



## DORMITORIES

In March 1944, 90% of prisoners live together in overcrowded dormitories equipped with an accumulation of bunk beds. The specific social life that develops there is not made up of the classic prison tensions. As a meeting place for people of very diverse backgrounds, the prison partially brought down social barriers. The political prisoners assert their own social codes, organizing themselves around survival objectives to better overcome the suffering, then rapidly around values of sharing and solidarity with the establishment of huts. Thanks to a watch system, it is in the bunks under the cover of night that journals are elegantly written and secret messages to the outside are recopied.

The few submachine guns and grenades, brought in through the workshops thanks to the complicity of resistant guards, are camouflaged under the floorboards. They will only emerge at the moment of the insurrection on February 19, 1944.

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**Sources :** Amicale des anciens détenus patriotes de la centrale d'Eysses, *L'insurrection d'Eysses*, éditions sociales, 1974. Corinne Jaladieu, *La prison politique sous Vichy. L'exemple des centrales d'Eysses et de Rennes*, L'Harmattan, 2007.

- **Solidarity**

The participation in solidarity does not come naturally for inmates who suffer from hunger. The temptation of individualism exists, and the contribution of each inmate necessitates a permanent task of explanation on the part of the leaders. Solidarity is practiced in a different way, notably with the night watch system where all the benefits are shared, under the direction of a leader who appropriates duties. The prison direction, not having the means to assure the upkeep of the inmates, often looks the other way in regard to the organization of alimentary solidarity. The task is often allotted to inmates having experience with such an organization: in Yard 4, for example, it is Édouard Planque, an official of Secours Rouge and then of Secours Populaire (international aid groups), who is put in charge of this task.

- **Secret Journals**

Information circulates in the prison. The inmates secretly procure a TSF station ("Transmission sans fil" or wireless telecommunications) hidden in the infirmary that allows them to pick up news of the war and of the Resistance. This information is then transmitted to all of the inmates, notably in the form of secret journals, such as *Le Patriote enchaîné*, *L'Unité*, *Bulletin des Jeunes*, and *Le jeune enchaîné*.

The journal is copied by a technical team in charge of reproducing the articles as legibly as possible and embellishing them with drawings, sometimes humorous. They do not only evoke prison life but are also meant to reinforce organization and to enhance the solidarity among the inmates.

- **Hidden Weapons**

Placed in the double bottom of cookie boxes, forty grenades and fifteen Sten submachine guns in detached pieces were able to be introduced into the prison via the workshops. These weapons are going to be hidden in different locations in the prison, notably under the floorboards of one of the dormitories, under Jean Chauvet's pallet, but also in a little room located across from the warming-room of Yard 2.

- **Solidarity of the Local Population**

The preparation of the Christmas holiday in 1943 is the moment of an extraordinary burst of generosity and solidarity with the imprisoned resisters on the part of the population of Villeneuve-sur-Lot and the surrounding areas, who thus demonstrate the courage of numerous inhabitants in supporting and accompanying the imprisoned resisters. The inmates' call to the merchants and to the inhabitants is heard to the point of allowing a diet more favorable on the interior of the prison than the exterior, because of the deprivations of war. Evoking the Christmas Eve Dinner, Paul Morin is aware that "*Many out there did not have as much*," he specifies: "*The bakers of Villeneuve had brought a truckload of good, fresh bread that we ate*



*with a large piece of pie from before the war. After this, a big piece of apple galette (prepared here by pastry chefs using gifts from people of the region), which was excellent[...]all this offered by our friends in the region[...]a merchant from Villeneuve sent us 150 liters of wine. The people here are very gracious, they truly do all that they can for us” (Letter from December 25, 1943, addressed to his parents).*

- **Spaniards at Eysses**

The inmates of Eysses constitute the image or the reflection of what the interior Resistance was: three quarters of them were communist militants; the second large political family being made up of the Gaullist resisters. Among the Spaniards, the ratio of militants of the PCE (*Partido Comunista de España*) or of the PSUC (*Partit Socialista Unificat de Catalunya*) were stronger still with a singularity: the directions in France of these two parties had, since October 1940, called them to reject Pétain and support General de Gaulle in thus refusing all forms of “wait and see” policies.

The Spaniards represent about 7% of the total prison population at the Eysses penitentiary and 43% of the foreigners incarcerated there, being about 85 internees. They are, for the most part, republicans exiled in France after Franco's victory who proceeded with the French Resistance before being arrested. Vichy's police forces and the Nazis never suspected the importance of certain imprisoned militants at Eysses. Among them are collaborators very close to the two national leaders of the Spanish Resistance in France: José Miret for the occupied zone and Jésus Monzon, for the so-called free zone. Overall, half of the Spanish inmates at Eysses were executives (officers or political commissioners) of the Spanish War. They represented a high level of competence and military experience.

Alongside the Spaniards, it is equally necessary to call attention to the Brigadistes present at Eysses. In the first place, Colonel Fernand Bernard commands the FFI battalion of the prison. He obtained his rank in Spain, starting as the staff-officer of the 35<sup>th</sup> International Division before becoming commander of the 139<sup>th</sup> Mixed Brigade. In total, more than twenty French Brigadistes, volunteers in Spain - so equally Spanish by blood shed - were imprisoned at Eysses.