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Summary of Oral History Interview with Christian Charlet—ENGLISH

Christian Charlet, born on February 10, 1934 in Cambrai in northern France – not far from Lille; his father was an officer in Maubeuge; speaking of his twin brother – Christian was older; speaking of his family – an older brother, and younger sister; living conditions in Brittany were closer to those of the Middle Ages, than those of today; his mother and grandmother were also from Cambrai; arriving in Brittany in 1939; recalling the beginning of the war in September, 1939; his father was prepared to leave for war; speaking of the "drôle de guerre"; his father leaving; recalling an instance when the mailman came waving a letter from his father; his father was a prisoner in Germany; speaking of WW1 and the bombardment of the north in 1918 – recalling his grandfather (poet, artist) and his paintings; recollecting the Germans in 1940, and the occupation; Pétain's era; in 1940, Pétain was the French ambassador to Spain; speaking of the Armistice; at that time, "Maréchal Pétain was truly considered as the fatherly protector of the country vis-à-vis Germany"; Christian was in school at Saint-François in Vannes – 1942; recalling his schooling and the song "Maréchal, nous voilà !"; Christian recalling a person who was secretly double crossing the Germans; recalling the Americans landing in France; negative thoughts towards Germans and the occupation; speaking of the resistance and the Maquis; not seeing the deportations; not many Jews in Vannes; Jews in Vannes walking in town with the yellow star sewn on their chest; in Christian's recollection, it didn't seem as if the population in Vannes was affected by this sight; much later, recalling the enormity of accepting that it's fine for people to be marked by their religious identity; speaking generally of Jews and their persecutions; anti-Semitic feeling towards Jews at the time, although his mother never spoke negatively of them; speaking of a Protestant friend; no memories of Jews; never hearing of deportations until much later; they were far from Paris and the larger cities, so it was relatively peaceful in Brittany; he lived happily, minus the fact that his father was not home; recalling pro-Pétain posters; speaking of the Normandy landing wherein they learned about it from the radio, like everyone else; seeing the arrival of Americans in Vannes at the end of July, 1945; after Liberation, recalling the memories of Americans in their jeeps – throwing candy, cookies, and chewing gum to the people; seeing African Americans for the first time; memories of the Liberation and the women who were paraded through town with shorn scalps; justice and punishment for collaboration; speaking of his mother before Vannes was liberated; finding out about the camps and the exterminations much later; Germans in Vannes; his mother was alone with the children; one was at the mercy of the German army in Vannes; his father was a prisoner of war for five years in the Hoyerswerda camp – about 50 km north-west of Dresden; speaking of another prisoner that his father shared the barrack with – Father Denis Huerre of the Pierre-qui-vire Abbey, who was also there; his father rarely speaking of anything.