

A “Golden Prison” in Pennsylvania: The Hotel Hershey, 1942-43

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The internees, including women and children, numbered about 100 and, if I am to believe the statements of those whom I had the chance to question afterward, the grand hotel at Hershey was a golden prison.

—Guy Fritsch-Estrangin, *New York entre de Gaulle et Pétain!*

Perhaps it is because they remember the eventual—if reluctant—recognition accorded General Charles de Gaulle. Perhaps it is because their historical memories evoke the post-Liberation France that occupied Baden-Baden and Berlin—as one of the Allies—rather than the legal government headed at Vichy by Marshal Henri-Philippe Pétain in the wake of Germany’s 1940 triumph. Whatever the reason, many Americans are astonished to learn that the United States ever maintained diplomatic relations with Pétain’s État Français.

True, when Pierre Laval returned to power in the French State in April 1942, Washington called home its ambassador, Admiral William Leahy, “for consultation.” But American foreign service and military personnel continued to work in Vichy and consular outposts; Charge d’affaires S. Pinkney Tuck assumed Leahy’s responsibilities, if not his title. No one summoned—or sent away—*Vichy’s* emissary in Washington, Ambassador Gaston Henry-Haye.

Thus, on 8 November 1942, Henry-Haye dined as guest of the Chinese ambassador to the United States. Conviviality was interrupted when T.V. Soong advised the Frenchman to return to his own embassy; the Americans had attacked French North Africa and “Operation TORCH” had begun.

1. Guy Fritsch-Estrangin, *New York entre de Gaulle et Pétain: Les Français aux Etats-Unis de 40 à 46* (Paris: La Table Ronde, 1969), 75. All translations are mine.

By month's end, Henry-Haye's "Mission Française" would no longer be headquartered on Kalorama Road. Along with diplomatic and consular officials and dependents stationed in New York, Chicago, and other cities, Henry-Haye would be brought to a "golden prison" 14 miles east of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: the Hotel Hershey.

To a significant extent, the Franco-American case replicated a scenario that emerged after the Pearl Harbor attack in December 1941. At that time, enemy diplomats and their dependents in the United States became intimately acquainted with luxury resorts such as the Greenbrier and the Homestead (in White Sulphur Springs, West Virginia, and Hot Springs, Virginia, respectively).² There, they awaited exchange and repatriation, all at the expense of the U.S. taxpayer.³ Correspondingly, American personnel in enemy countries fell into foreign custody, although they were not always so well accommodated. The United States—materially intact—invariably offered more and better comforts than the best equipped among its war-ravaged enemies.⁴

The "internment" at Hershey lasted less than a year, though for a small number of the original group it continued in less opulent Virginia quarters until an exchange for American personnel was effected in February-March 1944 (some families were released quite early, especially when husbands/fathers joined the Allied military effort). It is, to be sure, an obscure chapter in the typically alliance-oriented history of Franco-American relations.

2. On 1 September 1939, the State Department created a "Special Division" (SD) "to handle special problems arising out of the disturbed condition in Europe"; SD handled diplomatic internment and exchange. See "Special Division Established," *Department of State Bulletin* (DSB), 2 September 1939, 193-94; "Duties of the Special Division," *DSB*, 13 February 1943, 155-56; "Organization of the Department of State: Announcement of Reorganization," *DSB*, 15 February 1944, 47-48. Rich documentary material is found within the Records of the Special War Problems Division (hereafter, SWP) at the National Archives at College Park, MD, within Record Group 59 (General Records of the Department of State).

3. See Arnold M. Krammer, "In Splendid Isolation: Enemy Diplomats in World War II," *Prologue* 38 (Spring 1985): 25-43.

4. See, for example, accounts of conditions at Kobe, Osaka, and Yokohama in "Treatment of American Officials by Japanese Authorities," SWP Box 70. See also Charles B. Burdick, *An American Island in Hitler's Reich: The Bad Nauheim Internment* (Menlo Park: CA: Markgraf, 1987); George F. Kennan, *Memoirs: 1925-1950* (Boston and Toronto: Little, Brown, 1987); Joseph C. Grew, *Ten Years in Japan* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1944); Gwen Terasaki, *Bridge to the Sun* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1957).

But it raises provocative questions. What was life like in the “golden prison”? What insights into “international relations” might be gleaned from the interactions that took place in Pennsylvania? At the very least, we see that these relations—during wartime, no less—are more than a matter of battles and fighters who fight them, more than conventions and the conferences that create them. This leads us into a final analysis of whether the French officials were America’s friends, or enemies. In whose eyes?

A caveat: it must be emphasized that in virtually ever respect, “diplomatic internment” was the absolute antithesis of any other detention experience normally associated with the Second World War. The French at Hershey, and their American counterparts in Europe, were not military prisoners-of-war. They did not suffer the miseries of Japanese and Japanese-Americans in the United States, or the indignities borne by other civilian “alien enemies.” In Germany, where the French-based Americans were transferred after two months’ “internment” in Lourdes hotels, the environment of Baden Baden’s Brenner’s Park Hotel could not have less resembled a concentration camp. As for the Hotel Hershey, open nearly a decade by the time the French arrived, it was “a palace, a palace that out-palaces the palaces of the Maharajahs of India.”⁵

Palace/Prison Life

Candymaker-philanthropist Milton S. Hershey had earlier addressed the “palace’s” incongruous appearance in his namesake-town. “It was my intention to build a hotel on this hill from the very beginning, although I didn’t have anything like this one in mind.” Still, “I thought I’d impress the city folks by building a fine hotel on one of our farms. *I am of the opinion that there will be a need for this hotel some day, although the prospects to not look very encouraging.*” (emphasis added.)⁶

Ordinary guests might pursue golf, tennis, and horseback riding, whether on the nine-hole golf course, the four tennis courts, or the five miles of bridle-paths that meandered “through woods and open spaces alongside brooks and running streams.” Nearby was the thousand-acre

5. Lowell Thomas, cited in brochure, “Hotel Hershey and Cottages: Delightful Living,” National Archives and Records Administration, Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service (hereafter: “RG 85”), File 56125/91.

6. M.S. Hershey, quoted in Joseph Richard Snavely, *The Hershey Story* (Hershey, PA: n.p., 1950), 282-84.

Hershey Park, "a place of clean, wholesome entertainment, which has brought Hershey the title of "The Summer Capital of Pennsylvania." Aesthetic yearnings might be satisfied by a trip to the Hershey Rose Garden. Schools, shops, and other typical features of municipal life rounded out the picture.⁷

The French detainees enjoyed access to the 1.5 acres just behind the hotel and two adjacent acres of "open lawn" between 9AM and 5:15PM. The "large porch" stretching across the hotel's front was open from 9AM to 9:30PM. Golf was "permitted to one foursome in the morning and one foursome in the afternoon on a nine-hole course immediately adjacent to the hotel."⁸

Indoor activities included ping-pong, chess, and poker. Evenings often found the assemblage listening to classical records. Under the guidance of Marie d'Aumale, wife of the New York Consul, a women's "atelier" produced items that were sent to New York for forwarding to children in France. A contrived chapel provided weekly and holiday Mass.⁹ The French had access to a card room and a game room, as well as "a few other rooms and courts." American Agent T.F. Fitch judged that meals were "excellent and of the highest quality, with a wide range of selections" and impeccable service.¹⁰

Uniformed Immigration Board of Patrol guards, complemented by civilian guards, covered the grounds "using eight booths." They did not "concern themselves with the interior policing of the hotel," which was sufficiently isolated so as to be "completely free from any public interference," appropriate for its current occupants who, with the exception of Henry-Haye's contacts with the Swiss Legation, had no telephone privileges.¹¹

International Affairs in the Golden Prison

Semblance of normalcy notwithstanding—the French even maintained a "lycée" for the group's many school-aged children¹²—all was not peaceful in Candyland. The internees resisted accompanied prom-

7. Brochure, RG 85, File 56125/91.

8. T.F. Fitch to Brandt, 7 December 1942, SWP Box 122, "Funds for Former French Officials."

9. Henry-Haye, "Les activités de la Mission Française à Hershey," 3 February 1943, Archives communales de Versailles, Fonds Gaston Henry-Haye (hereafter: "GHH") 4820.

10. T.F. Fitch to Brandt, 7 December 1942.

11. T.F. Fitch to Brandt, 7 December 1942

12. Henry-Haye's "Les activités de la Mission Française à Hershey" describes this school. The internees' numbers peaked at 98 on New Year's Day, 1943. See the report of State

enades; the State Department philosophically observed that “the French people do not take easily to regimentation. They have explained...that they have seen enough of each other around the Hotel and would much rather walk alone or in small groups....” The State Department’s resident Agent Edgar Innes sympathized, “as I have noticed small incidents which would tend to show that nerves are wearing thin amongst some of them. All in all they are not exactly one big, happy family.”¹³

But intra-group tensions formed just part of the problem. International conflict, even on a micro-level, demonstrated problems between the French and American “sides.” How should an internee’s drawing of a “large swastika...on the snow in the back of the hotel” be interpreted, for example?¹⁴ The interactions mainly manifested themselves in routine complaints from the French and small flare-ups.¹⁵ There could also be more heated drama such as the infamous “Trainor Incident,” which was grounded in a specific conflict (shopping privileges) between an American representative and members of the foreign national group, and fueled by Franco-American dynamics.¹⁶

One State Department official had, from the start, displayed exasperation with the internees’ behavior. He concluded, after the shopping incident, that the American guardians had, to that point, “handled the French officials with extreme leniency in an effort to make their detention pleasant and to eliminate any bad feelings.” He opined that the group, then nearly 30-strong, “composed entirely of pro-Vichyites,” was taking advantage of this good will. The detainees were “behaving like spoiled children...and are behaving with utter disregard to the rules and regulations regarding their boundary limits.”

Dept. Resident Agent (Edgar) Innes, “Dailey [sic] Tally Sheet of French Diplomatic Officials at Hotel Hershey, Hershey, Penna. As of January 1, 1943,” SWP Box 107, “Daily Tally Sheet of Hershey Hotel (Vichy French).”

13. Innes to Fitch, 30 March 1943, SWP Box 103, “French—Hershey Hotel.”

14. Lee H. Seward, “Report on the Conditions at the Hershey Hotel,” 11 June 1943, SWP Box 166, “French—Hershey Hotel,” Folder 1 of 2.

15. The State Department seemed particularly irritated by repeated conflicts with one French family, the Imbault-Huarts, “the most troublesome of any of the detainees of Hershey.” See, in particular, Innes to Fitch, 23 March 1943, SWP Box 103, “French—Hershey Hotel,” Folder 3 of 3.

16. For details, see Lee H. Seward, “Report on the Conditions at the Hershey Hotel,” 11 June 1943, SWP Box 166, “French—Hershey Hotel,” Folder 1 of 2; Henry-Haye to Swiss Legation, 11 June 1943, “Correspondance. Télégrammes de la missions français et de l’ambassade de France. Départ,” GHH 4820; R.L. Bannerman, “French Situation at the Hershey Hotel,” 2 July 1943, SWP Box 166, “French—Hershey Hotel,” Folder 1 of 2.

“Boundary” could be construed in many ways. “They have used abusive and profane language to the guards, have deliberately crossed the restricted boundaries in the presence of the guards and have dared the guards to take any measures against them. They have destroyed hotel property and have destroyed all the signs put up by the guards indicating the boundary areas.” As for the Trainor Incident, the American perspective saw the French as having “seized” upon it, “determined to make a protest, when actually they are entirely wrong in every respect.” More severe restrictions were predicted, “unless they mend their ways...otherwise the Hershey situation will soon be out of hand.”¹⁷

The Hershey situation never quite got “out of hand.” Immigration guards by their sides, the remaining French departed Hershey 30 September 1943, taking the Pennsylvania Railroad toward their new residence at the “Three Hills estate” at Warm Springs, Virginia. The fiduciary relationship between the State Department and the Hotel ended in November, when Breckinridge Long sent a registered letter and final payment to Milton Hershey. Long wished the octogenarian to know “how very much the Department of State appreciates the splendid cooperation it received from you and from the management and the employees of the Hotel.” The State Department was “grateful” for Mr. Hershey’s involvement, and hoped that the elderly chocolatier would convey this gratitude to his employees, whose cooperation had “aided in the satisfactory solution of an important phase of its detention program.”¹⁸

Conclusion: France and America: Friends or Enemies?

But what were these officials doing in detention in the first place? “Interning” representatives of nations with whom the United States was at war after Pearl Harbor is one matter; treating French officials that way does seem at least slightly different. The issue of “status” increasingly preoccupied Henry-Haye at Hershey and beyond. He continued to present himself as “Ambassador,” much as the prefix “former” or “ex” was often tacked to the title in American documents. Nothing had broken his loyalty to Maréchal Pétain, and so long as he remained in the United States he would continue to supervise the French “mission.”¹⁹

17. R.L. Bannerman, “Memorandum to Mr. Fitch,” 11 June 1943, SWP Box 112, “Hershey Hotel,” Folder 2 of 2.

18. Breckinridge Long to M.S. Hershey, 20 November 1943, SWP Box 166, “French—Hershey Hotel,” Folder 2 of 2.

19. As the labels used to document sources for this paper, in the Fonds Gaston Henry-Haye, attest.

While sustaining this self-image, Henry-Haye understood the situation was far more complicated. He wanted to know the standing of his group, "which is incapable of being legally considered by the Federal government as 'enemy aliens' since no state of war exists between France and the United States...." Seeking further clarification from the Swiss, he stated: "The American Government, which cannot legally consider the interned French as 'enemy aliens,' still treats them...as such...."²⁰

In the end, however, it was the American group first interned in France, then transferred to German custody, who displayed more resentment. A chance meeting in Lisbon during the 1944 exchange process provides perhaps the most vivid example. When Douglas MacArthur 2nd, nephew of the famous General, encountered Henry-Haye in an hotel, a witness observed the dynamic between the well-fed Frenchman and the gaunt MacArthur. "You have indeed lost a lot of weight," Henry-Haye pronounced. MacArthur answered that he was "just out of an internment camp in Germany." Ah, yes, commiserated the Frenchman, who had spent the preponderance of his internment at the Hotel Hershey. Diplomacy carried certain risks. MacArthur agreed, but added that "nothing can justify that Vichy should have handed us over to the Germans from their own internment camp at Lourdes." His parting shot: "You would have probably lost weight yourself, too, sir, if we had handed you over to the Japanese."²¹

"We" hadn't done that. "We" handed "them" over to the Hotel Hershey. A golden prison.

Dipped in chocolate.

20. 12 January 1943 and 3 February 1943, "Correspondance. Télégrammes de la mission française et de l'ambassade de France. Départ." GHH 4820. See also Swiss Minister to the Secretary of State, 22 January 1943, SWP Box 122, "Henry-Haye, Complaints and Requests."

21. "U.S. Diplomat Curt to Vichy Ex-Envoy," *New York Times*, 10 March 1944, 4.