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# Americans in Paris: Life and Death Under Nazi Occupation 1940-44 by Charles Glass

The Sunday Times review by William Boyd

Wars, as well as being shocking, vicious, cruelly absurd and generally disgusting, can also be surreal. British and German troops playing football in no man's land at Christmas in 1914 is one of the most famous examples that comes to mind, but each conflict will throw up its incredible juxtapositions and baffling absurdities. The second world war is no exception, as Charles Glass's fascinating and absorbing account of American civilians trapped in Paris under the Nazi



occupation makes clear. To take one instance, in April 1944, as the outskirts of Paris were being heavily bombed in preparation for the imminent invasion of Europe, René de Chambrun, a Frenchman who was also an American citizen, went to the races at Auteuil (where he won 260,000 francs) and, that evening, took in a Jean Anouilh play. The perceived history of these conflicts often obscures the fact that "life goes on", however incongruously.

This was certainly true of the Americans in Paris between 1940 and 1944. Pre-war, Paris boasted the largest number of expatriate Americans in Europe - 30,000. With the Nazi invasion of France, most wisely decided to leave, but Glass calculates that 3,000 chose, or were obliged, to stay on and stick it out as best they could. All went relatively well until December 1941 - there was an American Hospital in Paris and an American Library - but when Hitler unilaterally declared war on America four days after Pearl Harbor, the Americans in Paris went from being neutrals to enemy aliens overnight, and everything changed.

Already, one's received wisdom about the occupation requires some reconfiguration: thousands of Americans in Paris during the Nazi era? Can that be true? Glass's contribution to the forgotten history of the second world war is to take a handful of exemplary figures among these American-Parisians and trace their individual stories. In so doing, he makes us think again about the nature of life in occupied Paris and refreshes what many would consider something of a tired and overworked period of contemporary history - the subject of innumerable books, films, documentaries and television series.

Two of the key personalities Glass focuses on are Sylvia Beach, the proprietor of the famous Shakespeare and Company bookshop in the Rue de l'Odéon, and Sumner Jackson, surgeon