



A French Slave in Nazi Germany: A Testimony

Elie Poulard

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The Required Work Service Law, or *Service du Travail Obligatoire*, was passed in 1943 by the Vichy government of France under German occupation. Passage of the law confirmed the French government's willing collaboration in providing the Nazi regime with French manpower to replace German workers sent to fight in the war. The result was the deportation of 600,000 young Frenchmen to Germany, where they worked under the harshest conditions. Elie Poulard was one of the Frenchmen forced into labor by the Vichy government. Translated by his brother Jean V. Poulard, Elie's memoir vividly captures the lives of a largely unrecognized group of people who suffered under the Nazis. He describes in great detail his ordeal at different work sites in the Ruhr region, the horrors that he witnessed, and the few Germans who were good to him. Through this account of one eyewitness on the ground, we gain a vivid picture of Allied bombing in the western part of Germany and its contribution to the gradual collapse and capitulation of Germany at the end of the war. Throughout his ordeal, Elie's Catholic faith, good humor, and perseverance sustained him.

Little has been published in French or English about the use of foreign workers by the Nazi regime and their fate. The Poulards' book makes an important contribution to the historiography of World War II, with its firsthand account of what foreign workers endured when they were sent to Nazi Germany. The memoir concludes with an explanation of the ongoing controversy in France over the opposition to the title *Déporté du Travail*, which those who experienced this forced deportation, like Elie, gave themselves after the war.

"*A French Slave in Nazi Germany: A Testimony* addresses a significant though little-known page of French history during World War II. While many people know of the Vichy government and its collaboration with the Nazis—in particular the deportation of French Jews—few people realized then, and now, the extent of such collaboration. It would surprise many to learn that the Vichy government provided Germany with French citizens who were deported and forced into slave labor in wartime Germany. Poulard's book confronts this unsavory part of French history and gives personal testimony to the terrible conditions under which the deported laborers existed." —Michael Khodarkovsky, Loyola University Chicago

"The book vividly evokes the life of a young French man forcibly sent to work in Germany during World War II. Once the Vichy Government of France passed the Required Work Service Law in 1943, more than half a million young French men were deported to Germany where they worked in the harshest conditions to replace the German men sent to fight in the war. This testimony is particularly significant today, at a time when all aspects of the war are closely examined. The chapters about the effects of the Allied bombing in the western part of Germany are especially poignant as they allow the reader to witness the gradual collapse and final capitulation of the Nazi regime." —Thomas Pavel, Gordon J. Laing Distinguished Service Professor, University of Chicago

"This is a fascinating and depressing account of a young Frenchman sent by his own government to be a slave laborer in Nazi Germany. One can only have enormous respect for Elie Poulard, who persevered and kept his faith in the face of hardship and tragedy. He not only witnessed one of the darkest periods in modern history, but he survived it with cunning and dignity." —John J. Mearsheimer, author of *Why Leaders Lie: The Truth about Lying in International Politics*

"As the passage of time silences the voices of the Second World War generation, we are grateful to have the memories of Elie Poulard. *A French Slave in Nazi Germany* tells the story of how Elie Poulard's faith helped

him endure the many years of suffering as a Déporté du Travail. His eloquent and gripping tale is testament to the abiding power of the human will in the face of adversity." — Michael Creswell, author of *A Question of Balance: How France and the United States Created Cold War Europe*

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