

German newsreel propaganda in France, 1940–1944

Brett Bowles

To cite this article: Brett Bowles (2004) German newsreel propaganda in France, 1940–1944, Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television, 24:1, 45–67, DOI: [10.1080/0143968032000184498](https://doi.org/10.1080/0143968032000184498)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/0143968032000184498>



Published online: 22 Jan 2007.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 475



View related articles [↗](#)



Citing articles: 3 View citing articles [↗](#)

German Newsreel Propaganda in France, 1940–1944

BRETT BOWLES, *Iowa State University*

Excerpts from newsreels released in France during the Second World War are generally familiar to scholars thanks to their widespread use in retrospective documentaries such as Marcel Ophuls's *The Sorrow and the Pity* (1969) and Claude Chabrol's *The Eye of Vichy* (1993). Though historians have often used newsreels to illustrate key aspects of German policy and French collaboration, until recently these films have not received widespread attention as an object of study in their own right [1]. Following the trail blazed by Marc Ferro and Jean-Pierre Bertin-Maghit [2], a new generation of scholars is now rediscovering newsreels and documentaries as long-standing archival restrictions are lifted and fragile nitrate films are catalogued and preserved [3].

Wartime newsreels are complex cultural products encompassing political, social, and economic dimensions. As such, they provide a unique perspective on these branches of history and constitute a valuable source for reassessing and refining existing scholarship. In the case of France newsreels are particularly relevant for understanding the link between propaganda and public opinion since relatively few of the fiction films distributed there during the war served as vehicles of German or Vichy French ideology. Unlike feature films, which typically played for only four weeks or less in any given location, newsreels were a mandatory part of all cinema programs throughout the war. As for the handful of ideologically loaded fiction films designed specifically to influence spectators, such as the infamous *Jew Süss* (1940), newsreels offer a useful basis for evaluating comparatively the impact of film propaganda on collective mentalities. In addition, the evolution of newsreel production in France over the course of the war highlights the tensions, limits, and necessities of collaboration with the Germans.

The complexity of newsreels as a cultural representation poses a methodological challenge, for many of the details concerning their conception, shooting, editing, distribution, and impact on the public either were not recorded or were destroyed in Allied bombings of film production facilities in Paris and Berlin. Archival sources are often sparse, thus requiring film historians also rely on supplementary sources such as magazine and newspaper reviews. Miraculously, almost all the films have survived. By identifying recurring propaganda themes and tracing their evolution over time, one can detect key shifts in ideological message and the overall discursive strategy of the newsreels, which can then be linked to larger contextual factors and public opinion through written archival documents and other print sources.

After France's capitulation in June 1940 the country was truncated into several geo-political units: the Germans annexed Alsace and Lorraine, attached the northern

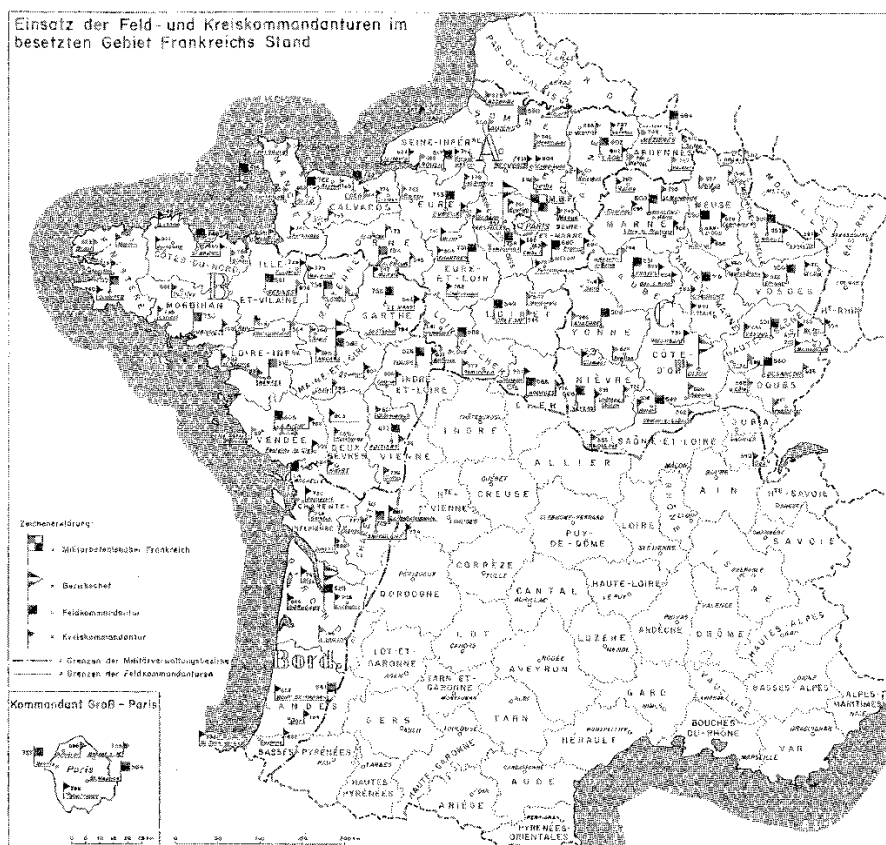


FIG. 1. German map showing the military administration in France. The occupied zone was divided into western, central and eastern districts (indicated by the broken line) with headquarters in Bordeaux, Paris, and Dijon, respectively. The Germans' low esteem for the Vichy government is apparent in that the capital of the unoccupied zone does not even appear on the map. *Source:* French National Archives, AJ 40/889.

departments of the Nord and Pas-de-Calais to the military government in Brussels, and divided the remainder of the country into two zones. The Germans occupied the northern zone and governed it directly from Paris, using French administrators to execute policy. The unoccupied southern zone fell under the authority of an autonomous French regime based in Vichy and headed by Marshal Philippe Pétain.

In general terms the German model of newsreel production in occupied France followed the pattern of other European countries. During an initial period (August 1940–August 1942) the Nazis produced a weekly, French-language series (the *Actualités Mondiales*) that combined repackaged clips from Germany and other parts of the Reich with a smaller number of sequences filmed on site in France [4]. Audience reaction to the newsreels was mixed, delighting a minority of collaborationists and other vocal proponents of a National-Socialist 'new Europe' but giving rise to frequent, equally passionate dissent among everyday movie-goers.

In the unoccupied zone the Vichy government established an independent cinema service in October 1940 and produced a weekly newsreel of its own titled *France-*



FIG. 2. Logo of the *Actualités Mondiales*. The use of the Eiffel Tower was apparently meant to conceal the German ownership of ACE, which had been distributing UFA-made films in France since the mid-1930s. AM, Issue 62, 3 October 1941. Source: Inathèque de France.

Actualités Pathé-Gaumont. Composed of footage shot in the unoccupied zone and in the colonies, the series offered spectators a substantially different representation of reality than its counterpart in northern France and enjoyed widespread popularity. Though the two series did not compete directly, a limited exchange agreement between the Germans and Vichy allowed a certain number of clips to cross the demarcation line.

Following lengthy negotiations between the two sides, in August 1942 a jointly produced newsreel called *France-Actualités* replaced its predecessors and was distributed throughout both zones. By combining elements of the *Actualités Mondiales* and *France-Actualités Pathé-Gaumont*, the new series attempted to rally public support for Franco-German collaboration. Despite high technical quality and savvy editing, its success was minimal at best due to contextual factors shaping public opinion, especially changes in political leadership at Vichy and the shifting course of the war.

Screening the *Actualités Mondiales*

In the occupied zone the production of newsreels was a top priority for the German army's Propaganda Abteilung, which in July 1940 outlawed distribution of all pre-war French and American newsreels to guarantee an ideological and economic monopoly for its own *Actualités Mondiales* (AM) [5]. Produced by UFA, Germany's largest state-supported film conglomerate, and distributed through a French subsidiary called the Alliance Cinématographique Européenne, the AM pushed French audiences to face the reality of their country's defeat and to accept the occupation—not in the name of ideological solidarity with the Nazis, but as a matter of necessity and self-interest.

To that end the AM devoted a disproportionately large number of sequences to Germany during its first months of existence. In August and September 1940 just under two-thirds of the clips focused on German culture, international politics, or the war. During the same period, coverage of specifically French topics was disproportionately low, comprising only about 3% of the newsreel [6]. German soldiers are particu-

larly visible on screen in parades and other military ceremonies staged around key Parisian landmarks such as the Champs-Élysées, the Arc de Triomphe, and the Madeleine church. In addition, virtually every episode shows German armed forces conducting military maneuvers on French soil and attacking Great Britain by sea and air. These battle sequences, shot live by special military ‘propaganda companies’ that were fully integrated into the units whose activities they recorded, are spectacular in their dramatization of speed and power, especially the aerial footage of Luftwaffe bombings and dogfights. Such scenes were meant to persuade French spectators that German victory in the war was inevitable, the occupation irreversible, and acquiescence the only viable option to ensure French national survival.

At the same time that the AM sought to endow the Reich with an air of unstoppable military strength and international prestige, it simultaneously emphasized Germany’s supposed benevolence toward and respect for French culture. German assistance of needy civilians and reparation of destroyed transportation infrastructures are recurring motifs in the newsreel, and are especially frequent in the weeks immediately following the armistice. Representative scenes depict refugees being resettled in their homes [7], railroad tracks being rebuilt and automobile factories resuming production [8], Red Cross workers distributing food to children [9], and Wehrmacht troops helping farmers tend their fields [10]. German respect for French life and cultural patrimony is dramatized in clips showing army officers solemnly laying a wreath on the tomb of the unknown soldier at the Arc de Triomphe [11], attending a funeral for French civilians killed in a building collapse [12], and a long, elaborately staged ceremony in which German troops repatriate the ashes of Napoléon’s son, the so-called Duke of Reichstadt, to the Invalides with full military honors [13].

The sequencing of the different clips within the newsreel was a crucial aspect of their discursive strategy. The AM typically began with brief reports on sports, other cultural events, or international news of general interest, then moved on to longer, more ideologically operative sequences concerning the war against England, domestic German political culture, and relations with other Axis powers. The idea was to capture spectators’ interest at the outset and absorb them gradually into the show so that they would be more amenable to the ensuing propaganda. For example, the 30 October 1940 episode contained three clear thematic units: (1) scenes of life in Paris featuring the arrival of beef cattle, the use of coal-burning taxis, and women’s fashion; (2) coverage of flooding in Louisiana, a food convoy in Burma, a swim meet in Barcelona, a concert in Madrid; and (3) war-related sequences on the arrival of Spanish troops in Tangiers, the ‘liberation’ of Constantza by Bulgarian soldiers, Italian forces triumphantly invading British-controlled Egypt from Sudan, and a squadron of Messerschmitt fighters shooting down Spitfires over England. Psychologically, the newsreel’s promotion of anti-English sentiment depended not only on creating a sense of awe and admiration among spectators, but also on eliciting their empathy for suffering caused by enemy ‘infamy’ such as the British killing of civilians in bombing raids over Holland, Germany, and France [14].

Beginning in June 1941 the AM added a new ideological element to its repertoire by targeting the Soviet Union and framing the German invasion as a ‘crusade’ to save Europe from the ‘Bolshevik peril’. Battle footage from the front, which by itself often lasted longer than the rest of the newsreel’s constituent clips combined, detailed the rapid German advance and Soviet retreat in order to reinforce the image of Nazi military supremacy. The war in the east also allowed the AM to celebrate Franco-German collaboration and to promote the image of a Nazi-led Europe united against

Communism. The formation and training of a special Waffen SS division known as the Legion of French Volunteers against Bolshevism (LVF) received close attention along with similar units from Belgium, Spain, Denmark, Norway, and Italy [15]. In reality the number of LVF volunteers was quite small, totaling only a few thousand between 1941 and 1944, but the clips present the movement as representative of the collective French will and invite spectators to engage in xenophobic scapegoating to explain the defeat of 1940. As collaborationist leader René Clémenti states on camera at the inaugural LVF rally: 'It is not France than has been beaten, but a gang of bastards, Jews, and capitalists', to which pro-Fascist Parti Populaire Français head Jacques Doriot adds emphatically: 'The defeat of Bolshevism will unite Europe' [16]. By placing blame on Jews, the British (the aforementioned 'capitalists'), and the Communists, such propaganda appealed at once to the rhetoric of quintessential French nationalism and collective fear of a Marxist *coup d'état* that had surfaced with particular intensity in 1938 after the fall of the Popular Front and the creation of a right-wing 'National Union' government under Edouard Daladier [17].

Coverage of other forms of collaboration was surprisingly discrete and sporadic, comprising less than 1% of the reports shown between August 1940 and August 1942 [18]. These sequences can be classified into two thematic units: French volunteers departing to work in Germany and pro-fascist French organizations operating in the occupied zone. The former series—which followed the workers' journey across the Rhine, warm welcome at specially built dormitories, and everyday routine in the factories—emphasized the material advantages of the experience (good food, high salaries, high-tech tools and production methods) as a means of indirectly highlighting the benefits of National Socialism [19]. The latter category of films, constructed around speeches by pro-Nazi politicians and intellectuals such as Alphonse de Chateaubriant, PPF head Jacques Doriot, and Rassemblement National Populaire leader Marcel Déat, takes a much more direct approach, enumerating vehemently why France should support Germany in building a 'new Europe' [20].

Today newsreel footage of roundups, deportations, and concentration camps are at the forefront of our collective visual memory because of their widespread use in retrospective documentaries, but during the war French movie-goers saw virtually no evidence of the Holocaust on screen. Like pro-collaborationist propaganda, anti-Semitism represented less than 1% of the AM's total content [21]. Though the reports released were strongly prejudicial in nature, presenting the French Institute for the Study of the Jewish Question, the trial of film producer Bernard Natan for fraud, the exhibition titled 'The Jew and France', and a homage to Edouard Drumont [22], they contained no references to the most ignominious aspects of anti-Semitic persecution. The successive waves of anti-Jewish ordinances passed from October 1940 onward (including the infamous requirement that all Jews wear a yellow star in public), mass roundups in large French cities (such as the Vélodrome d'Hiver raid of July 1942), and subsequent deportations to death camps are all conspicuously absent from the AM.

In this regard the newsreel contrasts sharply with other cinematic propaganda distributed in the occupied zone, particularly the German-made documentary *The Wandering Jew*, a pseudo-ethnographic account of life in the Lodz ghetto that likens Jews to rats, and Veit Harlan's *Jew Süss*, a thoroughly inaccurate historical drama that recounts the execution of a Jewish advisor to Friedrich II [23]. The Germans' rationale for not including such material in the AM is unclear, but the most likely explanation is that the AM's editorial board feared the inclusion of anti-Semitism might spark

pro-Jewish commiseration and intensify anti-German sentiment among spectators who felt persecuted themselves by constant food shortages, curfews, and the psychological weight of foreign occupation [24]. Ten days after the Vel d'Hiv roundup the Paris Police Prefect noted that 'the majority of the population feels that such treatment should not be inflicted upon French Jews, especially war veterans. In addition, a significant number of people fear that similar measures will one day be taken against other groups of French citizens' [25].

Audience Response to the *Actualités Mondiales*, 1940

The study of reception is always the most delicate part of film history because of the inherently multiple and often contradictory ways in which spectators interpret what they see on screen. The reasons underlying their reactions are equally complex and are all the more difficult to identify retrospectively since there were no scientific public opinion surveys conducted during the war. Fortunately, spectator response to the AM can be reconstructed with a reasonable degree of accuracy thanks to surviving German and French police reports.

Shortly after the newsreel's debut in August 1940 a German military administrator noted that 'demonstrations' were taking place in Parisian cinemas and that the French Police Prefect had suggested making an announcement before the projection advising spectators that such conduct would result in 'quick, forceful intervention' [26]. The Germans did not take the suggestion and the demonstrations intensified, for at the beginning of October uniformed French policemen began regular surveillance of theaters throughout the city. They reported widespread dissent of several varieties, including whistling at the sight of German soldiers on screen, as well as laughter and applause during clips showing German homes destroyed in English bombing raids [27]. A French officer assigned to the 'Normandie' theatre on the Champs-Élysées observed that patrons also applauded images of several French warships interned in the Atlantic port of Brest and 'snickered loudly' when the newsreel's voice-over commentator claimed that the Luftwaffe was bombing London only to punish previous attacks on German civilians [28].

This time German authorities responded quickly, requiring theater owners in both Paris and Bordeaux to show the newsreel with the lights only half-dimmed so that troublemakers could be easily identified and to make an announcement admonishing audiences to keep quiet. In addition, undercover German military police were assigned to visit especially 'problematic' cinemas on a regular basis in order to identify and arrest 'demonstration ringleaders' [29]. The measures appear to have had an immediate effect; in mid-October spectators in the Montparnasse and Montmartre sections of the capital remained silent before scenes of a German hospital leveled by British bombs, German submarines operating in the English Channel, and Stukas dive-bombing the London suburb of Tilbury. *Feldzug in Polen* (1940), a montage of *Deutsche Wochenschau* footage documenting the 1939 blitzkrieg into Warsaw and Danzig, was received with only 'quiet anguish and stupor' [30]. Dissent persisted for a while at other locations, resulting in the temporary closure of 26 theaters by late November, but afterward the number dropped gradually, first to 11 in December, then eight near the end of January 1941 [31].

The punitive measures taken by German and French authorities were partially responsible, but modifications to the form and content of the newsreel itself were equally if not more important. At their inception, the AM were made in Berlin using

footage shot almost exclusively in Germany and territories within its sphere of influence. The first nine episodes contained only three very short clips filmed in France, and these focused on the activities of German military units. In addition, the newsreel's producers struggled to find a speaker in Berlin whose French was good enough to deliver a credible voice-over commentary. In the 7 August 1940 edition the commentator's pronunciation is unnatural and clipped, particularly in the way he strings words together. Even to the most casual listener it is clear that he is a German, non-native speaker of French, and is reading from a prepared script, which is conspicuously limited to a few short phrases at the beginning of each new sequence. As a result the power of the images is lost and the newsreel comes off as transparent, badly executed propaganda—a perfect target for mockery by spectators still humiliated by their nation's cataclysmic defeat and resentful toward the occupiers.

The series's producers must have immediately realized this shortcoming, for the speaker is replaced by a different voice the following week. The new commentator's French is significantly more fluent, but contains numerous liaison errors, slurred words, and stumbles followed by self-corrections. The 21 August issue features yet another speaker, this time a woman whose phonetic accuracy is superb and has only the faintest trace of a non-native accent. She continues until early October, when her male predecessor returns, joined by another man who is obviously native French. Smoothly professional in its quality, his voice accompanies the first reports devoted specifically to French cultural topics: a professional bicycle race, alternative forms of locomotion improvised to cope with fuel rationing, and a music-hall concert held to benefit a retirement home [32].

The changes in images and commentary are noteworthy because they coincided with UFA's establishment of a local production office in Paris [33]. From mid-October 1940 onward the AM were mounted on site rather than being shipped from Berlin each week, which allowed better quality control and more informed editing choices. The inclusion of footage shot in France was an important first improvement, but the voice-over commentary remained problematic for some time. Over the next two months the producers experimented with a combination of speakers. Whereas items dealing with life in the Reich, the war effort, and international news were commented by the male German speaker, and occasionally by his female colleague when the clip related to a 'feminine' topic such as a parade honoring the Queen Mother of Romania, the native French speaker presented the footage concerning French culture. Under this system language and accent allowed spectators to identify the discursive function of each sequence and to evaluate its credibility accordingly: native French commentary signaled an entertainment report relatively free of ideological ulterior motives, while a German voice identified direct or indirect propaganda.

The situation was finally resolved in the 11 December edition, which incorporated two sequences shot in the unoccupied zone by the Vichy government's autonomous newsreel service: a report on damage done to Marseille by a British bombing raid and Marshal Pétain's visit to Lyon. Rather than replace the original voice-over accompanying these clips, as they had done with two earlier films provided by Vichy, this time AM officials incorporated the original soundtrack unmodified, entrusting the rest of the commentary to their own native French speaker and definitively eliminating his German competitors from the newsreel. From that point forward audiences heard two native French voices guiding them through the images on screen, one for German-made sequences from the unoccupied zone and abroad, then a second for Vichy-produced clips from the free zone and French colonies. Although the coexistence of two

speakers may still have served as an ideological signifier for savvy viewers, the distinction was much less pronounced than before. In fact, the rhythm and timber of the voices are virtually indistinguishable to the casual listener. The gradually declining number of demonstrations and theater closures in the weeks just before and after the New Year suggest that the presence of exclusively native commentators was reassuring to French ears.

Wary Complicity: exchanging Films with Vichy

The incorporation of unoccupied-zone films was an immediate success, for the Germans began exchanging clips with Vichy's autonomous cinema service on a regular basis from December 1940 onward. Choosing which films to include was a delicate and crucial task since the content and ideological agenda of Vichy's newsreel, *France-Actualités Pathé-Gaumont* (FAPG), was substantially different from, and even potentially antagonistic to, that of its northern counterpart. Established in October 1940 by combining the resources of France's two largest pre-war film companies, the French Army's Cinema Service, and Marcel Pagnol, FAPG was produced weekly in Marseille using footage shot in the free zone, the colonies, Switzerland, and Spain. Its distribution was limited to Vichy France, Syria, Switzerland, and North Africa, thus ensuring that it did not compete directly with the AM [34].

Thematically, there was a marked contrast in the way the two series selectively represented reality. Whereas the AM emphasized German military prowess, the war effort against Britain and the Soviet Union, and the necessity of collaboration to ensure France's place in the new, National-Socialist Europe under construction, FAPG presented a reassuring illusion of French political independence, the revival of traditional culture, and renewed national cohesion under the patriarchal leadership of Marshal Philippe Pétain. The message was articulated through three primary motifs: the celebration of France's colonial empire (a long-time signifier of national pride and strength whose value was greater than ever), the training of the small French army allowed by the armistice agreement, and the so-called National Revolution, a series of socio-cultural initiatives meant to restore France's moral and physical strength in the wake of the defeat. Images of Nazi troops and political leaders on French soil, as well as scenes of life in Germany and its satellites, were seen on only a handful of occasions, while footage of the war against England and anti-Semitism were totally absent. The one point of ideological convergence between the two newsreels was their promotion of anti-Communism through the use of battle footage from the eastern front. However, FAPG began showing the clips only in November 1941 and devoted only about one-fifth as much space to them as the AM [35].

In all FAPG borrowed 106 films from the Germans, of which roughly three-fourths served to entertain, to provide information about life in the north, and to reassure unoccupied-zone spectators that Vichy was working proactively to ensure French national unity and well-being across the demarcation line. Reports on sporting events, the charitable activities of the inter-zone National Relief Organization, and the return of wounded veterans and prisoners of war from abroad are particularly important recurring themes. On the rare occasions that Germans appear in FAPG, they are presented as respectful and benevolent toward France, as in the 1 January 1941 clip dramatizing the repatriation and entombment of Napoléon II's remains. Such sequences were clearly intended to promote the Vichy regime's credibility in the eyes of its subjects, an agenda that occasionally required repackaging the material provided by

the AM to remove connotations of French subservience to Germany. The most notable example was the film of the meeting between Hitler and Pétain at Montoire which took place on 24 October 1940 [36]. Vichy censors shortened the German footage and added a new voice-over commentary [37]. Whereas the AM montage underscored Pétain's deference toward the Führer and his agreement to collaborate with the Reich, FAPG represented the event as a diplomatic coup, recording a new voice-over commentary that concluded: 'the Victor of Verdun has given the French cause for hope. Each of his acts tells them "We must restore France, follow me!" ' [38].

For their part, AM officials were equally careful in their use of FAPG clips. From December 1940 to August 1942 the Germans reused 78 sequences supplied by Vichy, representing just over 7% of the newsreel's content. Though the films were invaluable for managing spectator dissent, they also had the potential to contaminate the occupied-zone newsreel's message and to foment French nationalism rather than resignation to German authority. For that reason the majority of the clips selected were ideologically anodyne reports on sports of all kinds, notable cultural events, the continuation of France's 'civilizing mission' in the colonies, and Pétain's frequent visits to cities throughout the unoccupied zone. References to the various elements of the National Revolution and the Armistice Army were kept to a strict minimum and used only when they promoted specifically German interests. Whereas FAPG provided expansive coverage of the French army's training (often using equipment prohibited by the armistice agreement) and leadership role in rebuilding society, the AM showed only symbolic medal ceremonies and Vichy troops battling Anglo-Gaullist forces in the Middle East and Madagascar.

The Germans clearly considered the clips featuring Pétain the most useful of all the imported FAPG material. He is featured in 32 sequences, many of which run significantly longer than average. Moreover, the AM's coverage of the Marshal increased steadily over time in relation to that of Hitler. Between August 1940 and June 1941 Hitler appeared on screen 27 times versus only 10 for Pétain. However, from July 1941 to August 1942 the figures were much more balanced: 25 versus 22, respectively [39]. The fact that audiences often whistled at Hitler's image during the first months of the AM, combined with the immediate pacifying effect of the first films showing the French head of state in December 1940, suggest a likely explanation for this trend.

Most important, the fact that Pétain's popularity as a patriarchal figurehead remained virtually unshakeable even as popular criticism of the Vichy government mounted over the course of the war meant that his cinematic persona could be used to defuse episodes of French public resentment against the Germans or to edulcorate unpopular policy decisions. The AM applied this tactic on several crucial occasions, editing FAPG footage as needed to enhance its propaganda value. In late June 1941 just after the Resistance's first organized attacks on Wehrmacht targets in the occupied zone, Pétain appeared in a clip chastising his countrymen for their 'short memory' and directed them to respect the cease-fire provision of the armistice agreement 'in the name of French national interests' [40]. Significantly, the AM excerpted this short clip from a longer FAPG film that also included suggestively nationalistic, anti-German material such as images of the French army training and Wehrmacht soldiers checking passports along the demarcation line.

Beginning in April 1942 there was an unprecedented flurry of clips devoted to Pétain shortly after German pressure returned the unabashedly pro-collaborationist Pierre Laval to power at Vichy, sparking 'deep hostility' and 'fear that the new Prime Minister would weaken the authority of the Marshal and undermine national interests by putting

an end to the relative independence that the French government has enjoyed thus far' [41]. To make matters worse, in June 1942 Laval announced at an LVF rally that he 'wished for a German victory' in the war, sparking another wave of 'profound unhappiness' among the population [42]. In the nine weeks separating the two events the AM released eleven pro-Marshall films, three more than in the preceding nine months and a third of the total for the newsreel's entire two-year run. The films' content was chosen specifically to reinvigorate Pétain's cult of personality and to reassure viewers that his power as head of state and commander-in-chief was intact: two clips celebrated his 86th birthday with a career retrospective and an illustration of his daily routine at Vichy; three others detailed his triumphal tour of cities in southwest France; a rare military ceremony aboard the battleship *Dunkerque* commemorated the anniversary of the British attack on Mers-el-Kébir; and a carefully staged sequence showed Pétain warmly welcoming Laval to his first cabinet meeting [43]. To maximize their effect, in all cases the Germans showed the films unmodified, exactly as they appeared in FAPG.

Audience Reaction, 1941–1942

Although the selective incorporation and repackaging of Vichy films contributed to a steady decline in spectator dissent from December 1940 onward, there were still occasional episodes of protest in response to heavy-handed, pro-collaborationist propaganda. The first flashpoint after the modification of the AM's format occurred in early February 1941 during an interview with a recently repatriated French pilot named Gontier de Vassé who had been shot down during the 1940 campaign and evacuated to England. He claimed that wounded French soldiers who refused to rejoin the war under British command were first offered bribes to change their minds, then 'imprisoned with common criminals' [44]. Spectators in a dozen Paris cinemas greeted the outlandish story with choral sneezing and coughing to drown out the soundtrack—a clever and apparently spontaneous response designed to circumvent the preventative measures still in effect. Since the newsreels were still being shown with the lights on and in the presence of uniformed policemen, whistling and laughing were risky options. The new tactic, which testifies to a remarkable solidarity among dissenting cinema-goers, ensured a high degree of anonymity and provided a plausible excuse for their conduct if arrested; after all, it was cold and flu season. French police made only two arrests, and both parties were released after 'severe admonishment' and notification that they would be turned over to German authorities in the future [45].

The following week a pair of reports on the founding of a pro-fascist party called the Rassemblement National Populaire (RNP) and a rally of French labor union leaders urging 'close collaboration between French workers, their brothers across the Rhine, and throughout Europe' sparked an even larger wave of protest during which spectators again coughed loudly in unison. During the latter film four patrons defiantly stood up and turned their backs to the screen in protest. All four were detained by police, but released with only a warning. Arrests were also made at five other theaters for similar acts of misconduct, including laughing, whistling, and several cries of 'Shut your lying trap!' One particularly ingenious man at the Radio-Cité cinema imitated the bleating of a sheep to cover up Alphonse de Chateaubriant's harangue emphasizing France's duty to support National Socialism. In the suburb of Clignancourt a group of young people tossed handfuls of sneezing powder into the air during the newsreel, thereby obliging all members of the audience to participate in the demonstration [46].

Subsequent clips featuring the RNP and its demagogic leader, Marcel Déat, met with

the same kind of resistance in mid-March and mid-May 1941. Groups of young people continued to throw sneezing powder and stink bombs occasionally during the newsreel, but arrests and theater closures were sporadic. Although the Paris Police Prefect characterized the situation as 'manageable', he also observed that:

the majority of people do not understand and are hostile to collaboration, which for them means the presence of German soldiers on our soil and the systematic requisition of all the products and foodstuffs that French people are lacking. They fear that collaboration will again drag us into the war, but this time on the German side. British radio propaganda reinforces this attitude, resulting in a silent but real hostility toward the occupying forces and French supporters of collaboration. Without overtly expressing hostility toward German soldiers, the majority of Parisians quietly hope to see the British win the war [47].

On several occasions movie-goers expressed their Anglophilia openly by applauding when the AM mentioned that 'Hindus and Canadians are fighting for England' and by whistling at images of the Luftwaffe shooting down British fighter planes [48].

Since the beginning of their surveillance duties in October 1940 French police had reported virtually no positive reaction to the newsreel, but that changed in July 1941 with the German invasion of the Soviet Union and the AM's consistent promotion of anti-Bolshevism. A clip in which German troops arrest Soviet guards (identified by the voice-over as 'Jewish executioners') for 'massacring' imprisoned Ukrainian nationalists drew 'boisterous applause without any counter-demonstrations' in several theaters, as did coverage of a rally celebrating the LVF's departure for the eastern front [49]. However, a spectator at another theater who cried 'Death to the Jews' during the same passage was immediately answered with 'widespread whistling and calls for silence' [50].

The episode is particularly noteworthy because it highlights the opportunistic strategy by which German editors first introduced anti-Semitism into the newsreel. Until summer 1941 the theme had been conspicuously absent despite the issuance of numerous anti-Jewish decrees by both the German military command in the occupied zone and by the Vichy government in the south. Given the persistent dissent that had plagued the AM during its first nine months of existence, it would have been risky during that period to add a new, potentially controversial element to an already unpopular form of propaganda. Yet the French public's relative openness to anti-Communist propaganda made it the perfect vehicle for promoting resentment against other 'foreign' enemies who could be blamed for France's misfortune. During summer and fall 1941 the AM consistently linked anti-Semitism to reports on the 'Bolshevik peril', the eastern front, or the activities of the LVF.

The second part of the strategy involved presenting anti-Semitism as being exclusively French rather than German in origin. The newsreel shows only French officials organizing 'The Jew and France' exhibition, trying Bernard Natan for fraud, and delivering denunciatory speeches about Jewish greed and mendacity; the audience at these events is entirely French as well. The staging may seem peculiar given the AM's emphasis on Nazi leadership in other areas of collaboration, especially the war against Communism, but it speaks to the Germans' concern that excessively direct anti-Jewish propaganda, particularly if linked overtly to their occupation of France and the restrictions they imposed upon all civilians, might backfire against them. When the handful of anti-Semitic clips released between late May and early October 1941 failed

to produce a noticeable effect on spectators, the AM abandoned its wary, short-lived campaign and definitively banished anti-Jewish discourse from the newsreel to concentrate fully on the more fruitful theme of anti-Bolshevism.

AM producers did so by including expansive, spectacular battle scenes (some as long as 15 minutes) in every episode and by releasing a feature-length compilation film in late September titled *Confronting Bolshevism: the war against the Soviets*. According to the Paris Police Prefect, spectators generally believed that such reports ‘significantly overstated German gains’, but they also ‘undercut anticipation that the German and Russian armies would both suffer heavy losses and be forced to end the hostilities, thereby favoring the English’ [51].

The fact that spectators openly protested collaborationist propaganda and supported the British cause against Germany but tacitly absorbed anti-Communist discourse and coverage of the German war effort against the Soviets as long as it did not spill over into anti-Semitism suggests the limits of the newsreel’s impact on public opinion. As prefects throughout the occupied zone emphasized time and again in their reports, public sentiment was determined primarily by contextual factors such as the material conditions of everyday life (especially food rationing) and the course of the war. Although the AM could not alter the French’s desire for independence from German control or their resistance to founding an indigenous National-Socialist regime, it did manage to inflame pre-existing French antipathy toward Communism, at least to a degree.

By late June 1941 German military authorities felt secure enough to repeal the order requiring that the newsreel be shown with the lights on and that an announcement be made requesting silence during the projection [52]. French policemen continued their surveillance during the last year of the AM’s existence, but reported only a smattering of isolated incidents between August 1941 and August 1942: the release of a pigeon with a tricolor French flag floating from its legs, the throwing of sneezing powder, occasional derogatory comments directed at French collaborationist leaders on screen, and whistling during footage of the war against England [53]. Perhaps most significant, neither German nor French records indicate any theater closures during the last year of the AM’s existence.

This long-term decline in audience dissent is a testament both to the enhanced quality of the newsreel, whose propaganda value had finally peaked after a difficult first year of trial and error, and to the shifting balance of military power in favor of the Axis. In addition to celebrating the Germans’ string of victories in the Soviet Union and in North Africa, the AM and the collaborationist press waged a campaign to discredit the British cause by denouncing the invasion of French possessions such as Syria, Lebanon, and Madagascar as a permanent usurpation intended to diminish France’s influence in the world [54]. The participation of Gaullist units in the Middle Eastern theater and their bloody clashes with colonial troops loyal to Vichy was a useful propaganda tool for suggesting the benefits of a Franco-German military alliance, like that outlined in the so-called ‘Protocols of Paris’ negotiated in May 1941.

Though a majority of French continued to support the Allies and to believe that ‘the English would give back all our invaded colonies if Germany lost the war’, the reports also caused ‘considerable anguish’ and ‘sharp disappointment’, underscoring the terrible cost of an ever-growing conflict whose end was not yet in sight [55]. Likewise, if the entry of the United States into the war provided a new source of hope, the inclusion of footage of the attack on Pearl Harbor and other Japanese military exploits in the Pacific



FIG. 3. Advertising poster for the *Actualités Mondiales*, 1942. By German decree all occupied-zone cinema owners were required to display such posters in the lobby to promote the newsreel. Source: Bibliothèque Nationale de France.

suggested that American forces were fighting an uphill battle and might not be able to intervene in Europe [56].

In sum, the effectiveness of the AM as a propaganda tool should be regarded as limited, though not altogether negligible. Although the modifications made to form and content after its disastrous debut in 1940 produced a marked improvement over the course of 1941 and 1942, the newsreel still did not achieve the level of impact its producers desired. On the other hand, the AM did slow the progress of pro-Allied sentiment by exploiting deeply rooted fears of Communism and by minimizing the appearance of collaboration in its careful manipulation of FAPG material, especially coverage of Pétain. Given the unfavorable political circumstances in which it operated, the AM probably succeeded in shaping public opinion as well as could be expected.

A Joint Newsreel: *France-Actualités*

In August 1942 a joint Franco-German production replaced the AM and FAPG in their respective zones, thereby unifying filmed propaganda across the demarcation line and bringing to fruition nearly two years of contentious negotiations [57]. At the outset of the Occupation German civilian administrators in charge of producing and distributing the AM lobbied military administrators to grant them a distribution monopoly throughout the country, but Vichy successfully resisted by offering the AM footage of the British attack on Mers-el-Kébir in exchange for time and freedom needed to found FAPG [58]. In February 1941 the Germans proposed establishing a joint newsreel under their *de facto* control, but French officials again opposed the idea on political and economic grounds. AM producers responded by suspending its exchange with FAPG and threatening to prohibit the distribution of French-made feature films in the occupied zone—a tactic that quickly brought Vichy officials to the bargaining table. In the end both sides agreed to the creation of a new production company in which French participants would own 60% of the capital and hold three of the five seats on the board of directors.

France-Actualités (FA) officially came into being on 8 May 1942 by merging the financial, material, and human resources of the AM and FAPG. UFA provided 40% of the 12 million francs needed, while Pathé and Gaumont each contributed 30%. The company's president was longtime National Assembly deputy Henri Clerc and its vice-president a Propaganda Abteilung member named Wilhelm Knothe, who was joined on the administrative council by representatives from Pathé, Gaumont, and the *Deutsche Wochenschau GmbH*. German distributor ACE received a monopoly in the occupied zone, with Pathé handling the south. Like the AM and FAPG before it, FA was made an obligatory part of all cinema programs by governmental decree. The new series had its headquarters in Paris, where editing and printing took place, but to maximize efficiency distribution and production offices were also established in Lille, Nancy, Rennes, Bordeaux, Lyon, Marseille, Algiers, Dakar, and Tunis.

From the outset FA was fully committed to promoting Franco-German collaboration, which had grown ever tighter during late 1941 and early 1942 in response to the expanding activities of the Resistance and the slow deterioration of public confidence in the Vichy government. Henri Clerc underscored the didactic nature of the enterprise in his strategic plan, which read in part:

Since France-Actualités is the sole national newsreel and is unconstrained by normal commercial demands, it does not have to cater to popular tastes and can instead lead spectators to understand key aspects of national and international life that have previously escaped them. This requires adopting the most digestible and pleasing methods of presentation. We will mix the useful and the entertaining, the serious and the light. Such a balance is indispensable [59].

During pre-production in spring 1942 Clerc sought to find a logo suggesting that 'with the dark days now behind it, France and the Empire are being reborn, both in association with the construction of a new Europe' [60]. The board of directors considered a bas-relief map highlighting France within central Europe and North Africa, but the idea was discarded in favor of the Francisque, a double-edged axe traditionally associated in French history books with the heroism of 'our ancestors the Gauls' and adopted by Vichy in late 1940 as a symbol of the National Revolution and

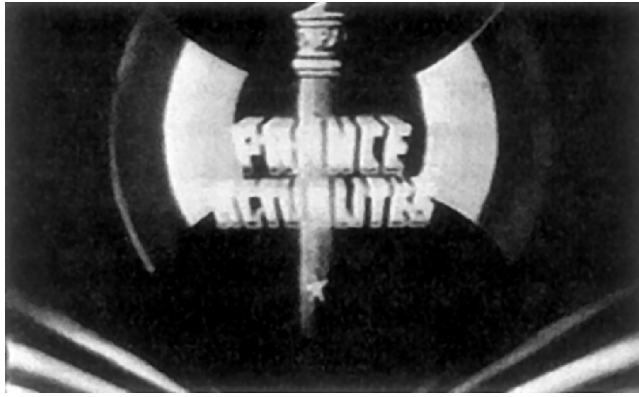


FIG. 4. *France-Actualités* logo featuring the Francisque. The handle of the axe is in the shape of an honorary baton traditionally bestowed upon Marshals in the French army. During the Occupation the Francisque and starred baton were key elements of Pétain's personal iconography. FA, Issue 21, 7 January 1943. Source: Inathèque de France.

Marshal Pétain. As a signifier of French strength, independence, and cultural patrimony, the tricolor Francisque hid the true political agenda of FA behind a mask of patriotism.

In the weeks immediately surrounding the series's premiere on 21 August 1942, FA administrators took great pains to underscore its supposed Frenchness through an elaborate publicity campaign. Mural posters distributed to theater owners and lavish color advertisements in large-circulation cinema magazines hailed the birth of FA as 'a landmark event in the history of French cinema. For the first time since the armistice, a great weekly newsreel will show France and the Empire in their entirety, bringing images from these territories and the best reports from Europe and the world to every movie screen throughout the country' [61]. To complete the illusion the inaugural episode began with a behind-the-scenes report showing how FA was made. Predictably, the clip stressed technical aspects of the production process and did not mention German participation in the series or its underlying pro-collaborationist priorities. On the contrary, the voice-over commentator characterized the series as 'a 100% French production' [62].

Marketing Collaboration, 1942–1943

In reality the content and style of FA closely reproduced those of the AM by using a mix of reports on sports and other cultural events, war news dramatizing German victories and Allied setbacks (especially in the Soviet Union and North Africa), and frequent coverage of Pétain. FA refined the formula of its predecessor slightly by devoting more coverage to entertainment (approximately a fourth of all stories) and increasing the proportion of clips on French and colonial topics (over half of the total). FA continued to integrate German-supplied films on life in the Reich and its sphere of influence on a regular basis, but these were limited in number (about 10%) and rarely ideological in nature [63].

During its first six months FA promoted collaboration indirectly by dramatizing Germany's supposed goodwill toward France and the autonomy of French political



FIG. 5. *France-Actualités* advertisement from the back cover of *Nord-Cinéma*, a film magazine published in Lille. Until mid-July 1943 a Belgian version of FA was distributed in the Nord and Pas-de-Calais departments. The Germans' introduction of the French edition there was meant to placate spectators dissatisfied with the previous situation. Source: Bibliothèque Nationale de France.

leadership. Coverage of the Vichy-initiated workers-for-POWs exchange known as the Relève and the National Relief Agency's efforts to aid those still awaiting repatriation became a standard element of the newsreel, as did numerous clips featuring Pétain and Laval. Pro-fascist French organizations such as the RNP and PPF, which had appeared sporadically in the AM from mid-1941 onward, vanished entirely from the retooled newsreel, as did any references to anti-Semitism. Images of German troops operating on French soil were rare; when they did appear it was to underscore their commitment to helping loyalist French troops defend the colonial empire against Allied 'aggression'—a disingenuous argument used to justify the German occupation of the southern zone in November 1942 [64].

Once the star of the AM, Hitler played a discrete secondary role in FA, acting primarily as a respected and benevolent statesman rather than as a military leader. From August 1942 through January 1943 his face was shown only twice: at a reception for the Turkish ambassador in Berlin and at a gala inaugurating the German Winter Relief Fund [65]. On two other occasions the voice-over commentator thanks the Führer for his decision to liberate French prisoners, who are shown arriving home to family and friends [66]. In contrast, Pétain occupied an increasingly prominent place

on screen, making 11 appearances during the same period. These sequences recycled the representational strategies used by FAPG during the first two years of the Occupation by showing the Marshal at numerous official ceremonies and interacting with common people in cities throughout Vichy France. The unifying theme is Pétain's authority and commitment to strengthening French society according to the principles of the National Revolution. To this end he decorates members of a veterans' philanthropic organization (the French Fighters' Legion) in Gergovie, visits a maternity ward in Bourg-en-Bresse, attends a Provençal folklore festival in Avignon, decorates a war memorial in Vichy, makes a personal donation to the National Relief Fund in Toulouse, and distributes toys to schoolchildren [67].

FA also cultivated a new style of film shot during Pétain's radio addresses in which he looks into the camera and addresses spectators directly, urging national unity and obedience to his government as the keys to overcoming France's misfortune. The framing technique of these segments (medium and extreme close-ups), as well as the language of Pétain's speeches, were heavily didactic and obviously intended to quell growing sympathy for the Resistance and dislike for Vichy's policies. The public's ironclad confidence in Pétain, who was generally regarded as being constrained to act against his will, made him the only French leader capable of convincing spectators to tolerate, if not support, the ever-tightening clockwork of state collaboration.

At the same time Pierre Laval remained in the background, and was accompanied by the Marshal during each of his appearances on screen in order to enhance the Prime Minister's poor image [68]. The 27 November 1942 edition of FA used a more explicit approach by showing Pétain solemnly delivering a radio address that read in part:

In France's interest I have decided to expand the powers of Prime Minister Laval so that he may fulfill a difficult task. Union is more crucial than ever. I remain your guide. You now only have one duty: to obey. You have only one government, that in which I have vested the power to govern. You have only one motherland which I personify: France.

Audience response to FA was initially mixed, with geography and audience expectations playing a determinative role. In the unoccupied zone spectators accustomed to seeing FAPG greeted the new series by whistling, conversing loudly to cover up the newsreel's voice-over commentary, milling around during the projection, and exiting in mass to the lobby until the feature film began. By late October 1942 the situation was bad enough that Henri Clerc contacted Laval to ask that the newsreel be shown in half-lit theaters under police surveillance [69]. The situation was further complicated by the exorbitant rental fees theater owners were required to pay FA. Following standard industry practice, FA received a percentage of each theater's total weekly box-office receipt (between 2 and 3%, depending on the size and type of establishment). Though its rates were actually lower than those of FAPG, FA required a minimum payment that was significantly higher than its predecessor and placed no ceiling on the total amount of revenue that it could collect. Under the new system proprietors of large cinemas ended up paying two or three times their previous fees. Many cinema owners simply refused to ante up, stopped showing the newsreel in protest, or wrote outraged letters to the COIC, a French administrative organism responsible for managing the cinema industry [70]. FA responded by threatening heavy fines and permanent closure of non-conforming theaters, thus further alienating their captive clients [71].

In contrast, the situation in northern France seems to have been relatively stable.

Apart from the bombing of a German *Soldatenkino* in early September 1942, Paris police reported no significant disturbances during the newsreel's first three months despite a 'wave of pro-American sentiment' after the Allied landing in North Africa and a 'highly unfavorable reaction among virtually all segments of the population' to the creation of an Obligatory Work Service (STO) requiring all able-bodied French men born between 1920 and 1922 to serve a six-month tour of duty in Germany [72]. For audiences accustomed to the style and content of the AM, FA constituted a clear improvement, offering them more extensive coverage of life in the unoccupied zone and the Empire while simultaneously reducing their exposure to overtly pro-German propaganda. As for the financial aspects of distribution, ACE maintained its previous fee structure, thereby obviating any protests on the part of cinema owners.

The first recorded incident of public dissent took place in the third week of December 1942 during the projection of an eight-minute 'special report' documenting the daily routine of Pierre Laval. Uniformed French agents, who had been dispatched to key theaters as a precautionary measure, noted 'sporadic whistles', 'coughing at the outset of the film', and 'ironic comments' directed at the Prime Minister's indulgence in small luxuries unavailable to the general public because of rationing. In a scene where Laval takes a cigarette from a silver case, one agent heard outbursts such as 'Hey! He's not short on tobacco!' and 'He sure doesn't need any tickets!' When Laval steps into his chauffeured car for the short commute to Vichy another voice cried, 'Take a look at his ride, it's not a *gazogène*!' (coal-powered, as many vehicles were at the time). At other theaters, however, there was 'approving applause' at the beginning and end of the report. On two occasions a chorus of whistles answered the applause; in another instance a spectator who called Laval 'a loafer' (*fainéant*) was confronted by another patron and a brief scuffle ensued [73].

The Hard Line, 1943–1944

During February and March 1943 the tone and content of FA began to take on a more overtly pro-collaborationist tone thanks to the insertion of clips denouncing the Allied bombing of France and praising the activities of organizations such as the LVF and the Milice, a paramilitary police force created specifically to eliminate the Resistance [74]. For the first time since its debut, the newsreel also started showing German-supplied films that glorified Nazi ideology and Hitler as a politico-military leader, including 'Ten Years of National Socialism', in which Waffen SS units parade triumphantly before Goebbels, the Führer, and delirious civilians, and 'Goebbels speaks to the German people', in which the Minister of Popular Enlightenment announced 'total war' and called upon all European nations to work for the victory of the Reich [75].

At first such clips were sparse, buried amidst the newsreel's standard dose of entertainment stories, French cultural reports, coverage of Marshal Pétain, and war footage. However, spectators immediately noticed the hardening of FA's ideological line, responding to Goebbels's exhortation with 'generalized coughing', 'loud whistles', 'laughter and snickering', and 'cries of protest that multiplied as the speech went on'. The same reaction greeted Laval's appended message that the French should strive to match Germany's effort to build a new Europe. Significantly, these demonstrations occurred in theaters where the lights had been left on as a precautionary measure [76].

The modifications to the newsreel's content were the result of German pressure placed upon FA president Henri Clerc, who often received criticism from French collaborationist organizations and the film department of the Propaganda Abteilung

regarding his editing choices. In early April 1943 *Deutsche Wochenschau* representative Hubertus Von Weyrauch sent an indignant letter complaining that:

your footage of combat operations on the eastern front is shortened so much that French audiences get a completely inaccurate impression of the conflict's epic scope. One does not see the immense Bolshevik danger, nor the terrible combat required to retake a strategically placed village. You limit yourself to showing a few columns of marching troops, some anti-tank artillery in action, and several squadrons of Stukas in flight.

Von Weyrauch also added that the newsreel was not sufficiently encouraging Frenchmen to work in Germany, again claiming that the films he supplied were being rendered ineffective by overzealous cutting [77].

Clerc, already sensitive to the dissent caused by the use of previous DW clips, responded acerbically that the German war footage was 'too monotonous, long, and repetitive' to be used uncut given the

quiet hostility of murmurs and fidgeting that greet such scenes in our theaters, thereby transforming the newsreel into counter-propaganda. [...] Our goal should not be so much to please those French already supportive of collaboration as to impress and if possible to trouble the Gaullist fence-sitters and other anti-German elements who unfortunately are in the majority among spectators.

As for the second charge, he defended himself by claiming that German officials had refused repeated requests to send a French cameraman across the Rhine to shoot clips that would 'better appeal to the mentality of our compatriots'. In the absence of on-site filming, he concluded, 'France-Actualités will simply not be able to offer any propaganda capable of neutralizing the Soviet and Anglo-Saxon campaign which is turning French workers against leaving for the Reich' [78].

Clerc evidently stuck to his principles, for there were subsequently no changes in the length or frequency of FA's coverage of the war in the Soviet Union or the Obligatory Work Service. However, he tried to compensate with other kinds of material. During the second half of 1943 coverage of the LVF and the prisoners-for-workers program grew dramatically. As the Soviets gained the upper hand in the east and Anglo-American forces turned the tide of the war in North Africa, reports from both fronts were gradually replaced by scenes of the German navy operating in the Atlantic and by shockingly graphic images of civilians (especially women and children) killed and maimed in American bombing raids over France, Belgium, and Germany. The Paris Police Prefect reported that cinema audiences 'watched such films stoically without any reaction whatsoever' and that 'the public as a whole showed a certain indifference regarding the bombings, which it accepts as a painful necessity of the coming liberation' [79].

The sharp decline in palatable propaganda topics created a gap in the newsreel that was filled by increasing the proportion of clips devoted to entertainment, especially sports reports. In addition, a number of serious logistical handicaps further undermined FA's effectiveness as an ideological tool. In April 1943 German military authorities cut the ration of electricity available to cinema owners by 50%, requiring them to reduce their number of weekly screenings by half and to close entirely one day a week [80]. Cinema attendance also dropped sharply in response to ever more frequent Allied bombardments, earlier curfews, and soaring ticket prices fed by uncontrolled inflation.

To attract wary spectators many theater owners began showing the newsreel after the feature film rather than before, as required by law [81].

By late 1943 FA had lost virtually all credibility with the public and become an easy target for Resistance counter-propaganda. In October a group of four young men entered the Kursaal cinema in the Paris suburb of Bondy at the conclusion of the newsreel and invited spectators 'to support De Gaulle, refuse to work in Germany, and join the war in France'. The speech received 'a loud round of applause' as the men exited; then the audience settled in 'contentedly' for the feature film [82]. Even the once-productive theme of anti-Communism now fell on deaf ears. Scenes from a December rally at which a series of prominent collaborationist leaders denounced the Soviets, Jews, and Anglo-Americans as 'the assassins of France' were greeted with whistling, laughter, coughing, and numerous cries of 'Sell-outs!' and 'Death to the traitors!' Conversely, footage showing the destruction of Berlin by Allied bombs drew 'widespread applause and cheers' in cinemas throughout the capital [83]. Henri Clerc wrote to Laval warning against the insertion of similar material into future editions [84], but the pro-collaborationist tone of the newsreel continued to harden during its last six months of existence under the influence of Vichy's new Minister of Information Philippe Henriot.

During spring 1944 FA degenerated into a litany of vitriolic attacks upon the Resistance, which was represented as a 'terrorist' organization dedicated to murder and pillage, denunciations of Anglo-American 'aggression', solemn praise for the supposed heroism of German units defending France against invasion, and strangely incongruous clips on sports and other trivial news items unrelated to the war. The increasingly sparse number of spectators who went to the theater during the last months of the Occupation expressed their hostility openly through sarcastic jeers and welcomed the frequent appearance of armed resisters distributing pro-Allied tracts [85]. The only segment of the newsreel to which spectators responded positively during the last months of the Occupation was footage of Marshal Pétain's visits to cities damaged in bombardments [86]. FA's distribution network collapsed progressively in June and July following the D-Day landing. Its final episodes, released in late July and early August 1944, played only in Paris at a handful of nearly empty theaters.

Conclusions: Newsreels and Public Opinion

In the final analysis German newsreel propaganda in France must be regarded as a qualified failure. Although neither the *Actualités Mondiales* nor *France-Actualités* succeeded in rallying much public support for National Socialism or collaboration, as a case study their history highlights both the power and the limitations of cinema as a propaganda tool. From mid-1941 until late 1942, they were able to intensify pre-existing fears of Communism and doubts regarding the Allies' ability to win the war, thereby sustaining popular resignation to the possibility of a long-term German occupation. Yet high technical quality and savvy presentation strategies could not outweigh the influence of contextual factors: gradually increasing popular resentment over the deteriorating quality of life, frustration with the Vichy government's support of the Nazi war effort, the marked growth of Resistance movements, and competition from ideologically antagonistic media (such as the BBC and clandestine newspapers) that stimulated the French's collective desire for liberation. It is no coincidence that the only truly successful newsreel produced during the Occupation,

France-Actualités Pathé-Gaumont, offered spectators a seductive illusion of national independence, strength, and hope for a brighter future—none of which its German counterparts could provide.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Roel Vande Winkel for his comments on a draft of this essay, as well as my wife Paige Koehler for her help translating German archival documents.

Correspondence: Brett Bowles, Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures, Iowa State University, Ames, IA 50011, USA. E-mail: bcbowles@iastate.edu

NOTES

- [1] Roel Vande Winkel, Nazi newsreels and foreign propaganda in German-occupied territories: the German version of Ufa's foreign weekly newsreel (1940–1944), Doctoral dissertation (Ghent University, 2003); Steve Wharton, *Screening Reality: French documentary under German occupation* (Bern, 2004); Sylvie Lindeperg, *Clio de 5 à 7: les actualités filmées de la Libération, archives du futur* (Paris, 2000); James Charrel, *Les actualités cinématographiques en France, 1940–1944*, MA thesis (Université de Paris VIII, 1999).
- [2] Marc Ferro, *Le film, une contre-analyse de la société?* and *Critique des actualités*, in Ferro (ed.), *Cinéma et Histoire* (Paris, 1977); Jean-Pierre Bertin-Maghit, *Le cinéma français sous l'Occupation: le monde du cinéma français de 1940 à 1946* (Paris, 1989). From 1989 to 2001 Ferro hosted *Histoire parallèle*, a weekly television series that compared representations of key international events in different countries' newsreels. The episodes devoted to the war are available on the CD-ROM *Histoire parallèle: la seconde guerre mondiale* (Paris, 1996).
- [3] In France the largest wartime newsreel collections are housed at the Inatèque de France in the Mitterrand National Library (Paris) and Pathé Television Archives (Saint-Ouen). In addition, the Etablissement de Communication et de Production de la Défense (Ivry-sur-Seine) and the Centre National de la Cinématographie's Archives du Film (Bois d'Arcy) hold several hundred documentaries made between 1940 and 1945.
- [4] Most of the German-supplied clips came from various editions of the *Auslandstonwoche* (ATW). See Roel Vande Winkel's article in this issue for a discussion of how these editions were made and their differences from the *Deutsche Wochenschau*.
- [5] For a detailed catalog of the series, see Edith Réta (ed.), *Les archives de guerre, 1940–1944* (Paris, 1996). The films themselves are available for consultation on VHS transfer at the Inatèque de France and at the Bundesarchiv-Filmarchiv, Berlin. Select episodes are also available for viewing on-line at «www.ina.fr/voir_revoir/guerre/videos.fr.html».
- [6] Statistics based on Réta (ed.), *Les archives de guerre*.
- [7] *Actualités Mondiales* (hereafter AM), Issue 2, 7 August 1940. The issue numbers and dates correspond to Réta (ed.), *Les archives de guerre*.
- [8] AM, Issue 2, 7 August 1940; AM, Issue 3, 14 August 1940; AM, Issue 22, 25 December 1940.
- [9] AM, Issue 3, 14 August 1940.
- [10] AM, Issue 37, 11 April 1941.
- [11] AM, Issue 15, 6 November 1940.
- [12] AM, Issue 29, 13 February 1941.
- [13] AM, Issue 21, 18 December 1940.
- [14] AM, Issue 2, 7 August 1940; AM, Issue 11, 9 October 1940; AM, Issue 20, 11 December 1940.
- [15] AM, Issue 52, 25 July 1941; AM, Issue 53, 1 August 1941; AM, Issue 54, 8 August 1941; AM, Issue 57, 29 August 1941; AM, Issue 59, 12 September 1941; AM, Issue 65, 24 October 1941; AM, Issue 99, 19 June 1942; AM, Issue 103, 17 July 1942.
- [16] AM, Issue 52, 25 July 1941.
- [17] On this point, see Pierre Laborie, *L'opinion française sous Vichy* (Paris, 1990), pp. 102–107, 141–154.

- [18] Of the total 1299 clips shown, only 11 dealt with collaboration. Statistics established using Réta (ed.), *Les archives de guerre*.
- [19] AM, Issue 25, 15 January 1941; AM, Issue 43, 23 May 1941; AM, Issue 63, 10 October 1941; AM, Issue 70, 28 November 1941; AM, Issue 93, 8 May 1942; AM, Issue 103, 17 July 1942; AM, Issue 106, 7 August 1942.
- [20] AM, Issue 29, 13 February 1941; AM, Issue 45, 6 June 1941; AM, Issue 50, 11 July 1941; AM, Issue 89, 10 April 1942.
- [21] Statistics based on Réta (ed.), *Les archives de guerre*.
- [22] AM, Issue 43, 23 May 1941; AM, Issue 49, 4 July 1941; AM, Issue 50, 11 July 1941; AM, Issue 52, 25 July 1941; AM, Issue 59, 12 September 1941; AM, Issue 62, 3 October 1941.
- [23] Susan Tegel, *Jew Süß/Jud Süß* (Trowbridge, 1996); David Culbert, The impact of anti-Semitic film propaganda on German Audiences: *Jew Süß* and *The Wandering Jew* (1940), in Richard A. Etlin (ed.), *Art, Culture, and the Media under the Third Reich* (Chicago, 2002), pp. 139–157; Stig Hornshøj-Møller, *Der ewige Jude; Quellenkritische Analyse eines antisemitischen Propagandafilms* (Göttingen, 1995); Joan Clinefelter, A cinematic construction of Nazi anti-Semitism: the documentary *Der ewige Jude*, in Robert C. Reimer (ed.), *Cultural History through a National-Socialist Lens: essays on the cinema of the Third Reich* (Rochester and Suffolk, 2000), pp. 133–154.
- [24] Michael Marrus and Robert Paxton, *Vichy France and the Jews* (New York, 1981), pp. 203–214; Laborie, *L'opinion française sous Vichy*, pp. 270–281.
- [25] Report dated 27 July 1942, Situation de Paris series, Archives of the Paris Police Prefecture (hereafter APP).
- [26] Memo dated 17 August 1940, AJ 40/889, French National Archives, Paris (hereafter AN).
- [27] Report dated October 1940, AJ 40/889, AN.
- [28] Report dated 1 October 1940, BA 2097, APP.
- [29] Report dated 11 October 1940, AJ 40/889, AN.
- [30] Report dated 11 October 1940, BA 2097, APP. On the history of the film, see Thomas Sakmyster, Nazi documentaries of intimidation: 'Feldzug in Polen' (1940), 'Feuertaufe' (1940) and 'Sieg im Western' (1941), *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 16:4 (1996), pp. 485–514.
- [31] French reports dated 4 November and 9 December 1940, Situation de Paris series, APP; German report dated 28 January 1941, AJ 40/889, AN.
- [32] The first clip appears in AM, Issue 10, 2 October 1940; the latter two in AM, Issue 11, 9 October 1940.
- [33] For details on the founding, organization, and functioning of the Aussenstelle Paris, see Roel Vande Winkel's article in this issue, pp. 17–21.
- [34] For an in-depth discussion of unoccupied-zone film propaganda, see Brett Bowles, Newsreels, ideology, and public-opinion under Vichy: the case of *La France en Marche*, *French Historical Studies*, 27:2 (2004), pp. 419–464.
- [35] FAPG incorporated only 21 of the 100 reports from the eastern front shown in the AM. Figures for FAPG are based on the index available at Pathé Television Archives, which also houses a complete collection of the series on VHS.
- [36] The footage appeared in AM, Issue 16, 13 November 1940 and FAPG, Issue 7, 11 December 1940.
- [37] For an in-depth comparison of the two versions, see Christian Delage and Vincent Guigueno, Montoire, une mémoire en représentations, *Vertigo*, 16 (1997), pp. 45–57.
- [38] FAPG, Issue 7, 11 December 1940.
- [39] Statistics based on Réta (ed.), *Les archives de guerre*.
- [40] AM, Issue 48, 27 June 1941. The original FAPG film was released on 17 June 1941, the anniversary of the armistice.
- [41] Report dated 20 April 1942, Situation de Paris series, APP.
- [42] Report dated 29 June 1942, Situation de Paris series, APP.
- [43] AM, Issue 90, 17 April 1942 through AM, Issue 100, 26 June 1942.
- [44] AM, Issue 27, 31 January 1941.
- [45] Reports dated 2 and 6 February 1941, BA 2097, APP.
- [46] Reports dated 11, 13, and 14 February 1941, BA 2097, APP.
- [47] Report dated 5 May 1941, Situation de Paris series, APP.
- [48] Reports dated 14 April and 18 May 1941, BA 2097, APP.
- [49] Reports dated 19, 20, 27 July and 2 August 1941, BA 2097, APP.
- [50] Report dated 20 July 1941, BA 2097, APP.

- [51] Reports dated 15 and 22 September 1941, Situation de Paris series, APP.
- [52] Propaganda Abteilung report dated 15 July 1941, Microfilm T 501/141, frame 678, United States National Archives, Washington, DC.
- [53] Reports dated 2 August, 7 August, 13 August, 17 August, 7 September, and 29 December 1941, BA 2097, APP; report dated 9 February 1942, Situation de Paris series, APP.
- [54] AM, Issue 54, 8 August 1941; AM, Issue 77, 16 January 1942; AM, Issue 94, 15 May 1942.
- [55] Reports dated 13 June 1941, 19 January 1942, 11 May 1942, and 29 June 1942, Situation de Paris series, APP.
- [56] AM, Issue 74, 26 December 1941; AM, Issue 81, 13 February 1942; AM, Issue 84, 6 March 1942; AM, Issue 85, 13 March 1942; AM, Issue 96, 29 May 1942; AM, Issue 98, 12 June 1942.
- [57] The main details are summarized below. For a step-by-step account, see Jean-Pierre Bertin-Maghit, *Le cinéma sous l'Occupation*, pp. 106–119.
- [58] Brett Bowles, *La Tragédie de Mers-el-Kébir* and the politics of filmed news in France, 1940–1944, forthcoming in *The Journal of Modern History*, 76.2 (2004).
- [59] Memo dated 26 January 1942, F 42/118, AN.
- [60] Report dated 9 May 1942, F 42/119, AN.
- [61] Text from the cover of the corporate journal *Filmafric*, June–July 1942.
- [62] FA, Issue 1, 21 August 1942.
- [63] Statistics based on Réta (ed.), *Les archives de guerre*.
- [64] FA, Issue 15, 27 November 1942.
- [65] FA, Issue 3, 4 September 1942; FA, Issue 9, 16 October 1942. At his own request, Hitler also largely disappeared from the other ATW editions and the DW during the same period, perhaps because of health problems related to Parkinson's disease. On this point, see Kay Hoffmann's article in this issue.
- [66] FA, Issue 5, 18 September 1942; FA, Issue 4, 29 January 1942.
- [67] FA, Issue 3, 4 September 1942; FA, Issue 5, 18 September 1942; FA, Issue 9, 16 October 1942; FA, Issue 12, 6 November 1942; FA, Issue 16, 4 December 1942; FA, Issue 20, 7 January 1943.
- [68] FA, Issue 3, 4 September 1942; FA, Issue 5, 11 September 1942; FA, Issue 12, 6 November 1942; FA, Issue 21, 7 January 1942.
- [69] Letter from Clerc to Laval dated 23 October 1942, F 42/119, AN.
- [70] Letter from René Buron (General Secretary of the COIC) to Louis-Emile Galey (General Director of National Cinematography) dated 17 October 1942, F 42/119, AN.
- [71] Letters from Henri Clerc to Marcel Garnier (theater owner in Marseille) and Jean d'Albert (theater owner in Perpignan) dated 16 September 1942, F 42/119, AN.
- [72] Reports dated 5 October and 30 November 1942, Situation de Paris series, APP.
- [73] Reports dated 24, 25, 27 December 1942, BA 2097, APP.
- [74] The first bombardment report appeared in FA, Issue 31, 19 March 1943; the first Milice report in FA, Issue 25, 5 February 1943.
- [75] FA, Issue 25, 5 February 1943 and FA, Issue 29, 5 March 1943.
- [76] Reports dated 6 and 8 March 1943, BA 2097, APP.
- [77] Letter from Von Weyrauch to Clerc, 8 April 1943, 2 AG/555, AN. Weyrauch's ire can be explained in part by the fact that most ATW newsrooms were not allowed to edit battle footage provided by Berlin. My thanks to Roel Vande Winkel for this clarification.
- [78] Letter from Clerc to Von Weyrauch, 8 April 1943, 2 AG/555, AN.
- [79] Reports dated 26 July 1943 and 6 September 1943, Situation de Paris series, APP.
- [80] Report dated 5 April 1943, Situation de Paris series, APP.
- [81] Report dated 26 December 1943, Situation de Paris series, APP.
- [82] Report dated 27 October 1943, BA 2097, APP.
- [83] Report dated 26 December 1943, Situation de Paris series, APP.
- [84] Letter from Clerc to Laval, 23 December 1943, F 42/133, AN.
- [85] Reports dated 14 January, 29 April, 9 May, 25 May, 28 May, 22 June, and 9 July 1944, BA 2097, APP.
- [86] Reports dated 30 April and 26 May 1944, BA 2097, APP.

Brett Bowles is Assistant Professor of French at Iowa State University. He recently completed a book on Marcel Pagnol's fiction films from the 1930s and is preparing a second manuscript on film propaganda in France during the Second World War. His article on French newsreel coverage of Mers-el-Kébir is forthcoming in the June 2004 issue of The Journal of Modern History.

