

Eisenach – Because of a Few Rabbits

NARRATOR

The following story concerns eight French forced laborers who were deported to Eisenach during the war. Most of them were deployed at the municipal gasworks and the *Max Müller* metalworks. At least one of them was assigned to the Bavarian company *BMW*, which was the largest industrial enterprise in Eisenach at the time.

Most of the French workers were housed together in a forced-labor camp on Eichrodter Weg.

In March 1944, the local district court issued arrest warrants for the men. They were accused of breaking into garden plots to steal food and rabbits. Allegedly, they sold some of these goods on the black market. Two of the Frenchmen, Josef Ibar and Achille Hebra/Hebrard, could not be found at the time. The other six were arrested. The police searched their lockers in the camp, but no stolen goods were found. In October, five of the arrested Frenchmen were charged with gang theft. Their names were René Boileme, René Bouchard, Michel Gomez, Raymond Goynon, and Marcel Mongondry.

The forced laborer Alexandre Irachabal was also charged; he was accused of selling the stolen goods on the black market.

The bill of indictment was based almost entirely on the statements of the accused.

INDICTMENT

... In July 1943, Bouchard and Boileme entered the canteen of the DAF communal camp through an open window and stole 4–5 sticks of butter, 2 pounds of sugar, and 4 pounds of bread from a shelf....

...In September 1943, Bouchard and Ibar broke into the storage room of the DAF camp again (...) and stole 2 buckets of jam and 1 box of pasta....

...In October (...), Bouchard and Ibar broke into the DAF camp's storeroom again around midnight. (...) That night, they stole three buckets of jam, a box of pasta, and several packets of pudding mix....

...On the night of December 7–8, 1943, Bouchard, Goynon, and Mongondry left the camp around 9:30 p.m. and went to the allotment garden of the invalid Herrmann on Wiedengrund. All three of them climbed over the fence. Mongondry removed the lock from the rabbit hutch and stole two large rabbits, each weighing 8 pounds....

...On the night of December 23–24, 1943, Bouchard and Goynon left the camp around 9:00 p.m....

...They stole two large chinchilla rabbits ready for slaughter from the hutch. (...) The rabbits were prepared in the living room and then eaten....

NARRATOR

The prosecutor based his indictment on the so-called “Ordinance Against Public Enemies” (*Verordnung gegen Volksschädlinge*; literally, “Ordinance Against Folk Pests”) which was issued shortly after the war began. It allowed even minor offenses, such as the theft of food, to be punished with the utmost severity. The ordinance covered offenses that supposedly took advantage of the “exceptional circumstances” prevailing during the war.

INDICTMENT

In committing the theft of small animals and food, the defendants Bouchard, Goynon, Mongondry, Gomez, and Boileme took advantage of the blackout measures implemented to protect against air raids.

Furthermore, they profited from the fact that many farms and properties are currently left without male protection due to the **high rate of** conscription into the Wehrmacht; as a result, they were able to venture onto these properties more easily and brazenly.

The (...) defendants are *Volksschädlinge* [pests to the community].

NARRATOR

The six men remained in pretrial detention until their court hearing. On October 15, the defendant Marcel Mongondry died of unknown causes. It is presumed that he had health problems and urgently needed to be hospitalized. The prison administration requested his transfer, but the public prosecutor's office did not act upon this request.

The other five Frenchmen were brought to trial in November. Three of them were sentenced as accomplices to prison terms of one year and six months each. Irachabal received a two-year sentence for receiving stolen goods. The fifth man, Marcel Bouchard, was identified as the principal offender by the court.

VERDICT

Bouchard, who committed the greatest number of burglaries, (...) had to receive the harshest punishment. Even if he did not actually incite some of the co-defendants to commit the crimes, he at least encouraged the others to do so by setting a bad example. (...)

NARRATOR

Marcel Bouchard was sentenced to six years in prison as a "public enemy." The Reich Ministry of Justice appealed the verdict a few weeks later, in January 1945,

REICH MINISTRY OF JUSTICE

As the Special Court's judgment states, the convicted defendant Bouchard stole small animals and food by means of burglary in at least eight instances (...). Since he received a monthly wage of 120–130 Reichsmarks in addition to free room and board, yet demonstrated very poor work performance and incited his accomplices to commit criminal acts by leading a bad example, he must be regarded as a particularly antisocial offender. Therefore, I do not consider the imposed sentence of 6 years' imprisonment to be sufficient;

furthermore, I request that the case be submitted for review to the Chief Reich Prosecutor at the Reich Court to determine whether a nullity appeal—with the goal of securing the imposition of the death penalty—is warranted.

NARRATOR

The Reich Court upheld the Reich Ministry's motion and ordered the Special Court to sentence Marcel Bouchard to death. However, the death sentence was not carried out. The convicted men were sent to Untermaßfeld Prison. One of them, Rene Boileme, died there. The other four returned home after the war ended.