

Pierre Seel

(August 16, 1923 - November 25, 2005)

This essay was written by Pink Triangle Legacies Project public history intern Danny Bean. It is based on Pierre Seel's memoir and oral history testimony, as well as the important research of Dr. Gregory Woods, Jean Le Bitoux, and Joachim Neugroschel. Thank you for your efforts in preserving queer history.

In August 1923, Pierre Seel was born into a devoutly Catholic family in the French city of Mulhouse, near the border with Germany. Pierre realized his homosexuality at a very young age, but he remained silent because he believed his sexuality would create “an unbridgeable gap” with his family.

In late 1940, Pierre's watch was stolen during a visit to Steinbach Square, a popular meeting spot for gay men in Mulhouse. He reported the theft at a local police station, where the interrogating officer soon deduced that Pierre was gay. Despite the fact that homosexuality was then legal in France, the officer berated Pierre before letting him go. Pierre didn't know that the officer added his name to a list of suspected homosexuals.

The Germans had occupied parts of France since June 1940. On May 2, 1941, the Nazi Gestapo summoned Pierre to their headquarters, where they beat and raped him with a broken ruler. Sixty years later, Pierre revealed he was still suffering repercussions from the sexual assault. He eventually confessed to being gay to stop the torture.

On May 13, 1941, Pierre was deported to the Schirmeck-Vorbrück concentration camp and assigned a blue bar badge, which marked Catholics, “asocials,” and gay prisoners. He was only 18 years old. In the camp, Pierre witnessed the execution of his lover, Jo. Camp guards stripped Jo naked and placed a tin pail over his head. Classical music played in the background as German shepherds tore him apart. The pail caused his screams to reverberate. Pierre later recalled that the execution kept “ceaselessly passing... through my mind” for at least fifty years.

In November 1941, after six months in the camp, Pierre was released for “good behavior.” He was forced to sign a nondisclosure agreement before he returned home. He discovered he could only sleep on the carpet of his bedroom, as the “ideal warmth” of his sheets made him feel “horribly oppressed.” His nightmares induced “nocturnal shrieks” that woke up his entire family.



Undated photo of Pierre Seel from the cover of the first edition of his memoir *Moi, Pierre Seel, déporté homosexuel*. Calmann-Levy

The widespread homophobia of the society around him caused Pierre to suffer intense feelings of shame regarding his sexuality. He feared “being put on trial or accused of apologizing for ‘unnatural’ sexuality.” He thus remained silent for decades. The stigma also existed in Pierre’s home, as his father had “imposed a pact of silence about my sexuality.” Pierre married a woman and fathered three children. The marriage proved difficult, and the two eventually divorced.



Pierre Seel meeting Josef Kohout's (Heinz Heger's) long-time partner Wilhelm Kroepfl in 1996.
Kurt Krickler

On May 27, 1981, Pierre attended an event about the book *The Men with the Pink Triangle*, which told the true story of a gay concentration camp survivor, published under the pen name Heinz Heger. Learning of another gay survivor telling their story helped Pierre to tell his own. At first, he did so anonymously. But on November 18, 1982, Pierre published an open letter under his own name responding to homophobic claims from Bishop Elchinger of Strasbourg. From that point forward, Pierre began publicly advocating for the recognition of the Nazi persecution of homosexuals.

In the early 1990s, Pierre received a small payment (approximately \$2,800 USD today) from the French government for “doing forced labor... in enemy-occupied French territory” and for being “forced to serve in the German army.” No mention was made of him being targeted because of his sexuality. In 2003, the International Organization for Migration officially recognized Pierre as a victim of the Holocaust. He spent his final years with his partner, Eric Feliu, and died in Toulouse in 2005. His memoir is one of only three books written by gay concentration camp survivors.

Sources & Further Reading

Pierre Seel, *I, Pierre Seel, Deported Homosexual: A Memoir of Nazi Terror*. Translated by Joachim Neugroschel. Notes by Jean Le Bitoux. Foreword by Dr. Gregory Woods. Basic Books, 1995.

Making Gay History, “The Nazi Era: Pierre Seel,” Season 14 Episode 5 (Feb. 20, 2025).

Paragraph 175, directed by Rob Epstein and Jeffrey Friedman (Channel Four Films, 2000).

Read more about Pierre Seel [online](https://pinktrianglelegacies.com/stories). For more LGBTQ+ Stories from Nazi Germany, visit pinktrianglelegacies.com/stories.