

The Resistance in France

Professor H.R. Kedward

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Early Resistance

Q. Why and how did the Resistance begin?

A. The Resistance was created by a combination of small acts of defiance and a surprising number of visionary claims, of which de Gaulle's image of the undying flame of resistance was only one.

Early resistance is more accurately termed refusal, dissent and disobedience. You also find acts of desperation, fantasy even, and acts of idealism. Those who first expressed their defiance were scattered individuals and groups with little or no contact between each other.

Some of the very first initiatives concerned purely military circles. De Gaulle's radio appeal of 18 June on the BBC was couched in military terms, and there were two or three similar officer figures in France who set out plans for a military resurgence, refusing to accept that the war had been irrevocably lost. Some agents in the French Secret Services maintained their counter-espionage activity, directed against the occupying Germans, and were suspicious of any defiance which looked political.

At the same time, imaginative actions by civilians, often with little or no military knowledge and no access to arms, created a mosaic of initiatives of enormous diversity and unknown potential. Because they were such a small minority in the beginning, there is no way of making generalizations about either their social backgrounds or their motivations.

The isolated voices of defiance used their own resources. Some individuals had a typewriter and duplicator to roll off words of resistance which they distributed to friends or scattered in the street. Others employed their flair for intelligence work which led them to note down the movements of German troops and seek contact with London; and there were those who showed an instant sympathy for British aircrew shot down and stranded in France, and provided unquestioning refuge and a search for the means of escape.

In most cases, these first gestures sparked contacts between like-minded friends, co-workers or professional colleagues who trusted each other. Detailed and often ambitious ideas of action were hatched in these small gatherings which occurred throughout France in the summer and autumn of 1940. The very first meetings and their consequences are now well researched, and accounts of each of them emphasize the imagination, the audacity and tenacity which most early resistance groups displayed.

Some characterized their defiance in intellectual terms. Jean Cassou, an art historian, used the term 'absurd refusal' (*un refus absurde*) to describe the apparent absurdity of pitting himself against the overwhelming German presence. After Pétain's broadcast of 17 June, it seemed to the majority of French people to be both patriotic and common sense to support the charismatic Maréchal who represented the epic defence of Verdun in the First World War. At the very least, it was widely imagined that Pétain would be a staunch national defender of French interests,

whatever happened in the war. By contrast, de Gaulle's appeal from London on the following day was heard by very few, and his status and personality were unknown. Yes, argued Cassou, refusal flew in the face of all the arguments of 'realism' but it was an assertion of individuality, an existential choice, embracing but also defying absurdity.

Other early resisters have underlined the elements of chance and coincidence which were there from the beginning, and most have downplayed any talk of heroics. Some have shrugged their shoulders and described their reaction to events as a simple reflex, saying, 'We felt we just had to do something.' These acts constitute a *petite histoire* of resistance in which opportunity and situation were clearly among the most important variables.

Because of the number of variables, the origin and nature of early Resistance can seem random and indefinable. But a full study of motivation brings in more concrete and collective elements: ideological opposition to Nazism; anger and self-defence of those sacked, replaced or victimized by Vichy; the defiance of refugees who could not return to areas annexed by the Germans, notably Alsace and parts of Lorraine; the determination of those with close links to Britain who tuned immediately to the BBC as an alternative source of information. There were also those on the borders of Spain or Switzerland, or on either side of the demarcation line, who smuggled people across and became known as *passeurs*. Some were unpredictable and demanded payment and they are sometimes discounted as resisters, but many created reliable escape networks which quickly lost the taint of financial exploitation.

One pathway into resistance was the sheer determination of individuals to continue doing what they had always done, for example, teachers at all levels of education who prized free discussion and continued to reject propaganda from above, or journalists who continued their commitment to free enquiry.

All were minorities within their profession, so we do come back to the variable of personality, but gradually over the course of 1940–41 there were enough individuals who showed persistent defiance for movements and networks to take clandestine shape and assess what they needed to survive and expand. At that point, people began to be recruited for the skills or knowledge that they possessed, and the number of volunteers steadily grew. By the autumn of 1941 it was meaningful to talk of joining 'the Resistance'.

By then, it was also much more apparent what the dangers were. Several of the earliest groups had already been infiltrated by the Germans, and those arrested had been shot or deported. And as well as danger, there was also frustration at the long periods of waiting for contacts to be made, for messages to be answered, for groups to be formed, for plans to be hatched and favourable situations to present themselves. Resisters had to develop a capacity for patience. Most of the memoirs of early resistance contribute to the image of people feeling their way step by step in the darkness.

But the course of the war was changing, and Vichy policies were creating deepening resentment. The evolving international context made Vichy's collaboration with the Germans increasingly unacceptable. Month by month, and place by place, these changes radically affected the nature and growth of resistance.

Q. How were the circumstances of the Resistance different in the two zones?

A. It's good to put place and locality at the centre of resistance history right from the start. It was just as important as the other variables. We now have micro-studies of resistance not only in the major zones and regions, but also in specific towns and their *quartiers*, rural areas, valleys and mountains, and every kind of working community from fishing ports on the coast of Brittany to coal-mining districts in the Cévennes.

Recognizing the importance of place involves researching the huge differences in the presence or absence of German troops, in the provision of food (*ravitaillement*), in the cult of Pétain, and in the degree of real power that Vichy was able to exercise.

To these obvious differences you have to add differences of local history and local attitudes to central authority. Resistance research is open to all the cultural, political and economic characteristics of the highly diverse regions and localities of France. In the north, for example, the region of Nord-Pas-de-Calais, with Lille at its centre, was cut off from the rest of France and administered directly by the German military authority in Brussels. The resistance history of the region stresses not just the specific nature of the German administration but it also highlights the enormous importance of ingrained pro-British sentiments among the population which derived from the shared experience of French and British troops in the First World War.

The demarcation line which the Germans established across France enabled them from the start to control the movement of people, goods and services. Refugees who had made their way to the south in the exodus (*exode*) of May and June 1940 were not allowed to return home across the line until the Germans had embedded themselves in the occupied zone (*zone occupée*). This included organizing the distribution of food to the population who had remained in Paris and the northern regions, and imposing a nightly curfew in places where individuals showed any sign of defiance. This early period allowed the Germans to develop a reputation in some areas for behaving 'correctly' by paying for goods in the shops and visiting famous sites as 'tourists'.

Early defiance in the occupied zone was in the teeth of this complex German presence. The realities of German occupation, the control, the curfews, the billeting of officers in French homes, the marching military bands, the operations of the Gestapo, all created a sense of immediacy in the resistance organizations of the occupied zone. Resistance there was more pragmatic and more limited in its ambitions; the overriding necessity of secrecy and a realistic sense of what was possible is more evident there than in the south.

It's in the southern zone (*zone libre*) that you find the more expansive examples of resistance ideas and *esprit*. This was seen as something of a luxury by some resisters from the occupied zone who managed to cross the line and discover what was happening in the south, but the ideas and greater relative freedom of the *zone libre* were just as important to the nature of resistance as the pragmatism of the occupied zone.

It was not the German presence but rather Pétainism and Vichy that were apparent in the south, and much of the early defiance there was complicated by the cult of Pétain and the appeal of Vichy structures such as the youth movements and the Légion des Combattants. Vichy at the start appeared to offer opportunities for certain kinds of new social ideas which had struggled to be heard in the 1930s, and some pioneer resisters gave Vichy the benefit of the doubt in the first year. The army officer, Henri Frenay, for example, who launched the movement that became Combat, continued to hold on to his hopes in Pétain and kept his links with Vichy until 1942, despite having sketched out in the autumn of 1940 an ambitious future for resistance activity of all kinds, including a secret army.

Certain refugees from the north, from Paris and from Alsace-Lorraine, such as evacuated journalists, government administrators, business people and university lecturers, either could not or would not return home, even when the demarcation line was opened at regulated crossing points. For many of these individuals what gave resistance in the *zone libre* its own particular nature was the formation of 'exile' groups, which have some of the characteristics of the French 'exiles' in London, including the prevalence of discussion and ideas. They came together in Lyon and the other large southern towns in order to work out ways of defying the Germans, just like all resistance groups elsewhere, but they had the added motivation of being displaced.

Something of the same sense of internal 'exile' or discrimination was shared by those who were politically or racially excluded by Vichy ideology. This applied to the occupied zone as well as the south, but it was in the *zone libre* that Vichy was felt most acutely to be the initiator of repression. Individuals lost their jobs and status because they were communists, socialists, Freemasons, staunch republicans, or more insidiously because they were Jews, reduced to second-class citizens by the two Statuts des Juifs, and dehumanized by the rabid anti-Semitism sanctioned by the regime. Among all those excluded by Vichy you can find pioneers of resistance.

What finally gave particular focus to resistance in the *zone libre* was the extent to which Vichy's collaboration with the Germans deepened and expanded. From its origin as an apparently reciprocal policy to benefit France in equal measure it came to signify subservience to the New German Order. Some of the first use of explosives by urban resistance groups (*groupes francs*) was against the centres of collaboration in Montpellier and Marseille. It made sense to those who wanted dramatic action: in the relative absence of Germans in the south before November 1942 collaborators were the accessible targets. Resisting the Germans and resisting Vichy became intertwined at all levels of activity, even if certain groups tried hard to keep the two issues apart.

Q. What was the role of the clandestine press?

A. Writing, printing and distributing a clandestine paper, or series of tracts, were by far the commonest ways in which a resistance movement (*mouvement*) was created. On the other hand, the resistance networks (*réseaux*) of intelligence, military planning and escape which were linked into Allied and Gaullist Secret Services, did not produce newspapers.

When comparing the two as methods of resistance, it is easy to miss the active nature of the press. It had three essential roles. It was a visible act of defiance; it carried opinion and news unavailable in the authorized press; and it was in itself a method of organization and recruitment.

We sometimes refer, let's say, to the newspapers *Combat*, *Libération* or *L'Humanité* only by reference to their content, but anyone who has been involved in producing a newspaper knows that the resources of production and distribution are as vital as the text. Every aspect of launching and sustaining a clandestine paper extended the range and impact of resistance. Finding the resources to roneo or print the copies was a process of recruitment: offering the necessary skills and materials was voluntary commitment. Distribution set up wider networks of involvement, even if it only meant passing on a copy to a friend.

The clandestine press was assertive civilian action. It broke silences; it established contacts; it allowed a full range of political, social and moral ideas to be at the centre of resistance. It became one vital model of what was possible under foreign occupation.

It also made strong links with the past. The titles and the references of the papers reminded people of past political struggles, national victories, and popular protest. In this sense, it grounded resistance in the history and culture of France at a time when Vichy was claiming a monopoly of patriotic and cultural legitimacy.

The clandestine press gave a relatively public identity to resistance. Much of its news came from Swiss and Russian radio, but above all from the BBC. In its turn, the BBC quoted from letters, tracts and clandestine newspapers, most notably in the programme *Les Français parlent aux Français*. The clandestine press and the BBC broadcasts ensured that the existence of resistance was known. This knowledge in turn created more resistance. By contrast, the *réseaux* of intelligence and escape, by their very nature, remained secret and unknown until the Liberation or even beyond.

When comparing the relative roles and merits of *mouvements* and *réseaux*, what we need to remember is the extent to which a clandestine newspaper, as we have seen, was also a human web of resisters with different tasks. It also depended on secrecy and reliable intelligence.

Q. What was the stance of the Communist Party during the early period?

A. This is really a question about the effects of the Nazi–Soviet pact of 23 August 1939. If France as a whole was thrown into chaos and confusion by the defeat of May–June 1940, communists had already experienced over eight months of chaos and confusion since the pact took everyone by surprise in late August 1939. The pact shattered the identification of international communism with active anti-fascism. In an instant, the communists lost the identity they had gained by their intervention in the Spanish Civil War, by their stand against Munich and their backing of national defence since 1934.

After a few days of silence the party hierarchy accepted the new Soviet line and dubbed the war an ‘imperialist war’ for which Britain and France were blamed as much as Germany. The party and its press were banned by Daladier, decimated by arrests and forced underground. Many members left the party; but those who remained and were subject to police investigation mostly saw the arrests as retaliation by capitalist forces for the communist role in the strikes and politics of the Popular Front.

Once it had taken the decision, the party leadership clung to its Soviet-led position even when Germany invaded and occupied the country. There was no call from the PCF for anti-German resistance until Hitler invaded the Soviet Union in June 1941. The party then put itself in the vanguard of resistance activity, obliterating all reference to the position it had adopted since the first week after the Nazi-Soviet pact.

During the period of the pact and notably in July 1940, efforts were made by certain communists to persuade the Germans to permit the open publication of *L’Humanité*, which had been forced underground. There were also expressions in the paper of the need for French workers to fraternize with ordinary German soldiers as fellow comrades of the working class. And there were criticisms of de Gaulle as a lackey of big business and bankers in the city of London.

At the same time, and certainly by the winter and spring of 1940–41 there were different layers and loose threads to the communist position which complicate the picture, and suggest that historians need a more nuanced approach to the role of the communists, seen not just as a party hierarchy but also as individuals and local groups.

In the first place, the PCF called for a 'government of the people' and criticized Pétain and Vichy from the summer of 1940 onwards, expressing its open hostility to the cult of Pétain and the ideology behind the new regime. This made the PCF the first political party to defy and condemn the Vichy regime, and placed local communists in the front rank of those pursued by the police for what Vichy called 'anti-national activities'.

Second, the party confronted the task of rebuilding its decimated membership. It set up many of the clandestine structures which were later seen as models of effective resistance. Such was its reputation for underground activity even before June 1941 that the party was held responsible by the Vichy police for many resistance acts which were in fact carried out by others.

Third, a number of communists arrested and imprisoned, by Daladier in 1939 or by Vichy in 1940, were shot by the Germans as hostages in reprisals for assassinations of German personnel in the months following June 1941. This gave communists a reputation for being among the earliest martyrs of the resistance.

Fourth, from the start of the Occupation, there were a small number of individual communists at the local level who continued with their pre-war activities and initiated resistance and sabotage against both Vichy and the Germans. Often rejected by the party leadership, and later omitted from official party histories, they nonetheless saw themselves and were seen in their localities as communists in the tradition of the Popular Front and anti-fascism.

Finally, every communist expression or action across France before June 1941 needs to be looked at just as carefully as the clandestine activities of the non-communist *mouvements* which were created at the time. Small but significant differences in language and emphasis distinguish several local communist newspapers from the central *L'Humanité*, suggesting that a few local leaders were taking a more active position against the Germans and the Occupation.

This became reality in the miners' strike in the Nord-Pas-de-Calais in May 1941, a whole month before the Nazi invasion of the USSR. What began as a communist-backed strike against the employers for better conditions quickly became one in which the miners, and the women who rallied to the picket lines, denounced the German Occupation. This shift of direction was immensely popular in the area. The PCF leaders were defied and overtaken by the party's own members in the locality.

Half-way through May 1941 the party launched the Front National. It is difficult to say with precision whether it was initially intended to be an active anti-German organization: it really existed only in embryo until the party's take-off into resistance in June. From that moment onwards it was a major resistance movement in both zones.

Two points to add. The motivation and timing of communist resistance would not have been so much of an issue if the party had not claimed after the war that its leaders had resisted the Germans right from the start. For roughly 40 years after the Liberation, party histories failed to admit that the Nazi-Soviet pact had forced the PCF to reverse its pre-war policy and had determined the party's response to defeat and occupation in 1940. It was party hypocrisy about this early period which fuelled so much criticism of the PCF.

On the other hand, indiscriminating anti-communism also played its role in over-simplifying the issue with the result that historians did not always look closely at local communist individuals, nor at nuances in the provincial party press.

Resistance, armed struggle and Liberation

Q. Why and how did the Resistance movements expand during 1942?

A. There was no inevitable, steady pace of expansion, though it could seem so in retrospect, when the history of the *mouvements* and *réseaux* were seen as a whole. At the time, resisters were acutely aware of problems and setbacks as well as growth in numbers and confidence. Growing unpopularity of Vichy, Laval's return to office, the Allied invasion of North Africa and the German occupation of the *zone libre* all expanded the range and risks of resistance.

There was still the problem of Pétain's influence which was a brake on resistance recruitment, though considerably less so after the total occupation of the country. Pierre Laval returned to the head of the Vichy government in April 1942. His statement on 22 June that he wanted a German victory because otherwise Bolshevism would install itself everywhere, re-arranged the Vichy agenda. Public outrage at the first part of the statement boosted resistance and caused dismay in many sectors of the Vichy administration at local level. The second part of the statement set out to exploit the fears of communism, and related closely to Pétain's repeated claim that he and his ministers were the only safeguard against the disintegration of France into warring factions. From the summer of 1942 onwards Vichy's *raison d'être* was more and more justified by Laval as a shield, protecting the French, on the one hand, from the imposition of a Nazi *Gauleiter* and, on the other, from the threat of communism.

Resisters in the following two years had to defend themselves against accusations that they were pulling France towards the abyss of a conflict similar to the Spanish Civil War. Their success and their moral ascendancy by 1944 can be measured by the fact that resistance of all kinds hugely increased from 1942 onwards, but no such civil war ensued, despite the eventual armed struggle between the Maquis and the Vichy Milice.

The ultimate success of the Resistance owed much to the multiple ways in which it developed during 1942. There was both diversity and unity, leadership from the top and from the grass roots, organization from outside France and from within, and a potent mixture of motivations, political and non-political, military and civilian, national and local. Liberation was the collective aim, but immediate objectives and methods of struggle dominated the period of consolidation.

In 1942–43 it became apparent how many sectors of French society were involved in resistance activities of some sort, even if still only a minority. Women were active in growing numbers, not just the outstanding individuals such as Bertie Albrecht, Lucie Aubrac, Marie-Madeleine Fourcade, Danielle Casanova, and many others whose actions became a by-word for women's equal commitment in leadership and initiative, but also the far more anonymous women at local level. They maximized their much greater freedom to move about in the towns as it became increasingly dangerous for men to congregate in public places.

Women largely filled the distribution, communication and liaison roles vital for the impact of the clandestine press and the cohesion of resistance action. In some towns young women handled arms and ammunition within the activist *groupes francs* and they constituted a significant minority in all the *mouvements* and several of the *réseaux*. Their names were often not registered at the Liberation, and the role of women was only a marginal theme in resistance historiography for several decades. It is now rigorously and creatively researched, and the gender-blind histories have been re-written or replaced.

The same is true of foreigners, refugees and immigrants in the Resistance. Often at the centre of operations in the major towns, and numerous in the units of the communist-run FTP (see *Maquis* section below), they too were marginalized in subsequent accounts. Yet again new research has revealed their importance, to the point where historians prefer the term 'Resistance in France' to the more habitual term 'French Resistance'. Poles, Italians, Spanish, refugee Jews, East and Central Europeans, all now have detailed histories of their involvement. Their common ground was anti-fascism, and they gave the Resistance an international character, particularly marked in the phase of armed struggle from 1943–44 leading to the final liberation conflicts.

Often referred to as the decisive year of the war, 1942 can be seen as the year in which the dominant strains of early resistance all showed signs not only of heightened identity but also of adaptability:

- de Gaulle and his military Free French based in London came to recognize the importance of the civilian and political *mouvements* in France;
- the highly individual leaders of the *mouvements* came to accept de Gaulle as at least a symbolic leader;
- the communist Front National recruited many non-communists, some of whom became leaders of sectors of the FN, especially those in the arts and professions.

Diversification was the key to expansion. Where possible, resisters stayed in jobs where they could sabotage the working of Vichy's public administration from within. Known within Combat as NAP (*noyautage des administrations publiques*), the practice was common to all movements and networks, allowing them to tap into official information, to undermine controls such as postal censorship, or turn the provision of identity and ration cards to their own advantage. Many resistance journalists kept writing for the authorized press, giving them cover and access to news and materials.

Where some individual acts in 1941 had been spontaneous and flamboyant, the norm in 1942 was to perfect the use of codes and double identities. It was subterfuge but it was also subversion. Illegality was a necessity, not an option.

Q. How were the various movements unified?

A. The drive for unity came both from within France and from de Gaulle in London. Inside France the secret *réseaux* of intelligence and escape could not have operated in isolation. By their very nature, they were a part of the military infrastructure of the war.

The first reflex of those at the start of the networks had been to make contact with London. In return, de Gaulle set up his own secret service, the BCRA, to receive intelligence and send agents back into France. The resources lay in British hands, in the British secret services and the SOE, set up by Churchill to operate behind enemy lines. The two secret systems, French and British, worked partly together and partly in rivalry, yet another of the mixtures of opposites which made up the nature of resistance, but also in this case reflecting the ambivalences of the relationship between de Gaulle and Churchill.

The *mouvements* had a far more obvious independence, both from London and from each other. Their forms of civilian resistance were self-generating, and in many

ways resembled the workings of a diverse political or social opposition driven underground by those in power. As a military leader, de Gaulle might have discounted them. But they were the voice of resistance opinion and their strength lay in their claims to represent not themselves alone, but France as a whole.

By mid-1942 the *mouvements* were sufficiently well established for them to demand recognition, support and resources from de Gaulle. Representatives of the *mouvements* made their way to London. De Gaulle, in his difficult and fluctuating relationships with the British and American governments, needed to be able to claim that he had the support of the internal resistance. Increasingly the talk was of unity as the sign to the Allies that the Free French outside France and the growing resistance movements inside France were a coherent force.

Histories rightly stress Pierre Brossolette and Jean Moulin as the two outstanding agents who brought de Gaulle and much of the internal resistance together, but there were others, notably Christian Pineau, who had significant roles in changing de Gaulle's attitude to civilian and political resistance, and in securing commitments from de Gaulle which could be relayed back into France.

A decisive moment at the end of June 1942 was the publication in the clandestine press of a declaration from de Gaulle which accepted the civil and political aspirations of resistance as well as driving forwards the military necessity. From that moment the multiple meanings of 'liberation' were established as legitimate aims, and the process of unifying the different *mouvements* took on a wider and more inclusive perspective.

The Allied landings in North Africa, and the German Occupation of the *zone libre*, made November 1942 an accelerating moment in the process of unification. De Gaulle was faced in North Africa with the rival military leadership of General Giraud, and made even greater claims to national legitimacy by reference to the support of the internal resistance. Jean Moulin seized every opportunity to bring the leaders of the three major *mouvements* of the south more urgently together, while balancing wider claims from inside both zones for inclusion in the organizational structures of the Resistance.

Against his initial preferences, Moulin opened his negotiations and forward-planning to representatives of political parties, including the communists, whose Front National remained outside the Mouvements Unis de la Résistance but was brought into the Conseil National de la Résistance (CNR).

In Moulin's vision of a united Resistance there was idealism and realism in equal measure, and it was both a functional and ambitious set of unified structures which he created. The months of criss-crossing an increasingly dangerous occupied France, for ever more inclusive secret meetings, were brought to a dramatic climax in June 1943 with his arrest at Caluire in Lyon, and his torture and death in German hands.

Jean Moulin 'the martyr' brought Jean Moulin 'the unifier' a deservedly epic status in the history of the Resistance, but unification was always a collective drama, with a cast of individual and charismatic players, all of whom had good reason to speak for the aims and achievements of resistance. Many historians have likened unification to a loose patchwork of personalities or a fractured jigsaw of group identities. At the time what forced resistance leaders to agree was the strategic necessity of compromise to ensure a basic structure of authority at local as well as national level. Given the overwhelming need for secrecy and the dangers of bringing representatives together, the achievement of even a partly successful unification was astonishing.

Distribution of command, of financial resources, and eventually of arms and ammunition, justified the degree of centralized organization which was put in place, but the separate publications of the clandestine press all continued. A growing confidence among resisters allowed many to stress the unifying spirit (*esprit de la résistance*) as much as the actual structures, and it was this investment in a struggle which would not only liberate the territory of France but change its social and political landscape which led to the radical aims of the CNR Charter, proclaimed in March 1944.

Q. What was the Maquis? How did this represent a new stage?

A. For well over two years, resistance activity of all kinds was mainly identified with the towns, and even the hiding of resisters on the run tended to be in urban areas. The countryside was impractical for the production and distribution of the clandestine press and too unaffected by the German presence to attract intelligence gatherers. The exception from the start was the crossing of frontiers and the demarcation line which involved rural areas, while in 1942 the escalation in the persecution of Jews prompted mainly Protestant villages in remote hills and valleys of the south to provide shelter and protection, particularly for Jewish children.

The refugee and immigrant Jews rounded up by Vichy were interned in overcrowded and unsanitary camps which had been used for Spanish Republican refugees after the Civil War. Cohorts of Spanish internees were relocated in forestry and other manual work, where they were under armed surveillance, but many found it possible to escape into the surrounding countryside and find refuge and work in farms which badly needed labour.

This piecemeal pattern of refuge in certain rural areas drew some villagers and peasant farmers into acts of concealment from the Vichy police, and subversion of Vichy legislation. There was already a widespread readiness to conceal quantities of crops and food from Vichy inspectors of the Ministry of Provisions, since better prices could be obtained by selling to individuals who came out from the towns.

Laval's plan announced in June 1942 to send skilled workers to Germany in return for French prisoners of war (the *Relève* scheme) appeared likely to find support in the countryside, since most of the returning prisoners would be peasants. But the numbers who returned later in the year were so few, that rural support could not be guaranteed. On the contrary, the first few urban workers to escape the *Relève* and look for work and hiding in the farms of relatives were well received.

The urgency and numbers of escapes into the countryside vastly increased with the impact of the compulsory labour draft (STO) of February 1943, aimed at providing the hundreds of thousands of young workers demanded for work in Germany by Fritz Sauckel. In the spring and summer of 1943, the villages and areas which had already shown a readiness to protect people from Vichy or the Germans, became the focus for those escaping STO, the *réfractaires*. The extension of STO to certain categories of agricultural workers, pushed even more areas into defiance of the authorities. The pattern of escalating defiance which had marked the origins of resistance in towns in 1940–41 was now repeated in scattered rural areas across France.

News circulated that workers avoiding STO should take to the maquis (*prendre le maquis*), a Corsican word meaning the inner terrain of hills and forests. Without anybody knowing exactly when, the word rapidly enlarged its meaning to indicate not just the terrain but bands of young men in the woods intent on defying the

Germans and Vichy. By the autumn of 1943 maquis bands (*les maquis*) were the embryonic units of a new phase in the Resistance, the armed struggle (*la lutte armée*).

I have deliberately approached the subject in the first place through the readiness of certain rural areas to respond to those victimized and pursued by the Germans and Vichy. Without this pre-history of rural defiance, the outcome of workers escaping STO might have been very different. As it is, their history is a highly varied one. Some *réfractaires*, probably the majority, only intended to hide and survive individually, taking work where they could find it, but a minority made their refusal of STO into a motivation for resistance of a more active kind, and looked for ways of securing arms and working out plans for raids on German and Vichy targets.

Decisions were taken in some farms and villages to accept *réfractaires* individually but not the establishment of armed bands. Other areas threw their support fully behind the bands, and where this happened, the history of the maquis is more than just a history of the armed men in the woods and hills, it is a history of whole rural communities.

A second and equally necessary approach is to look at the growth of resistance acts of sabotage and armed assault which began to spill out of the towns and into the country during 1942, especially after the German occupation of the south. For example, railway sabotage took groups of resisters into rural areas of tunnels, cuttings and viaducts, where the lines were less protected than in the sidings and workshops of the towns.

As the methods of resistance diversified, so too did the ideas behind the activist groups which had always envisaged military action. The *mouvements* had nurtured the idea of a military wing, which took concrete form in the *Armée secrète* (AS), while in the spring of 1942 the communist *Franco-tireurs et partisans* (FTP) were created. Both organizations expanded during the winter of 1942–43, and a few individual resisters, such as Georges Guingouin in the Limousin, had already seen the potential for guerrilla action in the countryside before the impact of the STO.

The number of young workers on the run from the STO as early as February and March 1943 took all the established resistance movements by surprise. The first maquis bands created themselves, very much like the first resistance groups had done in 1940–41, but by April 1943 the united *mouvements* and the AS had started to respond to the huge rural opportunity of recruiting *réfractaires* and others on the run (anti-fascist militants, refugees, and those escaping from internment and work camps). The FTP was slower to expand out of the towns, but by the autumn of 1943, maquis with allegiance to the AS or the FTP were in active formation. Vichy Prefects began to report the existence of troublesome elements in the countryside who were ‘intent on sowing disorder and revolt’.

The winter of 1943–44 brought rural communities and the maquis bands more closely together, as shelter, food and liaison dominated the necessities. Everywhere the issues were ones of survival, but beyond that the maquis and the resistance leaders faced crucial strategic decisions:

- whether to plan for mobility of small numbers, or concentrate large numbers into an army formation;
- whether to strike immediately in guerrilla attacks against German targets, or train for action at the moment of the expected Allied landings;
- whether to forage for arms, ammunition, money and clothing by local raids, or depend on parachute drops determined in London;

- whether to stay close to a town in order to support a possible urban insurrection, or plan to confront a full German attack in a fortified rural stronghold.

Different strategies, and varied combinations of the alternatives, make up the diffuse history of the armed struggle and the liberation conflicts of 1944. So does the expanded resistance role of women at the centre of local webs of maquisard support, information and shelter and as liaison agents moving within the units and between town and country.

Mobile maquis action gave primacy in many southern rural areas to Spanish resisters, who had military experience from the Spanish Civil War and established themselves as experts in guerrilla tactics and the use of light machine guns dropped by the Allies. The *guérilleros espagnols* were a potent force of their own in the south-west of France.

In many maquis units the significant presence of refugees and immigrants, who had been on the run before the STO, made the maquis experience in certain regions one of international anti-fascism in the multiple struggles for liberation. Elsewhere more conventional secret army units emerged, some loyal to General Giraud and run by professional officers from the Armistice Army. SOE agents had also trained liberation forces ready to go into action at D-Day.

German troops and the Vichy Milice pursued all armed resisters as ‘terrorists’ and ‘bandits’, giving no quarter to villages in maquisard territory. The widespread incidence of German retaliation and reprisals in which villagers were massacred and their houses burned, also made the full history of the maquis one of whole rural communities.

Q. What contribution did the Resistance make to the Liberation of France?

A. As in all the aspects of resistance discussed so far, there are two main types of answer to this question: military, on the one hand, and civil and political, on the other.

1. Military Recognition of the whole array of military potential within the Resistance led Churchill to decide to arm the maquis. It was a decision vital to the role of the Resistance in the conflicts of the Liberation. Yet the acid test of Allied confidence in the armed Resistance is the extent, the timing and the nature of the supplies dropped in increasing amounts throughout the early and mid-summer of 1944. The bulk of it was light arms and ammunition. No heavy artillery and no Allied troops were dropped to the maquis in the hills, such as the Vercors, where considerable forces of resistance had gathered before the announcement of D-Day.

Almost all military accounts, therefore, emphasize the subsidiary and diversionary role allotted to the Resistance by Allied command. A major example of this is the fact that Allied bombing of towns, factories and railways in France continued to be given priority over sabotage in the build-up to the landings. Endless communications from the maquis called for heavier arms, while the Resistance as a whole called for more trust in sabotage techniques, which they claimed were more effective against the German infrastructure with far less human cost.

The decision on the military effectiveness of the Resistance has to be set within this context of Allied priorities. The lightly armed Resistance carried out what was possible and fulfilled the roles allotted to it, with a rigour and effectiveness to which General Eisenhower paid substantial tribute in his Memoirs. This success was

just as visible at the southern landings in Provence on 15 August as it was in the north before, during, and after the Normandy landings of 6 June.

Elsewhere, the military achievements varied considerably from place to place, region to region. Most of the rural areas of the old *zone libre* saw liberation proclaimed by the maquis, and local Liberation committees took charge in many provincial towns before the arrival of the liberating armies. Heavily armed German convoys could still make their retreat from the south across France but were subject to effective harassment and ambushes, which seriously slowed or diverted their progress.

After the landings were stabilised, the liberation of the main towns reveals a chequered history, with the barricades and street-to-street fighting by the FFI rightly acknowledged to have played a substantial role in the liberation of Paris.

In all the towns it is easy to minimize the liberation contribution of the Resistance by reference to the fact that the Germans were on the retreat, but this ignores the unpredictable nature of the withdrawal of their forces. In certain towns the Germans appeared to have left, only to return, and in others a surrender of the German garrison was precipitated not only by the success of the landings but also by the strength of the maquis in the surrounding area.

What cannot, and should not, be claimed is that France liberated itself. It was in no position to do so. The armies of the Free French, renamed the Fighting French (*la France combattante*) made up a part of the second wave of the Allied invasion forces, but as many resisters have said in interviews, the military role of the Resistance always has to be kept in the strict perspective of the massive Allied attack and losses at the time of the landings: 'With slender resources we fought where we could,' is a widespread conclusion by self-aware resisters, 'but by itself this could never have been enough'.

2. *Civil and political.* Moving to the civil and political aspects raises the question of legitimacy. It can be framed in the following way: could the highly varied aspects of the Resistance claim not only to represent France, but also to have defined the Liberation as more than a military objective? The answer is yes.

The struggle against the Occupation gradually became inseparable from the struggle against the ideology of Nazism and the regime of Vichy. It was never one monolithic movement of opinion, but it evolved to the point where Vichy was rejected by the majority for its collaboration with Nazi Germany, and by a growing minority for its authoritarian structures, its policies of exclusion and its suppression of individual rights and freedoms. The Liberation increasingly had a human, social and political agenda.

Much of the current research into the meaning of resistance hinges on the way humanitarian and moral actions are defined. People who gave shelter to a Jewish family or gave food to the maquisards, sometimes describe their actions as 'natural' or 'merely a human reflex'. These categories of response increasingly fall within the wider understanding of resistance.

At the same time, there is a continued stress on the many programmes for civil liberties and social justice produced by the Resistance. The CNR Charter was the most noted but by no means the only formula for social and political reform produced as an antidote to both Nazism and Vichy.

Such was the moral and civil authority achieved by the Resistance that the Allies did not impose an Allied Occupation on liberated France. The assumption of power by the Provisional Government, and the absence of any insurrectional protest, have always been seen as the measure of de Gaulle's personal ascendancy and

triumph: it spoke volumes also for the way in which opinion had been shaped by the clandestine press and every aspect of civilian resistance.

Differences of aims and ideas abounded in the Resistance but so too did a consensus that Vichy had to be rejected, the Republic had to be restored, and with it a programme for change. Any full evaluation of the Liberation has to involve this perspective.

In summary, the historian who asks questions about the nature of the Liberation receives a whole gamut of answers from those who lived through the Occupation. The meaning given to the Liberation tends to reflect the ways in which an understanding of resistance developed over the years. Not the least of these developments was the extent to which the Resistance asserted its moral, civil and political dimensions. Reaching a purely military assessment of the Liberation would be to misunderstand the multiple challenges of the Occupation and to impoverish four years of creative individual and collective resistance.

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Key publications by Roderick Kedward

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Further Reading

Julian Jackson, *The Dark Years*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

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