at Le Mémorial de Caen, where he recounted his exploits with relish.

A Polish priest recruited Heintz into the Resistance. Having been driven out of their own country in 1939, Polish refugees fostered Resistance activity in Caen. Father Makulec was discovered by the German authorities in 1943, but escaped, one step ahead of the Gestapo. Heintz prepared a false identity card for the priest. He also collected and transmitted information on German troop movements and defenses. Heintz regularly inspected his assigned section in and around Caen, reporting on German anti-aircraft guns and any unusual activities to his Resistance group leader. Information came from many sources – even those not active in the Resistance – passed on information that might be useful to Allied forces.

Resistance members carefully kept their identity secret from each other. Under constant threat of discovery, cells disbanded and reformulated with new members; Heintz changed groups three times. There was always fear that if arrested and tortured by the Nazis, a Resistant might reveal names of others. Most activists knew their contacts only by a code name.

This could lead to unexpected complications. Heintz's contact, whom

Witness to History

One Man's Role in the French Resistance



by Christine Adams, Professor of History



For Frenchman André Heintz (above), a member of the Resistance, the Allied invasion of Normandy came as no surprise – thanks to a small short-wave radio he kept hidden inside a spinach can.

he met regularly at the 6:30 a.m. Catholic Mass, was a former student of his father. One evening, Heintz's father mentioned that he had seen him with his old student Lelièvre and asked how they had become acquainted. Knowing his contact only as Yvon, Heintz denied knowing Lelièvre; however, he soon realized Lelièvre and Yvon were the same individual. Lelièvre was also his sister's schoolteacher. On a school day in April 1944, she reported that classes had been cancelled because her teacher had been arrested. Terrified, Heintz slept on the floor in his clothes that night, ready to flee if Yvon identified him under torture. Along with over 70 other members of the Resistance held at the jail in Caen, Lelièvre was among the first D-Day casualties, lined up and shot by the Gestapo as the British troops landed on nearby Sword Beach.

Heintz's most important information source was his small short-wave radio transistor kept hidden in an old spinach can. Keeping a radio was dangerous in occupied France; Germans realized that radios were used to receive messages and considered possession of them as evidence

of Resistance membership. But this radio provided vital information. Heintz was listening on June 5, 1944 when he heard coded messages that the Allied invasion of Normandy was imminent.

At 3 a.m., on June 6, the sky over the English Channel just north of Caen glowed red. Heintz had kept his Resistance activities hidden from his parents, but they suspected the truth. His mother, hearing the planes overhead and bombs in the distance, asked Heintz, "Surely this is the invasion?" Sworn to secrecy, he couldn't tell her, but did mention that it might be a good idea to fill some water bottles. She decided to boil some potatoes as well, which turned out to be wise; Caen's water, electricity, and gas no longer functioned by morning and would not be restored for six months.

Caen's liberation entailed its nearly total destruction; the city had been reduced to rubble by the time the Allies took control on July 9-19. Cut off from his Resistance leader and without instructions, Heintz assisted his sister, a nurse, at the Red Cross hospital. It was one of the

few buildings not bombed by the Allies. With his sister's help, Heintz made a huge cross out of blood-stained hospital sheets, laying it in the garden to signal the bombers that it was a Red Cross facility. He recounted with some wonder that the pilot dipped his wing in acknowledgment. The hospital was spared.

Despite the terror of the bombings, Heintz, like most French, experienced enormous relief in the aftermath of the Allied landings. He proudly sported his Cross of Lorraine, symbol of membership in the French Resistance, and assisted British civil officers in Caen for five months.

Following our two-hour visit, Heintz guided us on a tour of the Caen Mémorial Museum. He paused with understandable pride in front of the spinach can containing the short-wave radio on display there. His name was not on the label that identifies the function of the can and its contents, and I wondered why. I suspect that museum curators were trying to universalize the story of the Resistance, which consisted of many individuals who risked so much. But through the stories of men and women like André Heintz, we piece together the past. We reflect on the choices they made under circumstances we can barely fathom.

Author's Note: My thanks go out to Chuck Holden, associate professor of history, for his help on this piece.

SMCM Alumni and Friends D-Day Tour

May 27 – June 5, 2008

Along with history professors Chris Adams, Chuck Holden, and Gail Savage, travel to the key sites in one of the most famous invasions in the history of warfare – D-Day. St. Mary's faculty will offer occasional short lectures providing historical context to such sites as London's Imperial War Museum, Utah Beach, and The American Military Cemetery at Omaha Beach. The estimated cost of the tour is \$3,300. For more information, e-mail to normandy@smcm.edu.