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# "A Delirious Welcome to Anyone in Uniform:" The GI Experience in Paris, July - September 1944

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## **Abstract**

Previous studies of relationships between American GIs and the French population during and after Liberation paint two extremes: one of a perfectly handsome American man doling out candy, cigarettes, and kisses, and the other of a rapist and conqueror. In reality, the situation proved to be somewhere between these two realities. In this paper, I will argue that the Franco-American relationship in the months of July, August, and September 1944 was one of utility and necessity that left the French vulnerable and powerless. Because of factors such as preexisting conditions left behind by German soldiers, language barriers, and material needs, American GIs enlisted, collaborated with, interacted with, and took advantage of Parisians during their time in Paris

## **Keywords**

Liberation, Paris, World War II, Cultural History

## **Disciplines**

European History | History | Military History | United States History

## **Comments**

This paper was written for Dr. Birkner's course, HIST 421: The US and World War II, Fall 2017.

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“A Delirious Welcome to Anyone in Uniform:”

The GI Experience in Paris, July – September 1944

Bridget Ashton

History 421 – Birkner

December 2017

I affirm that I have upheld the highest principles of honesty and integrity in my academic work, and I have not witnessed a violation of the Honor Code.

**Abstract**

Previous studies of relationships between American GIs and the French population during and after Liberation paint two extremes: one of a perfectly handsome American man doling out candy, cigarettes, and kisses, and the other of a rapist and conqueror. In reality, the situation proved to be somewhere between these two realities. In this paper, I will argue that the Franco-American relationship in the months of July, August, and September 1944 was one of utility and necessity that left the French vulnerable and powerless. Because of factors such as preexisting conditions left behind by German soldiers, language barriers, and material needs, American GIs enlisted, collaborated with, interacted with, and took advantage of Parisians during their time in Paris.

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## Introduction

Around 6:30 am on a blustery Tuesday morning, 156,000 Allied troops began to land along the coastline of Normandy, France. What would later go down as June 6th, 1944, known as D-Day or Operation Overlord, was the start to French liberation and the end of World War II. In the months to come, Allied troops and Free French forces would fight from the northern coasts of Normandy and the southern hills of Italy to meet in Paris for the liberation of France. As July passed into August, Operation Cobra was carried out, whereby bombers attacked the north of France, pushing German troops south and east. As Operation Bluecoat launched, the British inched in on the Germans stuck in what would become known as the Falaise Pocket.

Following August 21<sup>st</sup>, the Allied and Free French Forces had a clear shot at Paris. Defying orders from Adolf Hitler to completely destroy the city, General Dietrich von Choltitz, commander of the German garrison in Paris, surrendered the intact “City of Light” on August 25th, 1944. Of the 20,000 German troops stationed in Paris, most surrendered or fled, while others remained in hiding.<sup>1</sup> Approximately 156,000 Allied troops were involved in the fight for Normandy, which inched southward to Paris. For these GIs, Paris had often been an idyllic dream: a center for the arts, music, and culture that welcomed in countless American artists during the 1920s and 1930s. For other GIs, it was a well-needed refuge after months or years of tough fighting. For more GIs still, it was a grateful city that overwhelmingly celebrated their feats in North Africa, Italy, and Normandy.

For the Parisians? The GIs were liberators. Over the past four years, Paris had devolved from an international metropolis to a starving village. Many Parisians lived off of chickens and rabbits, raised in bathtubs and broom closets on diets of stolen grass from public parks. A

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<sup>1</sup> Larry Collins and Dominique Lapierre, *Is Paris Burning?* (New York: Warner Books, Inc., 1965).

common joke said that the meat ration “could be wrapped in a subway ticket – provided the ticket had not been used. If it had, went the joke, the meat might fall through the hole punched in the ticket by the conductor’s perforator.”<sup>2</sup> For these starved and desperate Parisians, GIs brought hope. They replaced the Nazi flag atop the Eiffel Tower with the French Tricolor, and with it a sense of relief, freedom, and return to home as they knew it. GIs brought everyday necessities of food, fuel, and cigarettes that Parisians had been living for years without. They brought with them the idyllic American dream of a soldier: handing out candy to kids, cigarettes to adults, and kisses on the cheek to beautiful women. But is this story all there is to the summer of 1944? What did everyday relations between Parisians and GIs look like in the weeks leading up to liberation and following liberation in Paris?

In this paper, I will argue that the Franco-American relationship in the months of July, August, and September 1944 was one of utility and necessity that left Parisians vulnerable and largely powerless. Because of conditions left behind by German soldiers, language barriers, and material needs, American GIs used and manipulated Parisians during their time in Paris. However, unlike previous studies that have framed American GIs as rapists and criminals, this paper will outline the relationship between GIs and Parisians as one of mutual necessity.

It is important to keep in mind not only a chronological scope, but also a geographic context when looking at the daily lives of these GIs and Parisians. To establish this geographic scope, I have provided a map of Paris at the time so as to better understand the spread of American influence in these months of 1944. While Americans evidently impacted life in Paris in many other ways besides the Red Cross, this map gives a good idea of centers of “American life” during these months.

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 9.





Figure 1 - Map of Red Cross Clubs in Paris, 1944

<sup>3</sup> "Map of American Red Cross Clubs," MS-211: Earman Family Collection, Series VIII (Gettysburg College Musselman Library Special Collections, processed July 2017).



## Historiography

The common narrative surrounding Franco-American relations in Paris during and after liberation has been much the same through the end of the 20th century: the handsome and young GI delivering candy, cigarettes, and kisses to gracious locals. Larry Collins and Dominique Lapierre's *Is Paris Burning?* portray these scenes of absolute gratitude and delight during liberation. Beautiful young women of every shape, size, and color, flood to kiss the young men, while elders pour out bottles of champagne and cognac, and young children toss flowers onto the parade of jeeps.<sup>4</sup> More recent documentaries, such as Ken Burns' *The War* have brilliantly captured these images of mutual celebration and welcome.<sup>5</sup> When surveying war crimes committed against French women, historians have focused primarily on those committed by German occupying forces. One such example comes from Anne Sebba's *Les Parisiennes: How the Women of Paris Lived, Loved and Died in the 1940s*, published in 2016. It examines the lives of Parisian women under German occupation. While she provides examples of abuses against women, they primarily come from German occupiers or delirious French men celebrating liberation. Beginning in the early 2000s, a new narrative began with the advent of women and gender studies: extremely high rates of venereal disease, rape, prostitution, and exploitation of French women by American troops. The publication of Mary Louise Roberts' *What Soldiers Do: Sex and the American GI in World War II France* in 2013 represents this new narrative in an effective, albeit depressing way. Her narrative primarily focused on sex - the material and utilitarian aspects of it. Roberts breaks up her history into sections on romance, prostitution, and

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<sup>4</sup> Collins and Lapierre, *Is Paris Burning?*.

<sup>5</sup> Ken Burns and Lynn Novick, *The War*, miniseries, written by Geoffrey C. Ward, 2007 (United States: Public Broadcasting Service, 2007), Video. Other documentaries that offer brilliant images of this "stereotypical" narrative include the British documentary, *World War II in Colour*, which show images of elderly women throwing out homemade "Thank You" banners while young women make out with soldiers through the streets. One older woman smashes a framed portrait of Hitler in the street to the applause of American GIs.



rape. However, the bulk of her story focuses on the latter (and darker) pieces of prostitution and rape.<sup>6</sup>

Similarly, Daniel Clayton, a professor at Regis College specializing in war and memory, published in 2015 “Whitewashing WWII Sexual Memory,” a narrative that follows a related track. Clayton takes Roberts’ argument one step further, describing the American historiographical “whitewashing” of this history, whereby writers purified and removed scandals and war crimes from the narrative of liberation. Clayton goes on to describe how military leaders and internal organizations created systems for sexual gratification of soldiers. He argues that for “[a]s long as armies have fought wars, an insatiable appetite for the latter kind of love - raw sex - has characterized the moral conduct of many soldiers. These sexual predators needed sex, which was often provided by their commanding officers to keep them productive.”<sup>7</sup>

This paper goes beyond such previous scholarship in that it shows how Franco-American relations were more complex than either of these extreme “rape and pillage” or “kisses and flowers” narratives. By combining both of these narratives, one of an extremely positive view of American GIs, and one of an extremely negative view, along with primary sources and individual accounts, this paper aims to portray a more balanced and well-rounded history of Franco-American relations than those previously written. The paper’s scope is narrowed to Paris in the summer months of 1944, so as to provide a different view than previous histories which focused on Normandy and port cities such as Le Havre. By limiting one’s scope to these provincial cities, historians have limited the socioeconomic and racial diversities that were evident in France at the time. By choosing Paris, this paper seeks to paint a more well-rounded

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<sup>6</sup> Mary Louise Roberts, *What Soldiers Do: Sex and the American GI in World War II France* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2013), Print.

<sup>7</sup> Daniel M. Clayton, “Whitewashing WWII Sexual Memory,” *War, Literature & the Arts: An International Journal of the Humanities* 27 (June 2015): 5.

and diverse picture of what was actually going on between GIs and French locals during this time of liberation.

To accomplish this goal, this paper uses letters, diaries, photographs, and oral histories relating to the summer of 1944. My story draws heavily on the experiences of American GIs and Parisian locals. Specifically, I have drawn from the diary of Forrest Pogue, a combat historian who later became a renowned oral historian and biographer. Born in Eddyville, Kentucky in 1912, Pogue taught as a history professor at Murray State University throughout the 1930s before enlisting in the Army as a combat historian who followed the movements of the US Army during the invasion of Normandy, the Liberation of Paris, and throughout the rest of the war in Europe. Celebrated for his forward-thinking approach to oral history, his diary serves as a fabulous source for historians because of its accuracy and detail.<sup>8</sup>

Also of note is the Earman Family Collection housed in the Gettysburg College Musselman Library's Special Collections. Ernest Earman, Jr. was born in 1921 in Harper's Ferry, Maryland. The war offered Ernest, formerly unemployed and living with his family, an opportunity, both in terms of a paycheck and chance for independence. Having completed basic training in Texas in 1943 and early 1944, Ernest sailed to France in August of 1944 as part of the 724th Railway Operating Battalion. From August onward, he helped with "train derailments, wrecks, and cleanups for over a year." During his time around Paris, he began a relationship with Mademoiselle Catherine Seux, a beautiful young lady from a wealthy family living in the 16th

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<sup>8</sup> Wolfgang Saxon, "Forrest C. Pogue, 84; Wrote an Epic Study of General Marshall," *The New York Times*, October 8 1996, Web (<http://www.nytimes.com/1996/10/08/arts/forrest-c-pogue-84-wrote-an-epic-study-of-general-marshall.html>). Forrest Pogue would go on to write the famous biographical works of General George C. Marshall, as well as several works on Eisenhower's military and diplomatic experiences in World War II.

arrondissement of Paris with a country house in Couilly-Pont-aux-Dames, a small village less than thirty miles east of Paris.<sup>9</sup>

Another critical piece to the story is a collection of oral histories gathered from the National World War II Museum in New Orleans, LA. Of these is the story of Richard Duchossois, Second Lieutenant of an infantry division, born in 1921 in Chicago, IL. Duchossois experienced Paris as both an active soldier before liberation and again later when hospitalized there following a gunshot wound in September of 1944.<sup>10</sup> Other brief oral histories come from soldiers such as Lynn “Buck” Compton of Los Angeles, CA, who remembered Paris as a location for baseball games and a chance to experience a return to “American” normalcy.<sup>11</sup> Born in 1923 in Mobile, AL, Thomas Galloway experienced a more combative side of Paris, as he was involved in the fighting leading up to the liberation of Paris. Having gone through Officer Candidate School, Galloway shipped out as part of the wave that would land on Omaha Beach and fight southward to Paris.<sup>12</sup> Equally interesting are the stories of Gerard Halpern, born in 1925 in Frankfurt am Main, Germany. His stories of growing up in Germany under the rise of Hitler and Nazism, which led to his family’s immigration to the United States in July of 1937, are fascinating; however it is his memories of his time around Paris that are of significance here. Halpern experienced Paris as a Private First Class stationed in Chantilly, a suburb thirty miles north of Paris, where he was put in charge of an officer’s club.<sup>13</sup> Other oral histories from the

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<sup>9</sup> Earman Family Collection Finding Aid, *MS-211: Earman Family Collection*, Series VIII (Gettysburg College Musselman Library Special Collections, processed July 2017), [https://www.gettysburg.edu/special\\_collections/collections/manuscripts/collections/ms-211-earman](https://www.gettysburg.edu/special_collections/collections/manuscripts/collections/ms-211-earman).

<sup>10</sup> National WWII Museum, “Oral History of Richard Duchossois,” (interview by the National World War II Museum, National WWII Museum Digital Collections, <http://ww2online.org/view/richard-duchossois/segment-1>).

<sup>11</sup> National WWII Museum, “Oral History of Lynn Compton,” (interview by the National World War II Museum, National WWII Museum Digital Collections, <http://ww2online.org/view/lynn-compton/segment-1>).

<sup>12</sup> National WWII Museum, “Oral History of Thomas Galloway,” (interview by the National World War II Museum, National WWII Museum Digital Collections, <http://ww2online.org/view/thomas-galloway/segment-1>).

<sup>13</sup> National WWII Museum, “Oral History of Gerard Halpern,” (interview by the National World War II Museum, National WWII Museum Digital Collections, <http://ww2online.org/view/gerard-halpern/segment-10>).

National WWII Museum proved equally helpful in delineating the experiences of American soldiers' interactions with Parisians.

### **Arrival of GIs in France**

So, what type of Paris were these GIs encountering as they marched into the city on the evening of August 24th, 1944? The spring and summer of 1944 had brought in a renewed effort by Germans to amplify cultural opportunities so as to showcase a degree of normalcy despite military defeats elsewhere in Europe. In June of 1944, Paris officials announced 91 upcoming concerts. Throughout the months of June and July, state and private theaters continued to present plays and operas from Labiche to Verdi. Leading artists Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque continued to churn out work from their Parisian studios, and “[a]s late as the last day of July, a new show of watercolors opened at the Paris Orangerie. Meanwhile, although reduced from four to two a week, daily programs continued at Paris racetracks. One would scarcely have guessed that a liberating army would enter the city within barely a fortnight.”<sup>14</sup>

Despite this propaganda-infused resurgence of culture and art, the situation in Paris was increasingly problematic as July turned to August. Once bombings became a continuous part of the day, production halted and routes to Paris were cut off. In his reflections of the war, General Dwight D. Eisenhower made note of the pains he took to avoid bombing the centermost parts of Paris. To achieve this, Eisenhower focused the destruction of communications “by attacking railway bottlenecks outside rather than terminals inside the city.” By taking such pains, the Allies avoided turning Paris into a “battleground” or city of destruction. Instead, the Allies worked on a

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<sup>14</sup> Allan Mitchell, *Nazi Paris: The History of an Occupation 1940-1944* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2008): 140-141. A new topic of interest in Occupation literature has focused on the lives of artists living in Paris under the Occupation, which are not pretty pictures for art enthusiasts. Alan Riding's 2011 *And the Show Went On: Cultural Life in Nazi-Occupied Paris* questions the moral obligations of artists during the Occupation. A more recent work by French scholars entitled *Les artistes en France sous l'Occupation: Van Dongen, Picasso, Utrillo, Maillol, Vlaminck...* examines the relationships (and collaboration) between these artists and German occupiers.

siege-like strategy that would surround the Vichy and German troops occupying the city and force a surrender.<sup>15</sup> Without access to the resources of the countryside, Paris experienced a “growing scarcity of foodstuffs, the lagging availability of coal,” whereby “electricity meant ineluctable cutbacks and layoffs.” Those who followed the long French tradition of striking faced violence or threats of treason. As the month of July ended, electricity hit a new level of shortages.<sup>16</sup> The situation was dire.<sup>17</sup>

For the American GIs marching in from Normandy, Paris offered a victory and place of refuge that they had long been fighting and waiting for. With victory in Paris and liberation of France, the European theater of World War II would soon be closed for these tired soldiers. That being said, Allied military leaders considered the liberation of Paris a cost. A SHAEF study at the time reported that “Paris food and medical requirements alone are 75,000 tons for the first two months, and an additional 1,500 tons of coal daily are likely to be needed for public utilities.”<sup>18</sup> The Parisians were expected to return the favor for the Allies, who not only liberated their city, but also maintained it following its liberation.

Beyond the cultural and artistic celebrities of the 1920s and 30s, little was known by the average American soldier marching into Paris in the summer of 1944 about typical French life. The bulk of the information they had was provided from a 1944 pocket guide provided by the Army Information Branch of the United States Army, entitled “Instructions for American Servicemen in France During World War II.” Broken up into four pieces, the guide runs through “Why You’re Going to France,” “The United States Soldier in France,” “A Few Pages of French

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<sup>15</sup> Dwight Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe* (United States: Doubleday & Company, Inc, 1948), 296.

<sup>16</sup> Mitchell, *Nazi Paris: The History of an Occupation*, 142.

<sup>17</sup> Eisenhower admitted the limitations of their intelligence of the situation when liberating Paris. He continues on page 296 of *Crusade in Europe* that because of their limited fuel remaining and limited accessibility to future fuel, he “was hopeful of deferring actual capture of the city, unless [he] received evidence of starvation or distress among its citizens.” The Allies needed to balance the need for fuel in supporting a newly liberated city versus the need for fuel in continuing the ongoing fight through Europe to Germany.

<sup>18</sup> Collins and Lapierre, *Is Paris Burning?*, 13.



History,” and an “Observation Post” of common aspects of French culture. The bulk of the guide focuses on sexual relations with French women, meant to assure young men that the locals they would encounter would not be the flirtatious and promiscuous ladies pictured in popular culture. The guide seems to generalize that any woman sexually offering herself up is either a diseased prostitute or a spy collaborating with Germans. And if a French “girl” is still respectable and possessing of “charms [that] induce thoughts of marriage,” the guide emphasizes all of the reasons why such a relationship is unwise and strongly advised against:

During the war and for six months thereafter the government will not pay for the transportation of dependents of military personnel from a theater of operations to the U.S. nor from theater to theater. After the war, when you are shipped home for discharge, there will be no government transportation available for a wife. Nor is there likely to be any for a long, long time. In any case you can’t marry without the permission of your commanding officer.<sup>19</sup>

With such advice, there is no question as to what motivated American soldiers to keep their relationships with French women as superficial and informal as possible. Beyond these advisories against relationships with French women, the guide uses wording that portrays French women as masterful seductresses on the hunt for young American men. Despite describing France “as a frivolous nation where sly winks and coy pats on the rear are the accepted form of address,” the guide continues to refer to the women as “girls” and “tarts” who have higher rates of venereal diseases, loose lips, and “charms.” All of these descriptions paint a picture of women who are primarily referred to as either objects of sexual pleasure and exoticism or as providers of “a home cooked meal or a glass of wine.”<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> United States Army, “Instructions for American Servicemen in France During World War II,” 1944 (ProQuest Ebook Central, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/gettysburg/reader.action?docID=471796>): 20.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 18.

Another guide, published in 1944, entitled “Pocket Guide to Paris and the Northern Cities of France,” establishes a similar tone. First and foremost, the pocket guide puts down the question inevitably in every soldier’s mind: Parisian women.

One of the first ideas that you should get out of your head is that Paris is a city of wicked and frivolous people. There’s an old French proverb, “*Cherchez la femme*,” which in GI language means “Find the woman.” Well, maybe you will find the woman, but chances are you may not. At any rate, you’ll find that the real Paris is not the Paris of night life and wild women. Instead, you will probably find it a city of great beauty and culture.<sup>21</sup>

No other city in the pocket guide goes into such detail about its women. Despite warning soldiers about the reality of Parisian women versus the ideal of Parisian women, by dwelling on the topic of women, the guide prolongs this sexist and utilitarian view of Parisian women. Furthermore, the guide goes on to cover the history of Paris, which can be summed up as “a history of conquests and wars” by great *men* such as Caesar, Clovis, Louis XIV, and Napoleon.<sup>22</sup> The women of the city were to be just another conquest and victory for them. When women are mentioned, it is in the form of the “little woman back home” in the United States to whom the soldier might faintly have an inclination to jot a note to while lounging in a Parisian cafe.<sup>23</sup>

Beyond these notes of sexism and stereotypes of promiscuous Parisian women, the guide offers an interesting peek into what opportunities Paris offered American GIs. Despite the warnings of Paris not being so *wild* anymore, of requiring official “soldierly” duties while there, and the possibility of all of its beauties being destroyed, the soldier could still “undoubtedly find plenty of interesting cafes, restaurants, and places of amusement.”<sup>24</sup> What most strikes the modern reader in this pocket guide is the tone of lightness and gaiety despite the tragedies occurring across the European Theater at this moment. The guide offers pages of suggested

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<sup>21</sup> United States Army, “Pocket Guide to Paris and the Cities of Northern France” (1944: Hathi Trust Digital Library, <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/100843449/Home>): 1.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 2-4.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

activities and tourist attractions for soldiers to complete while in Paris: Notre Dame, Montmartre, the Jardin du Luxembourg, and the Louvre. One line suggests that should “you become depressed by viewing the many skeletons and bones in the Anatomical Museum, you can park yourself on a bench in the shady zoo and be amused by the antics of the kids and monkeys.”<sup>25</sup> In a time of world history where life would soon offer these soldiers far more depressing subjects<sup>26</sup> than those of an Anatomical museum, this guide exemplifies the lightness of the situation that the soldiers experienced while in Paris. Paris was not to be a place of difficult soldierly duties, but a place for gay museum visits, long strolls through the many *jardins*, and drawn-out evenings in bistros along the grand boulevards.

The lasting impression from this guide is first evident within the introductory remarks concerning this matter of tourism and exoticism of Paris. By setting the city up as a tourist location with exotic wonders rather than a chance for cultural immersion and integration, the pocket guide relegated the soldiers to superior relations with locals. Instead of soldiers immersing themselves with local culture, they were just visitors using the city’s sites as tourists while maintaining their own American ways. Above all, it created a situation where the soldiers viewed their time in Paris as a vacation that they were entitled to. The guide opens up in the introduction:

Anyhow, so far as your military duties permit, see as much as you can. You’ve got a great chance to do now, major expenses paid, what would cost you a lot of your own money after the war. Take advantage of it.<sup>27</sup>

How were these soldiers expected to take their role seriously in aiding Parisians when their very guide books advised that they treat the whole mission as a vacation? Most soldiers left behind in

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>26</sup> Many of these American soldiers would go on to face gruesome fighting at the Battle of the Bulge. Among those who survived, many of these same soldiers would later liberate the Nazi death camps, observing (with their own eyes) some of the worst atrocities of World War II.

<sup>27</sup> United States Army, “Pocket Guide to Paris,” IV.

Paris after liberation were administrative troops, not the “mud and boots”<sup>28</sup> of infantry divisions who were sent to the European Theater for tough combat. These administrative troops’ military duties permitted plenty of downtime, which added to the sense of gaiety and recreation these soldiers anticipated when staying in Paris.

Based on similar Resistance and Allied propaganda, including films, newspapers, and radio reports, GIs had a lot of questions for those who had endured the four years of Nazi occupation:

What happened inside Paris during those 50 months? Did the population writhe in agony under the boot of Nazi oppression? Did it live in constant terror of the Gestapo? Was it robbed, lied to, cheated, exploited? Were the people unable to obtain sufficient food, clothes, heat and other necessities of life? Or after all was the occupation not as bad as painted abroad?<sup>29</sup>

The answers would soon become evident as the Allies and Free French Forces fought against the 20,000 occupying soldiers throughout the suburbs and center of Paris. Beyond this count of Nazi and Vichy forces, the GIs faced collaborationist snipers who took to the rooftops of Paris, continuing to periodically shoot even during the victory speeches of Charles de Gaulle on August 25th.<sup>30</sup>

### **Liberation: Indescribable Euphoria**

Forrest Pogue described how he and his counterparts felt as they arrived in Paris following liberation as “a wild sort of excitement - a type I had not felt since I was a child riding a Ferris wheel or a roller coaster. [...] We began to giggle, to sing, yell, and otherwise show

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<sup>28</sup> National WWII Museum, “Oral History of Richard Duchossois.”

<sup>29</sup> Robert Sage, “Paris’ Rebirth Watched in Four Years of Agony,” *Los Angeles Times* (5 September 1944), ProQuest Historical Newspapers: pg. 6.

<sup>30</sup> Anne Sebba, *Les Parisiennes: How the Women of Paris Lived, Loved and Died in the 1940s* (London: St. Martin’s Press, 2016): 226.

exuberance.”<sup>31</sup> This wild excitement was equally felt by Parisians who were swept up in an “indescribable” atmosphere. One veteran, Oliver Stewart, declared: “of sound mind and (fairly) sober character, do solemnly give my word that I have never been kissed so much in all my life. Almost every woman I meet on the street stops and kisses me on both cheeks. It is a beautiful custom.”<sup>32</sup> Because of the absolute euphoria and celebration that the GIs were first faced with upon arrival to Paris, the stereotype of wild, partying, and promiscuous French women was immediately created. The mob mentality and chaos of victory was not all good, though. Immediately following the removal of the Nazi flag and the raising of the tricolor and American flags atop the Eiffel Tower, the hunt for collaboration began. Anyone suspected of collaborating with the Nazis, particularly young women, were chased down and humiliated.

...they were denounced, hectorred, brought to their knees, had their heads shaved; some even had swastikas drawn or branded on their bodies and were made to parade half naked through town to display their shame publicly. No one who watched ever forgot the barbarity, as whole villages turned out to cheer young girls being humiliated perhaps for no greater crime than sleeping with a German in return for some silk stockings or a little bit of money.<sup>33</sup>

These women, known to history as *les tondues*, or “the shaven ones,” numbered to be as many as 20,000. Their humiliation exemplified the turbulence and excitement of Parisians and Allies alike as they celebrated Liberation.<sup>34</sup> Pogue, who encountered one such *tondue* on the streets of Saint-Denis, a suburb north of Paris, described her as having the look of “a hunted animal.” Pogue went on to compare this treatment and the signs posted on properties that declared “house

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<sup>31</sup> Forrest Pogue, *Pogue's War: Diaries of a WWII Combat Historian* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2001); Project MUSE, EBSCOhost (accessed October 30, 2017): 196.

<sup>32</sup> Burns and Novick, *The War*.

<sup>33</sup> Sebba, *Les Parisiennes*, 228.

<sup>34</sup> Sebba goes on to observe how de Gaulle still failed to go after the male political and commercial elite who had given total support to the Vichy government, because he needed them as allies in the fight versus the nation's communists. Modern history can create an analogy with the Iraq War, where in its aftermath, leaders purged *all* of the Baathists from the military, with very bad and divisive results.



of a German” or “supplier of the German”<sup>35</sup> to the designations of Jewish homes and businesses seen in Germany just years before.<sup>36</sup> Most observers weren’t as vigilant as Pogue. One man reflected on the experience that it was “[e]uphoria in the streets, people screaming with joy and enthusiasm. Head-shaving didn’t seem such a huge thing then. It wasn’t physical torture.”<sup>37</sup> What other forms of violence against Parisians therefore went unchecked given this sense of euphoria and chaos?

This hunt for collaborators undoubtedly pushed persons suspected or guilty of collaborating with Germans to embrace American GIs. For example, Coco Chanel was designated her own spy identification number from the Nazis. She had a very public and steamy affair with the esteemed German Baron Hans Gunther von Dincklage throughout the war. However, because of an ad that she posted in the window of her store that perfumes were free for all GIs, she instantly gained the support and protection of American soldiers, who waited along the lengths of her store for their bottles of Chanel No. 5.<sup>38</sup>

Beyond the chaos of hunting for collaborationists, de Gaulle’s new regime was seeking to establish and maintain power at whatever cost. At the moment, his biggest threat was the group of communists who had so fiercely fought for liberation as part of the Resistance. Eisenhower, upon visiting General de Gaulle in the days following the liberation of Paris, remarked upon this issue.

While I was in the city General de Gaulle communicated to me some of his anxieties and problems. He asked for food and supplies. He was particularly anxious for thousands of uniforms for issue to the Free French forces, so as to distinguish between them and the

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<sup>35</sup> Signs would have read *Maison de la Boche* and *Fournisseur de la Boche* in their original French.

<sup>36</sup> Pogue, *Pogue’s War: Daires*, 199.

<sup>37</sup> Sebba, *Les Parisiennes*, 230.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 235. A slew of recent scholarship on Coco Chanel has examined her role during and after the Occupation. Hal Vaughan’s *Sleeping with the Enemy: Coco Chanel’s Secret War*, published in 2012, delves into her collaborationist tendencies along with her affairs with German officers. A more recent work from 2015, by Rhonda K. Garelick, entitled *Mademoiselle: Coco Chanel and the Pulse of History*, looks at this role through an even more critical lens.

disorderly elements who, taking advantage of temporary confusion, might begin to prey upon the helpless citizens. He also wanted additional military equipment, with which to begin organizing new French divisions. A serious problem in view of the disorganized state of the city was the speedy establishment of his own authority and the preservation of order. He asked for the temporary loan of two American divisions to use, as he said, as a show of force and to establish his position firmly.<sup>39</sup>

Despite his diplomatic tone, Eisenhower conveys a sense of desperation in General de Gaulle's plea for help against the "disorderly elements," who threatened "the preservation of order." Such disorderly elements ranged from former Vichy government supporters to communists seeking to oppose de Gaulle's authority. The focus of de Gaulle's new republican government (later to become the Fourth Republic of France) was too heavily angled toward the hunt for communists, and too little on the protection of its own citizens in a time of chaos. With their own leader hunting after factions of their nation, the French, particularly the vulnerable intellectuals of Paris, needed a body who could provide protection, shelter, and safety. For many of these Parisians, the American GI would provide this security against the persecution threatened by de Gaulle's administration.

### **Material Needs**

Beyond this immediate need for security and safety, Parisians flocked to the American GIs to meet their material needs of food, money, cigarettes, clothing, and heat. Similarly, the American GIs used the Parisians for their own wartime need for sex, entertainment, and alcohol. Daniel Clayton reflects on the scholar J. Glenn Gray who described in *The Warriors* that "there are different kinds of love that war arouses - love of comrades, love of friends, erotic love of the fuller kind, romantic love, and 'gross physical love.'" As long as armies have fought wars, an

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<sup>39</sup> Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe*, 297.

insatiable appetite for the latter kind of love - raw sex - has characterized the moral conduct of many soldiers.”<sup>40</sup>

This same demand was seen in the Parisians for food, cigarettes, and other daily necessities. Pogue describes how he and his peers found themselves “to be an object of curiosity, and children and grown-ups surrounded,” asking “for cigarettes, candy or chewing gum, or were satisfied to look at an American soldier. Between handing out presents, shaking hands, and giving autographs, we found difficulty in getting away.”<sup>41</sup> Just as Americans used Parisians to satisfy their desire for entertainment, Parisians used Americans for entertainment. Thomas Galloway remembers meeting up with a girl who invited Galloway and his peers over to her family’s house for dinner. Galloway joked “I think it was an excuse – she wanted to ride in the jeep too!”<sup>42</sup> Whatever the case for this young woman’s invitation, it was common for Parisians to invite American GIs over for dinners, not only as acts of hospitality, but also for mutual entertainment and cultural exchange.

### **Pire que les Boches?**

For many Parisians, the GIs expressed as much of a superiority complex as the Germans had. American soldiers were the reality of German propaganda: strong, young, conquering, and superior men. GIs reveled in the parting remarks of their pocket guides that they “are a member of the best dressed, best fed, best equipped liberating Army now on earth.”<sup>43</sup> Pogue described how GIs tended to push aggressively in the metro and on the sidewalks, more than the Parisians were accustomed to. Parisians, on the other hand, had grown up in a society where people tended

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<sup>40</sup> Clayton, “Whitewashing Sexual History,” 5.

<sup>41</sup> Pogue, *Pogue’s War: Diaries*, 197.

<sup>42</sup> National WWII Museum, “Oral History of Thomas Galloway.”

<sup>43</sup> United States Army, “Instructions for Servicemen,” 58.

to themselves, quietly and gracefully. “Increasingly, there was the tendency to say “*pire que les boches*” (worse than the Germans) at the GIs,” Pogue recalled.<sup>44</sup>

This sense of superiority and privilege of American GIs spread to every aspect of their life in Paris. Pogue remembers how Allied soldiers were allowed to ride the metro for free because the Germans had refused to pay, so the Allies “should not be required to.”<sup>45</sup> GIs had no trouble reserving rooms in the most exquisite of hotels around Paris.<sup>46</sup> French orchestras and performers who had just months earlier been adapting to German songs, plays, and cultural allusions, now found themselves “feebly trying to pretend to be an American ‘combo’” in Red Cross clubs around the city.<sup>47</sup> Across the city, American Red Cross clubs set up shop, hiring Parisians in need of work and security to waitress, cook, and entertain. Pogue describes his mess hall:

Our mess was in a swanky cafe at the corner of the Champs-Elysees and the Rue de Berri. There was little to eat for several weeks, but we sat at tables with clean tablecloths, while French waitresses brought plates of Spam and C rations, with extremely unpalatable GI bread and great mounds of peanut butter and marmalade. After a time, an amateur GI orchestra played from the music stand on the second balcony. Meals were served on all three floors. It took some 350 employees to run the place. Such elegance was disturbing when contrasted with conditions at the front, and I always winced when I took there some visitor who had just returned for a day or two. “Jesus,” they would say, “women wait on you and an orchestra.”<sup>48</sup>

That American soldiers could tolerate such lavish conditions as their Parisian counterparts struggled under continued rationing shows how out of touch Americans were with the situation in Paris. The American soldiers were ignorant and entitled tourists who used the French labor and supplies for their own needs. However, the French needed jobs. For the past four years, a

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<sup>44</sup> Pogue, *Pogue's War: Diaries*, 214.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 214.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 201.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 213-214.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 213.

steady job too often meant deportation to work camps in Germany, not a comfortable position waitressing or cooking as might have been in the antebellum period.

Meanwhile, French businessmen and women who had been struggling for months because of cutbacks on electricity and resources, along with interruptions from bombings, jumped at the chance for business from American GIs craving any sort of “American” experience. As they converted to these American-isms, Parisians embraced American culture. Hamburger shops opened across the boulevards of Paris, while businesses supplied American bourbon that was slowly shipped over. Even *parfumeries*, a Parisian staple in the global market of perfumes, converted to the American way so as to gain business.



Figure 2 - Business Card of American Perfume Shop<sup>49</sup>

A business card for an “American Perfumery” blocks from the Place de l’Opéra guarantees in bold English that “you’ll feel at home!” Included in Earman’s collection of goods from his time stationed in Paris, this business card is just one of many artifacts conveying the business of “Americanizing” Paris for the benefit of American GIs. For those just in town for some days, a map on the back is provided to help an American, new to the city, navigate his way to the perfume shop.

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<sup>49</sup> “Business Card for American Parfumerie,” in *MS-211: Earman Family Collection*, Series VIII (Gettysburg College Musselman Library Special Collections, processed July 2017).



So why did the French put up with such treatment? The French culture had long been praised worldwide, Paris boasting itself as the cultural center of the world. Yet in the span of just four years, France tolerated first Germany, then the United States, as these conquerors pressed their cultures onto them. While many disdainfully muttered “*pire que les boches*,” it was the Germans who had established this tradition of implementing the “conqueror’s culture” as the norm and thus made it relatively more tolerable when the American GIs arrived with similar impositions.

That being said, American GIs tended to make a greater effort in asking permission and working with the locals for their own needs. Lynn Compton remembered Paris as a center of recreation and fun for soldiers on leave. His primary job while stationed in Paris was working with a French interpreter and negotiating with French proprietors of athletic facilities. As Compton described:

I would go out and look around town for facilities for the troops that might wanna use a running track, swimming pool, stuff like that and we’d go around and talk to the French proprietors, the owners of the facilities, and we’d negotiate and get permission for the American troops to use these various athletic facilities.<sup>50</sup>

One could interpret this information as the audacity of American soldiers to engage in frivolous recreation while Parisians were still making sacrifices. While Europeans were starving and being denied basic human rights, Americans were playing intramural football and baseball games or long rounds of golf with rented clubs. On the other hand, although Americans relied on French translators, they still respected the Parisians enough to ask permission and make negotiations before using their recreational facilities.

Those who could speak French from the American ranks were put in charge of more material negotiations with locals. For example, Gerard Halpern was raised in Germany and only

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<sup>50</sup> National WWII Museum, “Oral History of Lynn Compton.”

immigrated to the United States in 1937. He grew up with a background in French, and he was able to speak somewhat fluently to Parisians during his time stationed in Chantilly, just thirty miles north of Paris. Because of his ability to speak French, he was put in charge of an Officers Club, or as he humbly stated, “get the supplies and all that.”<sup>51</sup>

### **The Language Barrier**

Most Americans were not as fortunate as Halpern to have backgrounds in French. A major factor in the manipulation of French locals was the language barrier that led to a lack of communication between American GIs, most of whom were not educated in the French language. The few Americans who were educated in French (and French educated in English) had communications that tended to be superficial and lacking in deeper understanding.<sup>52</sup> For those who had no experience in French, their phrases were limited to those that they learned from their pocket guides: “hello,” “goodbye,” and other formalities such as locational and directional aids. Comically, the bulk of the phrases provided dealt with miscommunication: “do you understand,” “I don’t understand,” “speak slowly,” and “please repeat.”<sup>53</sup>

This miscommunication is evident in written correspondences seen between GIs and Parisians. Take the case of Catherine Seux, a well-educated and wealthy young lady brought up in the generally well-off 16th arrondissement. While her letters show a clear grasp of the English language, they fall into frequent gallicisms, such as “familie,” “ligne,” “fini,” and “beaucoup.” These slips show that Catherine lacked a complete fluency of English, which must have presented a barrier to her and Ernest Earman’s relationship. These barriers are evident, as her letters fail to go beyond a small array of topics. Even when she speaks of love, marriage, and a

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<sup>51</sup> National WWII Museum, “Oral History of Gerard Halpern.”

<sup>52</sup> Recent studies from psychologists and linguists have shown that speaking in a second language is inherently more rational and less emotional. For more on this subject, see Sayuri Hayakawa, David Tannenbaum, Albert Costa, Joanna D. Corey and Boaz Keysar’s study in *Psychological Science* of August 2017 for more on this subject (<http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0956797617720944>).

<sup>53</sup> United States Army, “Instructions for Servicemen,” 64-65.

possible life together later, Catherine cannot identify exact reasons for her love of Ernest. Her repetitions of “I love you” fail to convey more than a superficial passion for Ernest, similar to that of a young first love.

Pictures from Earman’s personal collection continue to show the superficiality of his relationship with Catherine. From sexualized pictures of Catherine propped up in scenic locations to stiff portraits of Earman with the Seux family, they convey a reality far from a lifelong love. Rather, they suggest a purely sexualized relationship that likely relied on a superficial attraction between the two young and handsome lovers.



*Figure 3 – Photographs of Catherine Seux*

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These language barriers overlapped with significant cultural differences surrounding home life which no doubt affected relationships between American GIs and Parisians. In the case of

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<sup>54</sup> “Photographs of Catherine Seux,” in *MS-211: Earman Family Collection*, Series VIII (Gettysburg College Musselman Library Special Collections, processed July 2017).

Catherine Seux, a point of contention in her letters is the lack of respect or connection between Ernest and her father, Monsieur Seux. Letter after letter, Catherine begs Ernest to write to her parents, just as she does with Ernest's parents. On May 22nd, 1946, she describes her concerns to Ernest:

Now, something important: it's certainly very good to write to my parents, especially to my father! I understand it's hard for you to make a letter like this [and] you don't my father and that's the trouble. But I want to help you because my father is a strict man and certainly different of the rest of my familie, every body must be [a] diplomat with him but he is very intelligent and can be nice too. I love him but I am not friendly with him like with the others. If I knew we shall be married someday I would make you meet him during the time you were here, but in fact you didn't have very much time and the Sunday he is always out! So now I give you a plea to write him a letter - you should explain him your feeling[s] like if you didn't talk already to Maman.<sup>55</sup>

Compared with this relationship (or lack thereof) between Ernest and Monsieur Seux, Catherine wrote to each member of the Earman family several times, wishing happy holidays, checking in on family updates, and conveying her love of Ernest to the rest of his family. Speculations could be made about Ernest's busy schedule as a soldier awaiting return home to the States. However, this hesitancy in making a deeper connection to the Seux family conveys a level of superficiality that comes from what appears to have been a purely sexual and recreational relationship with Catherine.

### **The Larger Picture**

So having seen that American GIs in Paris were not the perfectly moral or chivalrous gentlemen portrayed in Army propaganda during and after World War II, why did they not cease their manipulative behavior? These young men returned home to their mothers, their sisters, their

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<sup>55</sup> "Letter from Mademoiselle Catherine Seux to the Earman Family," 22 May 1946, *MS-211: Earman Family Letters from WWII* (Gettysburg College Musselman Library Special Collections, processed July 2017), series V.

girlfriends, and their wives. They picked up their old jobs and regular routines just as they had left them. What made those few months in Paris so different?

On one hand, the Parisians themselves saw their relationship with Americans as transactional, whereby they could get long-needed food, clothing, heating, cigarettes, and employment. On another hand, there was the timing in which the Americans arrived. The years leading up to the Americans' time in Paris spanned a period of absolute occupation that involved extreme violence, terror, and persecution. While Americans also strutted in with superior and privileged airs, they offered a refuge from all that the Parisians had just experienced. Furthermore, the majority of Americans experienced Paris for the first time during the very moments of liberation. Robert Sage of the *Los Angeles Times* explains:

But what the soldiers did not realize was that they were seeing Paris at one of the brightest moments in its history. They did not realize that many of the smiles were replacing tears for the day. That most of the healthy complexions were 90 per cent happiness and cosmetics. Paris bravely kept up appearances, but its larder and wardrobe were bare and its heart was sad. The victorious Yanks saw its sincere burst of grateful enthusiasm. What they failed to see were the marks of tragedy that its four-year ordeal had left.<sup>56</sup>

Pogue similarly noted how upon his arrival in Paris six days after liberation, “the people were still in a mood to give a delirious welcome to anyone in uniform.”<sup>57</sup>

However, the celebrations inevitably died down. The celebrations dimmed and Parisians went back to their normal antebellum lives. American GIs were only granted permission to return to the states on a point system. For Gerard Halpern who only had 68 points at the war's conclusion in May of 1945, his return to America would not come until December 1945.<sup>58</sup> Perhaps the troops' stationing in Paris lasted too long? The women were no longer as exuberant

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<sup>56</sup> Sage, “Paris' Rebirth.”

<sup>57</sup> Pogue, *Pogue's War: Diaries*, 196.

<sup>58</sup> National WWII Museum, “Oral History of Gerard Halpern.”

or thin or exotic. Parisians of every age no longer flooded the GIs' jeeps as they went about their daily lives. This time of mutual utility had ended, and American troops grew weary of their time abroad. Home beckoned, and their relationships died out.

Near the end of 1946, Ernest Earman stopped responding to Catherine Seux's letters. Letter after letter, she begged for a response. She dreamed of a marriage to him, even if it meant a simple honeymoon. However, it was not to be for Ernest. Whether he viewed Catherine as a recreational tool during his time away from home, or just as an exotic fling to tell his peers about back at the Red Cross clubs, the letters ended abruptly in August of 1946. Less than five short years later, he married Mary Elizabeth Burroughs of Alexandria, Virginia, ending any last hope of Catherine's dream.<sup>59</sup>

For others still, in the days and years following liberation, there was a heavy focus on de Gaulle's work, and not enough acknowledgment for those who had done the liberating work. Many American GIs therefore felt resentment for the French during their extended stays in Paris or upon returns after fighting in Germany.<sup>60</sup> For David Roderick, born in Decatur, Illinois in 1923, his motorized infantry division faced tough fighting both during D-Day and throughout their liberation of Paris. However, when his leader, General Omar Bradley, was reliant on the French soldiers to meet them outside of Paris, they fell through. "Forget the French! Go in and liberate Paris!" he instructed his men. Roderick recalls what an experience they had driving "through the streets and people were handing out wine and their babies [to kiss] and whatever.

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<sup>59</sup> *MS-211: Earman Family Collection Finding Aid* (Gettysburg College Musselman Library Special Collections, processed July 2017). Despite the abrupt end to this affair, the question remains – why did Ernest still keep these letters after marrying his American love? Was Ernest a keen historian who hoped to share his story with future generations? Were the letters simply a reminder of the fun and gay times he spent in Paris? Or, is it possible that Ernest and Catherine had a real connection, despite the situational setbacks of the times? Given the limited evidence, historians can only speculate.

<sup>60</sup> Besides administrative soldiers, most American GIs left Paris within days to head out for the campaigns through Belgium and Germany. They would face tough fighting ahead at the Battle of Hürtgen Forest and the Battle of the Bulge. Most GIs would return again to Paris for time on leave, furlough, or before shipping home to the States.



We thought ‘boy, this is gonna be great to have a while in Paris!’” However, their hours in the city were cut short upon being assigned to a scouting party outside of the city that evening. In addition to this lack of “down time” in Paris, Roderick’s division still holds resentment for the lack of credit received by France for liberation. “The Fourth Infantry Division wasn’t given any credit by the French for liberation until the last several years. Everything was de Gaulle at the time! And Leclerc! That was *interesting...*”<sup>61</sup> These critiques offer interesting insight onto further reasons relationships between American GIs and Parisians were tense or strained in the days, weeks, and months following the liberation of Paris.

On the Parisian side of global affairs, too much credit fell to the Allies. That the French were left out of several key negotiations on the topic of Germany aggravated prominent French leaders to no end. In the months and years to come, France would be relegated to the “B-team” of world superpowers as the United States and the Soviet Union reveled in their newfound geopolitical prominence. Roberts summarizes this new feeling of impotency and weakness felt by Parisians in the summer months of 1944.

Widespread “bitterness” concerning France’s “weakened” position was reported throughout the northern regions. In the summer of 1944 when Charles de Gaulle’s government was not yet formally recognized, many civilians feared that the United States had come to colonize rather than liberate their country.<sup>62</sup>

That the French required Allied aid to liberate its own capital city obviously added to their feeling of weakness and impotency. As American GIs established themselves as entitled superiors around the city, the Parisians grew only further frustrated.

## **Conclusion**

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<sup>61</sup> National WWII Museum, “Oral History of David Roderick,” (interview by the National World War II Museum, National WWII Museum Digital Collections, <http://www.ww2online.org/view/david-roderick#opening-the-falaise-gap-and-liberating-paris-and-moving-through-france>).

<sup>62</sup> Roberts, *What Soldiers Do*, 91.

While American GIs may have manipulated and used Parisians in the days leading up to and the years after Liberation, their relationships were not the aggressive rapes and crimes as recent scholarship has suggested. History is often much more complicated than it appears. The case of the months of July, August, and September of 1944 in France is no exception. The relationships between American GIs and French people were neither those of the extremes as formerly presented.

This research is significant for many reasons. If American GIs behave so differently in times of war or in spaces foreign from home culture, what can we learn about American culture and global politics? Furthermore, what do the relationships in this microscopic chunk of history tell historians and politicians about the narrative of Franco-American relations in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries? What were the factors at play behind that delirious welcome to anyone in uniform? The narrative of Americans as conquerors and superiors has permeated throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Look anywhere at American international affairs today, and academics will see a continuation of such entitlement and superiority. Furthermore, the stereotype of the French as impotent and weak fighters, lacking in “manliness” or agency continues today. That this short period of history has so impacted modern affairs is significant for understanding history and cultural studies.

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