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Britain and the French Resistance 1940-1942 : a false start

Laurie West Van Hook

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BRITAIN AND THE FRENCH RESISTANCE 1940-1942:

A FALSE START

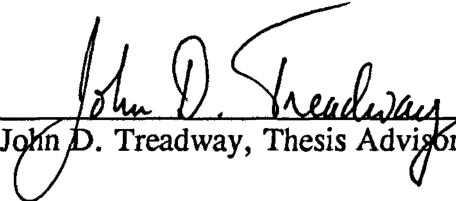
by Laurie West Van Hook

M.A., University of Richmond, 1997


Dr. John D. Treadway

During the Second World War, the relationship between Great Britain and the French Resistance endured endless problems. From the early days of the war, both sides misunderstood the other and created a stormy relationship, which would never mature later in the war. The French Resistance, initially small and generally fractured, frequently focused on postwar political maneuvering rather than wartime military tactics. Unification was sporadic and tenuous. Charles de Gaulle offered himself as the leader of the Resistance but lacked experience. This thesis also shows, however, that the British clung to the London-based de Gaulle hastily in the early days of the war but quickly decreased their support of him. Prime Minister Winston Churchill, who was de Gaulle's most ardent supporter, displayed ambivalence and frustration with the general. Fellow resisters and the British understandably viewed de Gaulle as a symbol more than a serious leader. This natural link between the British and French Resistance failed to develop into a mature relationship and precluded the chance for fuller strategic cooperation in major Allied invasions of French territory in November 1942 and June 1944.

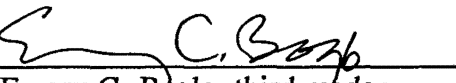
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it satisfies the requirements for the degree of Master of arts.



John D. Treadway, Thesis Advisor



Ernest C. Bolt, Jr., second reader



Emory C. Bogle, third reader

BRITAIN AND THE FRENCH RESISTANCE 1940-1942:

A FALSE START

By

LAURIE WEST VAN HOOK

J.D., University of Richmond, 1993

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A Thesis

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INTRODUCTION

During the Second World War, the French Resistance failed to unify or work effectively with Charles de Gaulle, the movement's symbolic leader. The Resistance maintained a troublesome relations with Great Britain. Neither side overcame a series of conflicts, battling egos, and internal confusion. As a result, Britain and the Resistance never developed a mature relationship that could aid the Allied invasions of French North Africa in November 1942 (*Torch*) and Normandy in June 1944 (*Overlord*). The British lacked a unified policy toward the French Resistance. Acting out of a sense of desperation and isolation, the British clung to de Gaulle in the early days after the German Blitzkrieg but later came to question their support. Building up de Gaulle while keeping other options open, the British pursued conflicting goals, confusing not only policy toward de Gaulle and the Resistance but also fostering internal disagreements within the offices of the prime minister and foreign secretary.

Over the past fifty years, glorification of the Resistance developed into a popular myth about the courageous French citizens who risked everything in order to regain their sovereignty. The term "Resistance" enhanced this myth because it projected an oversimplification of the nature of the phenomenon and implied a unified movement. It is a term of wide definition, referring to many groups and methods of resistance. Noble or opportunistic motivations, size, political or

Wartime conditions posed constraints on documenting clandestine activities.

Resisters maintained tight security and seldom wrote down instructions, missions, and contacts. Underground movements avoided publicity.² A resister only knew the true identity of his or her immediate superior. Fear of the Gestapo, infiltrators, and exposure overshadowed every detail of daily life.

Continuing intra-French divisions and the reluctance of postwar French governments to release material on the Resistance has restricted use of primary sources. Personal accounts are valuable in examining the innermost workings of a network or problems facing the entire movement but reflect glorifications and animosities.³ The memoirs of Charles de Gaulle (*The Complete War Memoirs of Charles de Gaulle*, Vols. 1-3) and Anthony Eden (*The Memoirs of Anthony Eden, Earl of Avon: The Reckoning*) exemplify how each author's inevitable subjectivity and hindsight must be read cautiously. Historian Gordon Wright wrote about the lack of balance in some historical studies. "Continental scholars, for example, are inclined to give central attention to the various anti-Nazi resistance movements,

²See, for example, Foreign Office note, 15 May 1944, Public Record Office, FO 371, 318/41924. Hereinafter PRO.

³See, for example, André Heintz, interview, *Remembering D-Day: Fifty Years Later*, C-SPAN, 7 May 1994. Hereinafter Heintz, interview. Heintz represents a decreasing number of resisters still living who can add to the oral history of the Resistance. C-SPAN heavily utilized this interview for the Resistance perspective for its Normany commemoration. Its use here illustrates both the positive and negative aspects of oral history and hindsight.

either within Germany or in the occupied countries; while most Anglo-American historians have dealt with the underground in rather offhand fashion."⁴

The most valuable primary sources for this thesis have been British documents released in the 1990s supplementing those released in the 1970s, which was the last time a thorough analysis of Britain's relations with the Resistance could be undertaken. These documents show that a conflict within Britain paralleled one within the Resistance.

Avoiding glorification without minimizing personal sacrifices presents the challenge when examining the problems surrounding Britain and the Resistance. Chapter one examines the rise of the Metropolitan, or continental, Resistance, Charles de Gaulle's relationship with the Metropolitan Resistance, and the fractured state of the Resistance, by the time the Allies had prepared to launch a major military invasion. Chapter two analyzes the circumstances surrounding de Gaulle's arrival on the international political scene. British actions during the fast-paced, crisis-ridden days surrounding the fall of France created confusion toward de Gaulle and mounting frustration with his irritable nature. British and Resistance operatives competed for military and intelligence operations in Metropolitan France.

⁴Gordon Wright, *The Ordeal of Total War: 1939-1945* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), 336.

The events and perceptions that arose in the early part of the war led to the exclusion of de Gaulle in the active planning and execution of important military invasions of French territory later in the war. Power struggles and a lack of cohesion typified intra-Resistance behavior. Resistance leaders still spoke of individualism on the eve of the Normandy invasion.⁵ One British Foreign Officer recorded a dinner conversation with two Resistance leaders. "Each Resistant had to make an individual choice, to examine his conscience and accept the technical position of a rebel" before fraternity of all resisters could emerge.⁶ Resisters refused to concentrate on the immediate military objective of liberating France and prematurely focused on their political position in the administration of postwar France. Wartime conditions, inexperience, personal vendettas, and political competitions precluded both a unified and effective Resistance and a cohesive and consistent British policy toward the Resistance.

⁵J. M. Baegner of the French Embassy in Angorra, which joined the Free French, first objected to the Free French movement because it sought to unify all French people, which countered French individualism and every person's right to decide on the type of country France should be after the war. Translated from Baegner memo, 9 July 1941, PRO, FO 371, 11/28213. See also Sir M. Lampson, Cairo, memo, 11 Feb. 1941, PRO, FO 371, Z870/114/17.

⁶Rooker's notes on dinner with Frenay and Bertain of Combat, 31 May 1944, PRO, FO 371, 82/41906.

CHAPTER ONE

THE UNKNOWN WARRIORS

The German Blitzkrieg in the West began on 10 May 1940. Within a matter of weeks, much of western Europe capitulated to Hitler. Over the next five years the French Resistance struggled to emerge. Resister Pierre Guilan de Bénouville stated, "This is no war of chieftains or of princes, of dynasties or national ambition; it is a war of peoples and causes. There are vast numbers . . . whose names will never be known, whose deeds will never be rewarded. This is a War of the Unknown Warriors.¹ These unknown warriors came from diverse social and economic backgrounds, resisted at different times and in different ways, held varying objectives, and formed hundreds of small resistance networks. Neither a centralized power structure nor a uniform alliance existed with Charles de Gaulle or the British, which undermined the role of resisters in military operations. One popular myth that, from the beginning, nearly every French citizen sought to resist both Germany and Vichy France is false. In September 1941, the British Foreign Office estimated that only 100,000 people in France rejected Vichy's policy of collaboration and supported the Resistance.² The

¹Pierre Guilan de Bénouville, *The Unknown Warriors: A Personal Account of the French Resistance*, trans. Lawrence G. Blochman (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1949), 8.

²W. H. B. Mack note, 4 September 1941, PRO, FO 371, 11/28214.

movement contained some noble, selfless citizens and many eleventh-hour patriots and opportunists.

Reactions to the Franco-German armistice of 22 June 1940 and the Resistance evolved from a mindset that developed after the First World War. Prime Minister Winston Churchill commented, "France had conducted and carried the main weight of the terrible land fighting from 1914 to 1918."³ This mentality relied on falsehoods, ignorance, and strategic errors. French defensive military doctrine centered around archaic trench warfare, a mode of fighting that ended with the First World War. The Maginot Line, a defensive barrier constructed after the First World War between France and Germany, ended before France's northern border. There the French relied on protection from either the thick Ardennes Forest or her Belgian neighbor, whose neutrality had been guaranteed in a 1839 treaty, even though this route was the traditional path of enemy invasion. French awareness of German offensive rearmament and modern mechanization failed to respond with sufficient material and organization. Although initially trampled by the Germans in the first part of the Great War, the French eventually emerged victorious with Marshal Pétain, the Victor of Verdun, christened a national hero. The French believed a defensive strategy complemented their notion that they would prove triumphant in future wars.

³Winston S. Churchill, *Their Finest Hour*, vol. 2 of *The Second World War* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1949), 35.

France also maintained a weak offensive political doctrine and supported the Little Entente of Czechoslovakia, Romania, and Yugoslavia, which were unstable democracies in the 1920s and authoritarian regimes in the 1930s.

Additionally, interwar French governments failed to inspire the population and faced considerable opposition in the 1930s. Twenty ministries rose and fell in the years between 1932 and 1940. The Popular Front, a coalition government of Left and Center parties from 1936 to 1938, represented for many the last hope for a revitalized France. Its failure climaxed popular weariness of leaders who lacked direction and succumbed to corruption. Léon Blum, former leader of the Popular Front, believed fear of rightist groups, government soldiers, German troops, and the loss of jobs and privileges caused the decline of the Third Republic.⁴

Rebuilding after the Great War had been a heavy burden, and the nation was unable to cope with the modern preparation required for another war. Edouard Bonnefous stated, "Morally, the nation was not ready, on the morrow of a long and hard conflict, to sacrifice its hopes for a higher standard of living in order to prepare for a new war which many did not believe to be in the offing."⁵

⁴Milton Dank, *The French Against the French: Collaboration and Resistance* (New York: J.B. Lippincott, 1974), 32. Blum later encouraged socialists, who feared de Gaulle's reactionary nature, to rally to the general. New York to Foreign Office, 18 December 1941, PRO, FO 371, Z10717/10376/17.

⁵Edouard Bonnefous, "Political and Military Responsibilities for the Defeat of 1940," *The Fall of France, 1940: Causes and Responsibilities*, ed. and intro. Samuel M. Osgood (Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath, 1972), 133.

The lightning war of 1940 enhanced an unstable political situation and left the French people without a sense of direction. Historian M. R. D. Foot described the French quandary:

Was it best to accept the fact of German domination and collaborate, or to follow the aged marshal in an attempt at an independent policy, or to resist? If to resist, with what object—to restore the third republic, or one of the monarchies; or to build a new kind of France, and if so with marxist or Christian or agnostic inspiration? And under American or British or Russian or purely French sponsorship? And under which French military leader?⁶

The final downfall of the moderate government of Paul Reynaud began on 10 June 1940, when the government departed from Paris and relocated further west and finally settled in Bordeaux. With a pacifist attitude securely embedded in the French majority, the scene was set for a leader who could symbolize the nostalgia, stability, honor, and enduring peace France had desired for so long. Charles de Gaulle observed, "Just as a besieged fortress is near surrender as soon as the governor talks of one, so France was heading for an armistice because the head of her government officially contemplated one."⁷ The people looked to Pétain as the only viable alternative. His past glories validated his view of patriotic

⁶M. R. D. Foot, *SOE in France: An Account of the Work of the British Special Operations Executive in France, 1940-1944* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1966), 133.

⁷Charles de Gaulle, *The Complete War Memoirs of Charles de Gaulle, Narrative*, vol. 1, trans. Jonathan Griffin and Richard Howard (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1964), 70.

action. Pétain favored a negotiated peace to save an independent government for even part of France.

The armistice divided the country into two geographic zones. The "Zone Occupée" or Occupied Zone comprised the northern and western coastal areas. The "Zone Libre" or Unoccupied Zone comprised the southern area. In the latter, Pétain established the État Français at Vichy and an Armistice Army. Many resisters and non-resisters understood Pétain's reasoning for peace. Resister Philippe de Vomécourt expressed a common ambivalence:

However shameful some of us considered the armistice, we could not deny that the terms seemed curiously mild and almost sympathetic in their regard for French feelings. If it were possible to judge it purely from a military standpoint, it was not dishonorable. The Germans did not demand the surrender of the French fleet, only its demobilization. They allowed sovereign rights to a French government in the free zone, and even to the retention of an army of 100,000 men on the soil of Metropolitan France. Furthermore, the armistice left the empire intact.⁸

The apparent invincibility of the Germans as a military force procured the French population's easy acceptance of the armistice. In 1938, Hitler annexed parts of eastern Europe. In 1939, Germany signed the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact with the Soviet Union, which divided Poland. The following year, the Wehrmacht blitzed

⁸Philippe de Vomécourt, *An Army of Amateurs* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1961), 54.

through western Europe. The Battle of Britain represented the next step toward the creation of a German New Order in Europe.

The French of both the occupied and unoccupied zones felt impotent before the invincible Nazi war machine. In the words of resister Henri Michel, "Since the nation in arms had failed to dam the Nazi flood, how could the disarmed civilian population sweep the waters away, or indeed prevent them from spreading further? And how much more impossible still to reverse the flow!"⁹ Hitler's leniency in the agreement coupled with his desire to eliminate Great Britain temporarily benefitted the Vichy government. Many French thought Pétain was the savior of French sovereignty and responsible for a lenient armistice. The real reason, of course, was that Hitler wanted to turn his attention to mounting a surprise attack on the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, the armistice divided French geography and opinion. Propaganda promoted faith in the Marshal who as head of the *État Français* had his people's best interests at heart. With "Travail, Famille, Patrie" replacing the 1789 motto of "Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité," the path of peace and cooperation meant the average French citizen could focus on the more immediate concerns of job security and supporting a family.

Marshal Pétain's infamous meeting with Hitler at Montoire in October 1940 produced mixed results for both Vichy and the Resistance. The meeting

⁹Henri Michel, "The Psychology of the French Resister," *Contemporary History* 5, no. 3 (1970): 165.

defined a portion of France as part of the Nazi war effort. Pro- and anti-Vichyists assigned great symbolic importance to the Pétain-Hitler handshake. Reactions covered both extremes. Henri Michel commented:

[some] sympathized with fascism, to whom that prospect was welcome; others were simply lured by the manna which the occupiers distributed; and lastly, there were some who were inspired by nobler motives, who went over to the victors not from sympathy, but from pacifism—to put an end to the horrible and catastrophic Franco-German hecatombs.¹⁰

Many military officers became devoted supporters of Vichy and Pétain's national revolution. For Michel, it was a program based "upon the ideology of traditional French reaction with a few fascist trimmings."¹¹ Resisters and some non-resisters viewed it as the ultimate defeat, with their image of the old Marshal destroyed. To others, Pétain's refusal to involve France in the war against England encouraged a double game theory. Pétain, though outwardly cooperating with Hitler, was waiting for the right moment to reassert French sovereignty and end submission to Hitler, perhaps even in conjunction with the Resistance. This allowed for a certain continuity with the interwar mentality. Some citizens preferred to excuse Pétain and instead blame his colleagues for the armistice, such as Vice-Premier Pierre Laval, whom many disliked and distrusted.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Ibid., 163.

Turning away from Vichy, however, did not necessarily mean increased support for the Resistance or a more unified direction among resisters. Many resisters, who had been anti-German yet pro-Vichy, realized only slowly that Pétain would not turn against Hitler. Henri Frenay, who later became the leader of a large Resistance network, was one of those people: "Despite growing and indisputable proofs, I felt a sort of repugnance to admit to myself that the old Marshal, whatever his intentions, was actually serving the enemy."¹² Years later Pétain stated that people on both sides misrepresented his reasons for meeting Hitler at Montoire. Pétain intended to compare himself with Tsar Alexander I who, Pétain believed, had over a century before pretended to accept Napoleon's friendship while conspiring against him. Pétain sought to keep the Germans out of Spain, North Africa, and the Mediterranean. He followed the lead of Generalissimo Francisco Franco, whom Hitler visited prior to Montoire.¹³ Franco reluctantly bargained with Hitler and avoided active participation in the war.

Just as a Vichy spirit existed before the creation of the regime, a Resistance spirit preceded its development but with greater difficulty. Former resister Henri Michel's psychological prerequisite for resistance was non-existent among the majority of the French population:

¹²Henri Frenay, *The Night Will End*, trans. Dan Hofstadter (Great Britain: Hodder & Stoughton, 1976), 97.

¹³Sisley Huddleston, *Pétain: Patriot or Traitor?* (London: Andrew Dakers, 1951), 81.

In any army the combatants need to be given reasons for fighting, although they have not been consulted before being involved in it; and it is even more necessary to enlist public opinion, without whose support the combatants would become as weak as Antaeus when his feet were off the ground.¹⁴

Many resisters regarded the *État Français* as an occupying force similar to the Germans in the *Zone Occupée*. Unlike their partisan counterparts in the Soviet Union but similar to those in Yugoslavia, French resisters had no government providing military, political, or moral support. Never fully occupied, the Soviet Union and Stalin exercised some organization and control over partisans. With past leaders a disappointment or part of Vichy, no well-known leaders emerged to direct a resistance. Self-appointed network chiefs, supported by a few friends and followers, struggled to assert their credibility and influence beyond network borders.

Free French official André Plevén wrote to the British Foreign Office that although a majority of people desired an Allied victory, only 10 to 15 percent of the population were ready to risk their lives for the cause.¹⁵ Although this figure represented a few million people, they remained scattered and unorganized in an

¹⁴Michel, "Psychology," 159.

¹⁵Translated from André Plevén to Major Desmond Morton, 11 Feb. 1942, PRO, FO 371, 699/32033. Plevén believed that number also represented true Gaullists. Morton thought Plevén's projections were too speculative regarding the support of the Free French in France. Morton to Mack, 13 Feb. 1942, PRO, FO 371, 699/32033. See also Spears note, 18 Feb. 1942, PRO, FO 371, 699/32033.

occupied country. The number of people involved in the Resistance constrained its ability to recruit and to act. Philippe de Vomécourt, one of the few actively involved in clandestine activities, described the need for considerable caution. "Ultimately an underground movement is sustained by trust, not suspicion. A traitor lives by gaining the trust of those he intends to sell."¹⁶

This constant strain among those trying to work together under already difficult circumstances affected intra-Resistance relations and performance. Relative inexperience and isolation meant most resistance groups arose spontaneously. A few friends gathered to talk about the war and how they could impede the Germans. Often newspapers appeared as the first sign of a new network, making writers and journalists prime recruits. The dissolution of many societal barriers, such as political parties, trade unions, and cultural associations, by Vichy and the Germans benefitted the Resistance's development. New forms of cooperation between those of diverse social strata emerged. In both zones, resisters emerged from all walks of life, including aristocrats, professionals, industrial workers, and merchants. According to Michel, early resisters also possessed vivid memories of the First World War and a hatred of Germans.¹⁷

Members of the intelligentsia were among the first, albeit unarmed, resisters. Writers conveyed a spirit of resistance and provided a starting point for

¹⁶Vomécourt, *Army*, 85.

¹⁷Michel, "Psychology," 166-67.

motivating other resisters who preferred military action. Historian James Wilkinson found the intelligentsia a consistent source of rebellion: "The ideals to which the Resistance intellectuals rallied were traditional ones: freedom of expression, freedom of conscience, the defense of human dignity, all as set forth in the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen in 1789."¹⁸

Although collaborationist literature existed in France, such as Jacques Benoit-Méchin's *La Moisson de quarante*, it was the authors in opposition to the Germans and Vichy who came to dominate the literary scene. Jean-Paul Sartre wrote several works, including *Bariona ou le fils du tonnerre* and *Les Mouches*, which described his disgust with the prevalent mood of guilt and uncertainty among the population and its refusal to react to the contemporary situation. Sartre later joined with Albert Camus, Paul Eluard, and Edith Thomas in the formation of Socialisme et Liberté, a literary Resistance group. Les Éditions de Minuit, the most important clandestine publisher, produced Agnès Humbert's *Notre Guerre*, a diary of her days with the early Resistance group Musée de l'Homme, and several short stories by Jean Bruller, a.k.a. Vercors. Bruller's *La Silence de la Mer* is the story of an uncle and his niece forced to host temporarily a German officer in stubborn silence.¹⁹

¹⁸James D. Wilkinson, *The Intellectual Resistance in Europe* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), 45-46.

¹⁹In describing his relationship with the German officer, the old man said, "We never gave, nor did he take, anything remotely like an opening for

Men and women joined the Resistance to participate in the salvation of France. The most expedient way to liberate France required the networks to put aside differences since each represented only a fraction of the population. Resisters, however, lost sight of the immediate goal of liberation and allowed their political aims to take precedence. Diverse ideological objectives and methodologies altered basic military strategies. Conflicts arising within one zone added to differences between the Zone Occupée and the Zone Libre.

In the initial stages of development, resistance networks in the Zone Occupée received more support than those in the Zone Libre. The incessant reminder of the Nazi troops and the restrictions these aliens imposed on every day French life fostered germanophobia. Daily German military parades from the Arc de Triomphe down the Champs-Élysées humiliated Parisians. Direct German domination provoked acts of sabotage. Some resisters tore down German propaganda posters placed in Metro stations and on the streets while others denied recognition of the foreigners. Agnès Humbert proudly witnessed a Frenchman refuse a German soldier's offer of cigarettes.²⁰ The predominance of German forces in the Zone Occupée meant a higher risk and a greater difficulty in the formation and maintenance of networks. Resisters quickly learned the

familiarity." Vercors, *The Silence of the Sea*, trans. Cyril Connolly (New York: Macmillan, 1944), 11.

²⁰Agnès Humbert, *Notre Guerre* (Paris: Éditions Émile-Paul Frères, 1946), 20, 27.

fundamental rules of underground activity, such as never write down incriminating evidence, remain calm in any crisis, and respect instincts. Resistance operatives learned to be conscious of every move made and word spoken. Still, innate behavioral habits sometimes gave people away. Peter Leslie described one incident.

A woman agent parachuted into France and was caught by an alert Gestapo officer in Paris after he had noticed her involuntarily looking to the right before crossing a busy street—instead of to the left like everyone else. The officer recalled that traffic in Britain kept to the left of the road, and deduced that anybody automatically checking on vehicles coming from that direction must be English.²¹

Boris Vildé led the “Musée de l’Homme”, one of the first groups in the Zone Occupée. Created in Paris in July 1940, many of its members worked at the Musée de l’Homme in the Chaillot Palace opposite the Eiffel Tower. Vildé built an extensive network of contacts in a short period of time. His comrades helped escaped French and Allied prisoners safely across the demarcation line to the Zone Libre and eventually out of the country. On 15 December 1940, the group published its first issue of the newspaper *Résistance*, which instructed the people of France in the preparation and methods of insurrection. A double agent ended Musée de l’Homme in early 1941, but the group inspired other networks. One

²¹Peter Leslie, *The Liberation of the Riviera: The Resistance to the Nazis in the South of France and the Story of its Heroic Leader, Ange-Marie Miniconi* (New York: Wyndham Press, 1980), 15-16.

evening immediately prior to his arrest, Vildé showed up on the doorstep of Agnès Humbert knowing the risk he took returning to Paris. In response to Agnès's words of concern, he replied, "Ma chère, nous irons tous en prison, vous le savez."²²

The Germans eventually occupied the Zone Libre in November 1942, in Operation *Attila*, after the Anglo-American invasion of French North Africa, codenamed Operation *Torch*. Even then, however, fewer German soldiers occupied the Zone Libre than the Zone Occupée, allowing southern networks to develop more easily. After examining daily life and the relative ease of movement in the south, a visiting Resistance leader from the Zone Occupée commented, "The Resistance leaders go about openly, meet in cafés and busy restaurants, not making the slightest effort to hide. They all but have calling cards bearing their underground titles."²³ The disaffected and rebellious members of the middle and upper class elites led the Resistance even though the working class constituted much of the core of the networks.

Resistance groups created in the Zone Libre promoted political aspirations foremost. They wanted to expel the Germans, rid the country of the foul État Français, and look to the establishment of a new progressive France. North and

²²Humbert, *Notre Guerre*, 65.

²³John F. Sweets, *The Politics of Resistance in France, 1940-1944: A History of the Mouvements Unis de la Résistance* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 1976), citing Pineau, *La Simple Vérité*, 21.

south often conflicted. In contrast to the north, the south's political goals overshadowed paramilitary operations, which were kept to a minimum until the arrival of the Allied armies. The prevailing Pétainist attitude of the populace restrained violent resistance. If potential agitators kept quiet, reprisals could be avoided. Therefore, resources first had to be directed toward persuasion and unification of French attitudes in favor of the Resistance. Clandestine newspapers were of the utmost importance in the Zone Libre. In the words of one resister, the "press was the only thing which gave to an individual in one part of the country the feeling that he was a part of a national organization, (a fact) which was capital from the standpoint of morale."²⁴

De Bénouville related another difficulty he faced in the eyes of French collaborators. He held a post in the Vichy regime, a cover many resisters found useful²⁵ but awkward:

The treason of some of these old-time nationalists, although it was just beginning, increased the risk of capture for true patriots. Our former comrades were not only bitter about our refusal to bow to defeat. They were resentful of the old internal political quarrels which had caused some of us to resign from the Action Française before the war, and which neither the heat of the conflict nor its tragic outcome

²⁴Témoignage of Bourdet, in Sweets, *Politics of Resistance*, 43.

²⁵For example, "Noyautage de l'Administration Publique" consisted of senior civil servants positioned in the central and local governments.

could make them forget. They were out to attack us with ever-increasing fury.²⁶

Resisters in the Zone Libre had to fight their fellow countrymen, more so than those in the Zone Occupée, as well as the Germans. A resister had to feel a strong belief in his or her convictions, especially at the hands of fellow Frenchmen such as the Vichy police.

Marie-Madeline Fourcade, the only woman to head a major Resistance network, began "Alliance" in 1940 in the Zone Libre. The espionage-oriented Alliance first supplied the British with locations of German military installations and troop movements. Fourcade's network later supplied the Allies with a detailed map of the Normandy coast used in the 1944 invasion and information about German research in Brittany on the secret V-1 weapons. By the end of the Second World War, Alliance's 3,000 members branched out all over France. Fourcade maintained contacts in Spain, Monaco, England, and Belgium. Alliance fascinated the Germans who nicknamed the organization Noah's Ark because members had code names of animals. Fourcade was "Hedgehog".²⁷

"Combat", "Libération", and "Franc-Tireur" were the three most important groups to emerge in the Zone Libre, and their leaders played a significant part in

²⁶De Bénouville, *Unknown Warriors*, 14.

²⁷Vera Laska, ed., *Women in the Resistance and in the Holocaust*, fore. Simon Wiesenthal (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1983), 137-38.

the unification of the Resistance. They also exemplified important characteristics of the Resistance movement as a whole, including the participation of diverse social groups, the crossing of established social barriers, and the damaging political struggles. Henri Frenay, a former career officer, created Combat, the most organized and heterogenous of all the early Resistance networks. He drew recruits from the disaffected military, Christian Democrats, intellectuals, workers, Communists, and former members of the royalist and fascist aligned Action Française, including Pierre Guillan de Bénouville. Combat published a clandestine newspaper, *Vérités*. Leftist intellectual-journalist Emmanuel d'Astier de la Vigérie led Libération and published a socialist newspaper, *Le Populaire*. Libération maintained ties with the political parties and trade unions Confédération Générale du Travail, Confédération Française de Travailleurs Chrétiens, and Comité d'Action Socialiste. Franc-Tireur was the most radical and politically experienced network. Led by Jean-Pierre Lévy, a Jewish technician, the group spoke out for democratic and republican principles in its newspaper, *Le Franc-Tireur*.²⁸

Resistance leaders may have understood the need to unite against the common enemy of Germany and Vichy, but distinctions protracted or prevented

²⁸Sweets, *Politics of Resistance*, 38-40, 46. The British actually found all resistance newspapers, not just those of the socialists and communists, to be uncompromisingly leftist in outlook. Further, each group considered itself worthy to speak for France and control her future while remaining equivocal and suspicious of Allied intentions. Foreign Office Summary of Clandestine Resistance Press 1 Jan. to 14 July 1943, 26 Aug. 1943, PRO, FO 371, 36059B.

consolidation. Leaders refused to tone down their individual rhetoric. Continued publication of numerous ideologically diverse newspapers increased competition between the networks and impeded the process of unification. De Bénouville discussed how the lack of a centralized command caused operational problems with rank-and-file resisters who overlapped one another on the same mission:

I had great difficulty making our men understand the first principles of intelligence: that no agent should transmit the same information to two different organizations feeding the same point. . . . [S]light differences in the text of the two versions would give the central intelligence point the idea that the two messages confirmed each other, whereas they were actually only duplications. Our men, however, were over eager, and once they had stumbled on a piece of information they were in a hurry to pass it on.²⁹

This typified the French Resistance's natural inexperience, poor internal communication, and inability to keep resisters from joining more than one network. Debates over methodology and the role of active operations accompanied differences over ideology. De Bénouville emphasized the difficulties: "So, while some crews were busy putting out newspapers, others broke the store windows of collaborationists."³⁰

The ambiguous position of the French Communists in the early years of the war confused the Resistance movement. Changes in French Communist

²⁹De Bénouville, *Unknown Warriors*, 96.

³⁰*Ibid.*, 55.

behavior between 1939 and 1941 grew out of fluctuations in official Soviet policy. The marginal position of the Communists in the Popular Front government of the late 1930s changed with an agreement between the French and Soviet governments against the common threat of Hitler. The Communists joined the Socialists and Radicals without formally entering the government. Henri Michel described the change in attitude:

[T]hey spoke with a completely new voice; they demanded a firm attitude toward Hitler, called for armed intervention on behalf of Republican Spain, repudiated the Munich agreements, and favored the broadest possible national unity and an "outstretched hand to the Catholics." Like the socialists, they had discovered in their turn that they possessed a fatherland.³¹

Soon, however, diplomacy changed Communist rhetoric and split the party with the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact in 1939. French Communists had to follow the Soviet strategy of preserving a Communist peace and denouncing the war as a conflict between rival imperialist powers. A clandestine press produced propaganda opposing the war and Pétain's regime, organizing defense groups, and denouncing de Gaulle and his followers in London as "dangerous warmongers in the pay of England."³² According to Michel, the Communists unsuccessfully attempted to justify this sudden change:

³¹Michel, "Psychology," 171.

³²Claude Chambard, *The Maquis*, trans. Elaine P. Halperin (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1976), 23.

[The] USSR being the fatherland of the workers of all the world, its defense was both the duty and the interest of the workers of every country. . . . We can be sure that none of them enjoyed making this reversal of policy; many of them left the party, while those who had been mobilized loyally performed their duty. And those who remained faithful to the party were, at the very least, demoralized and confused.³³

Those who disobeyed Stalin's orders frequently joined networks such as Lévy's Franc-Tireur. In some parts of France, the Communists controlled the Franc-Tireur military wing. In the "red belt" of factories around Paris, the Communists organized strikes.³⁴ Other French Communists and the Soviet government disapproved of this breach in loyalty, and ostracized many of them permanently from the party.

When Hitler broke the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact on 22 June 1941 with his surprise attack on the Soviet Union, Operation *Barbarossa*, another sharp turn in the official Communist attitude occurred. Stalin immediately called for all-out opposition to the Germans and to Vichy. De Bénouville saw the Communists as enthusiastic resisters who despite the embarrassment of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact "had become Men of the Resistance, and these sons of France were not sorry to find themselves fighting beside their brothers for the cause they had not yet

³³Michel, "Psychology," 171.

³⁴M. R. D. Foot, *Resistance: European Resistance to Nazism 1940-1945* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1977), 239.

been able to serve."³⁵ Despite Communist vacillation early in the war, many Communist networks managed to put politics aside, at least on the surface, for the duration of the war. Michel wrote how the Communists avoided intra-Resistance struggles which did not directly concern them:

Being very anxious not to weaken French unity or to diminish the national combativeness to the occupiers' advantage, the Communists took great pains not to alarm their partners. They avoided all references to their revolutionary programme and postponed to the end of the war any examination of the extensive reforms that their Gaullist and socialist partners were advocating.³⁶

The Communists attracted large numbers of recruits, including non-Communists, because they spoke out for unity and direct action. They invited the Left and the Right to join the Front National, the most militant network.³⁷ The emphasis on action, though a by-product of a political philosophy, appealed to resisters who yearned to fight the oppressor. Their ability to mobilize rapidly increased the Front National's strength and influence and would make it one of the most powerful Resistance groups in France by 1943.

A network developed also within the Armistice Army. Although loyal to Pétain, the *Conservation du matériel* hid military material for future use.

³⁵De Bénouville, *Unknown Warriors*, 40.

³⁶Michel, "Psychology," 172.

³⁷Sweets, *Politics of Resistance*, 121, 123.

Conservation du matériel maintained a clandestine fleet of military trucks camouflaged as civilian transport vehicles, attempted to unify and control local initiatives aimed at stockpiling weapons, and constructed crude armored scout cars.³⁸ Historian Robert Paxton described the position of army resisters:

[T]he clandestine planners in the Armistice Army were a small, dispersed group condemned to no share in national glory, unless the metropolitan Armistice Army itself were to play a major role in the liberation of France. Instead, the metropolitan Armistice Army was destined to be dissolved in November 1942. The strategic planners within its general staff were planning for situations which never arose.³⁹

Many army resisters had ambitious plans, but their ambiguous position restrained their activities. Influential senior officers helped determine Vichy policy and opposed rash violations of the Armistice agreement. The need to keep anti-government activities secret made communicating with resisters outside the Army difficult. Their loyalty to Pétain precluded joining other networks or following anti-Pétain leaders. They successfully hoarded military cachés, which remained unknown until the Germans occupied the south in November 1942 and discovered the cachés. The pacificism with which the Vichy officials accepted the occupation shocked the Army. Loyalty to Pétain wavered. In an act of protest and resistance,

³⁸Robert O. Paxton, *Parades and Politics at Vichy: The French Officer Corps Under Marshal Pétain* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), 284-85, 288.

³⁹*Ibid.*, 308.

the Armistice Army destroyed its own fleet in the Toulon Harbor to evade German control.⁴⁰

Torch and *Attila* produced important psychological consequences. The former destroyed the myth of the unbeatable German war machine, and the latter eroded the myth of Pétain's alleged double game. With all of France under German occupation, differing conditions for resistance in the Zone Occupée and the Zone Libre decreased. Where a divided France aided the Germans in the first half of the war, the two zones' common plight provided both a false glimmer of hope to the Resistance and added tensions as more militant movements emerged in the second half.

A gradual shift of post-armistice attitudes away from Pétain paralleled an increasing awareness of the failure of collaboration. Inept Nazi and État Français propaganda disclosed to the French populace their truly subordinate status in the Third Reich's New Order. The Germans had not returned over one million French prisoners of war interned in Germany since 1940. Under Nazi pressure, Pétain reappointed Pierre Laval to the Vichy government in April 1942. The Marshal had dismissed Laval in December 1940, but now with Pétain losing his popular support, Laval was needed to help maintain order and power in the Zone Libre. Marshal Pétain's public endorsement of Laval, who was openly pro-German

⁴⁰Chambard, *Maquis*, 31.

and, in effect, the true head of the État Français, lowered the prospects that Petain would reassert French sovereignty against the Germans.

In February 1943, Laval instituted the Service du Travail Obligatoire, which conscripted all men between the ages of twenty-two and forty-two to forced labor in Germany. Stories describing the harsh conditions in the labor camps quickly circulated in France. Many workers ignored the summons and retreated to the countryside and forests where they formed the maquis.⁴¹ Small groups had existed since the armistice, but the Service du Travail Obligatoire led to a massive influx of maquisards. In the words of resister Gilbert Renault-Roulier, a.k.a. Rémy, "without the seed planted in French soil for more than two years by the blood of this minority, many who took to the maquis would otherwise have meekly accepted forced labor in Germany."⁴² For several months, the Germans regarded maquisards as mere outlaws.⁴³ When the Nazis realized the potential threat of the maquis, they created the "Milice", a special French police organization to root out maquisards. Rivaling the Gestapo in cruelty, Milice power expanded.

⁴¹See Foreign Office note, 15 May 1944.

⁴²Gilbert Renault-Roulier (Rémy), *Memoirs of a Secret Agent of Free France: The Silent Company*, vol. 11, trans. Lancelot C. Sheppard (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1948), 335.

⁴³The British defined the maquis as embracing "all groups of outlaws in France and their camps or hide-outs." Appreciation of Strength and Organisation of the French Maquis as at 26 January 1944, 26 Jan. 1944, PRO, FO 371, 82/41904.

Some maquis operated independently, while others affiliated with existing Resistance networks. Small maquis numbered about twenty people. This made movement more inconspicuous but fostered regional loyalties and a reluctance to join other maquis. Larger groups, however, proved unwieldy and exposed themselves to German attacks and infiltration. Philippe de Vomécourt described the maquis as "symptomatic of France divided, yet vengeful."⁴⁴

Maquisards believed that they represented the military branch of clandestine activities and would join an Allied liberation of the countryside. They quibbled about short- and long-term strategic objectives. Most non-communist maquisards saw their role in the war as one of diversion. They opposed engaging the enemy unless attacked or needed to carry out a mission. Non-communist fighters preferred to focus on preparation for an Allied landing and the postwar administration of France. Communist maquisards, many of whom drew inspiration from Soviet partisans,⁴⁵ sought to attack German soldiers and Vichy officials whenever possible. They mastered ambush, assassination, intrigue, and hit and run raids but showed little regard for casualties or German reprisals upon the civilian population. At liberation, the Communists wanted to be the only group that

⁴⁴De Vomécourt, *Army*, 127. The maquis and other armed resisters were "hopelessly intermingled and overlap[ped] each other to a very great extent. It [was] consequently very difficult to obtain any reasonable estimate as to the real strength of the Maquis Proper." Appreciation of Strength, 26 Jan. 1944.

⁴⁵See, for example, Speight interview with Madame d'Aubrac, 23 March 1944, PRO, FO 371, 318/41923.

consistently and actively fought the Germans, thereby discrediting non-communist resisters.⁴⁶ Like other Resistance networks, both sides of the maquis, despite their emphasis on military action, proved susceptible to political ambitions. This would reduce their effectiveness as a fighting force and decrease their support with the local population and the British.

The Resistance also existed outside of Metropolitan France. Charles de Gaulle created the Free French, later called *la France Combattante* or Fighting France/French.⁴⁷ A few days before Reynaud's moderate government departed Paris on 10 June, de Gaulle, recently promoted to general, became Reynaud's Undersecretary of State for National Defense. Against the backdrop of the German Blitzkrieg, de Gaulle rose as the Third Republic fell. He exemplified a rare perseverance among government officials. He planned for the reemergence of an independent France and alleviated a sense of national humiliation felt by the surrender.⁴⁸

⁴⁶Michael J. Bird, *The Secret Battalion* (New York: Rinehart & Winston, 1964), 18.

⁴⁷*La France Combattante* was the union of French nationals who wanted to work with the United Nations toward the liberation of France, and the Conseil National Français was the directing organ that represented its interests with the British Government. Draft Statement for Publication, 14 July 1942, PRO, FO 371, 31966.

⁴⁸Parr, Consul-General at Brazzaville, note, 10 March 1941, PRO, FO 371, Z2685/114/17.

[I]f the war of '40 is lost, we can win another. Without giving up the fight on European soil as long as it is possible, we must decide on and prepare for the continuation of the struggle in the Empire. That implies a policy to fit: the transport of resources to North Africa, the choice of leaders qualified to direct the operations, and the maintenance of close relations with the British, whatever grievance we may have against them. I propose to you [Paul Reynaud] that I should deal with the measures to be taken for the purpose.⁴⁹

De Gaulle's optimism and determination left those in control unaffected. He found Pétain's interpretation of the war as just another Franco-German conflict short-sighted. The Marshal failed to grasp the "world character of the conflict, the possibilities of the overseas territories, and the ideological consequences of Hitler's victory. . . ." In short, Pétain showed his age, and for France, "[o]ld age is a shipwreck."⁵⁰

General de Gaulle arrived in London at dawn on 16 June 1940. In response to Pétain's request for an armistice on 17 June, de Gaulle delivered his appeal to the French people over the British Broadcasting Corporation, BBC, on 18 June:

The leaders who, for many years past, have been at the head of the French armed forces, have set up a government. . . . But has the last word been said? Must we abandon all hope? Is our defeat final and irremediable? To those questions I answer—No! . . . I,

⁴⁹De Gaulle, *Narrative*, 54.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, 72-73.

General de Gaulle, now in London, call on all French officers and men who are at present on British soil, or may be in the future, with or without their arms; I call on all engineers and skilled workmen from the armaments factories who are at present on British soil, or may be in the future, to get in touch with me. Whatever happens, the flame of French resistance must not and shall not die.⁵¹

For the few French citizens who heard de Gaulle's broadcast, 18 June emitted the spark for the next five years of the war. Isolated volunteers reached England daily, but only a few hundred had shown up by the end of the month to join General de Gaulle.⁵² Resister André Heintz spoke of the difficulty of supporting the general in France. "I was for de Gaulle, but he was in England. It was difficult to get instructions; our only communication came from BBC broadcasts."⁵³

Other resisters distrusted de Gaulle and his self-appointed status as the movement's leader. De Gaulle garnered less popular support than many of the networks emerging in France.⁵⁴ Resisters thought de Gaulle incapable of comprehending the continental situation because he was not there on a day-to-day

⁵¹Ibid., 83-84.

⁵²Ibid., 88, 90.

⁵³Heintz, interview.

⁵⁴Morton to Mack, 13 Feb. 1942; Spears note, 18 Feb. 1942. In contrast, a Swiss newspaper reported in March 1941 that 95 percent of Paris was Gaullist but then revised the initial tone of the story saying, "Gaullist sentiment is particularly strong in occupied France and indeed . . . the great majority of the population are supporters of the cause." Report of Swiss Newspaper, 9 June 1941, PRO, FO 371, 11/28213.

basis. Bitterness haunted de Gaulle's attempts to unify those French who resented his fleeing across the Channel. Some resisters found de Gaulle and his followers too narrow-minded. Henri Frenay, Combat leader, said the general viewed any refusal by network chiefs to subordinate their authority to him as a felony. De Gaulle was unable to understand that the network leaders were a vital connection between himself in London and the masses in France.⁵⁵ Free French agents sent over to France could not appreciate the work of Metropolitan resisters and misinterpreted any network independence as treason. Historian Milton Dank described the situation: "Too strongly Gaullist in their thinking and resented because of their inability to supply money and arms in the quantities required, they simply added to the squabbling."⁵⁶

Distrust of Charles de Gaulle and the politicians in London reinforced attitudes toward the Armistice and the Vichy puppet regime in many Frenchmen. Though eventually accepted, at least symbolically, as the primary leader of the Resistance struggle, many feared de Gaulle would establish a military dictatorship. Some British diplomats believed that "all French opinion wants a dictatorship, but a purely French one: they hoped for a man like de Gaulle of proved patriotism who would root out the old corruption, class and party struggles, and would

⁵⁵Henri Frenay, "De Gaulle et la Résistance," *Preuves* 70 (December 1956): 84.

⁵⁶Dank, *French Against the French*, 132.

rebuild France on a new basis."⁵⁷ De Bénouville reflected upon his lasting opinion of the French leaders in London:

I had serious reservations regarding the French politicians who were regrouping in London. It was evident to one that the old political parties were bankrupt. They had failed in preparing for the war, they had failed at Munich, they had failed by capitulating to the Germans, and they were failing under the occupation. France, abandoned by those who had given her such false and feeble leadership, was finding her own way back to life and I viewed with suspicion the activities of the refugee politicians in London, who seemed ready to profit by the resurrection in which they played no part, but which might get them their old jobs back. Their actions seemed motivated by a desire to cling to their former status, rather than by any wish to restore liberty to France and, with it, to all of Europe.⁵⁸

De Bénouville's skepticism typified that of many French citizens. At the time of the Armistice, popular opinion reflected a belief that life could not become any worse than it had been under past governments and the German invasion. "The people who shouted 'Long live Pétain!' were really shouting 'Long live Life!' For they remembered the roads caked with refugees, the bombardments, the days of exodus, and the nights of death."⁵⁹

⁵⁷Francis Patron, Consul-General in Barcelona, to Madrid, 15 Oct. 1940, PRO, FO 371, C10842/65/17. See also Copy of Conversation with Philippe Bourdet, French First Secretary, 4 Sept. 1940, PRO, FO 371, C9891/65/17.

⁵⁸De Bénouville, *Unknown Warriors*, 55.

⁵⁹*Ibid.*, 48.

De Gaulle also distrusted the Metropolitan Resistance and believed only he was qualified to lead France. "Against the enemy, despite the Allies, regardless of terrible dissensions, I would have to constitute around myself the unity of lacerated France."⁶⁰ Before the war, the general viewed French defensive military doctrine and the Maginot Line as insufficient. The war proved him right. De Gaulle predicted that the Communists would be ready to unleash anarchy at liberation. Only a national liberation government under his guidance could stop them. "Such was my task! To reinstate France as a belligerent, to prevent her subversion, to restore a destiny that depended on herself alone."⁶¹ In a meeting with Frenay and d'Astier, de Gaulle recalled, "Their accounts emphasized the will toward organization and the pressure from the rank-and-file toward unity, but also the extreme individualism of the leaders, from which their rivalries resulted."⁶² The general was unwilling to credit the efforts of the Metropolitan leaders or listen to their concerns. He sought instead to instigate his own unification with the help of Jean Moulin, a.k.a. Max, who assumed primary responsibility for the tremendous task of unifying the Resistance.

Moulin went to London after the Armistice to solicit support and funding for some southern Resistance groups. Moulin returned to France in late 1941 as

⁶⁰De Gaulle, *Narrative*, 307.

⁶¹Ibid.

⁶²Ibid., 346-47.

de Gaulle's delegate-general. He set out to coordinate and control support for a unified Resistance in Metropolitan France. Moulin found and organized the most dedicated resisters into cells of approximately seven men each. Upon an Allied invasion, the cells would form a secret army. Though a good idea on paper, the cells created problems. Each cell leader knew his immediate superior, but not his neighbor. Dewavrin, a.k.a. Passy, an associate of de Gaulle's in London, opposed the cell plan, calling it an example of de Gaulle's preference for propaganda over militant operations.⁶³ De Gaulle favored a policy of *attentisme* and showed a lack of confidence in the Resistance's ability to carry out successfully independent paramilitary actions.

Moulin, with the help of Yves Morandat, spent 1942 in France laying the foundations for unification. Morandat's trade union experience complemented Moulin's intellectual, administrative, and business knowledge. They organized small acts of insurrection and built a framework for Resistance networks. Changes in Vichy policy and Nazi actions had spawned a dramatic growth in the Resistance and advanced Moulin's efforts. German repression and reprisals to Resistance activity began in late 1941 after the Communists joined the Resistance effort. Field Marshal Keitel's "Night and Fog" order of 7 December 1941 called for the instant execution of any non-German civilians guilty of crimes against the Reich or the occupying authorities. The Germans transported those accused to the Reich

⁶³Foot, *SOE*, 181.

for punishment when it was impossible simply to impose a death sentence through the courts. The term "Night and Fog" derived from the Gestapo's announcement of names but never the fate of those arrested. Deportations, usually at night, included many Jews.⁶⁴ Historian M.R.D. Foot described its effect: "For every Frenchman or Frenchwoman that reprisal executions of this kind frightened into acquiescence, a score were shocked into opposition—in their hearts at least—and so became ripe for recruiting."⁶⁵

By the autumn of 1942, Moulin appeared ready to form a national organization. De Gaulle established a military coordinating committee, comprised of the "Armée Secrète" and "Groupes Francs", for southern France with Moulin as its president. The Armée Secrète would remain unarmed until an Allied landing. The Groupes Francs pursued immediate action directed toward embarrassing but not harming collaborators. For example, resisters warned customers before blowing up a newsstand that sold collaborationist newspapers.⁶⁶ The military coordinating committee first met on 11 November 1942, following Operation *Torch*. De Gaulle appointed General Charles Delestraint as commander-in-chief. Henri Frenay secured himself as the administrative advisor to the senior yet less

⁶⁴Chambard, *Maquis*, 28.

⁶⁵Foot, *SOE*, 177.

⁶⁶Sweets, *Politics of Resistance*, 37-38.

experienced Delestraint.⁶⁷ Frenay's Combat forces made up a large part of this new military group, and his power play foreshadowed future quarrels with Delestraint.

The initial results of Moulin's efforts to unite the Resistance would not occur until January 1943, after the Anglo-American invasion of French North Africa. By then, it was too late for the Resistance to play an active role in the campaign. The French Resistance would continue to display unstable characteristics throughout the war. Internal problems and external tensions with the British prevented a cohesive organization. An increased desire to unify coincided with the belief, as Michel stated, that "a purely military victory, without political significance, would be an incomplete victory."⁶⁸ Resisters remained skeptical of de Gaulle's ambitions and methods, even though he served a purpose as a symbol of the Resistance and a regenerated France. De Gaulle would follow another plan to increase his power by pursuing relations, though equally contentious and tenuous, with the British.

⁶⁷Foot, *SOE*, 230.

⁶⁸Michel, "Psychology," 169.

CHAPTER TWO

FROM DAYS OF CONFUSION TO DAZE OF CONFUSION

On 28 June 1940, the British government recognized General Charles de Gaulle as the leader of all Free Frenchmen who rallied to him and the Allied cause. It was a desperate, superficial, largely vacuous act. The phrase "the year alone" has been used frequently to describe Britain in 1940 and 1941, between the fall of France and the entry of the United States into the Second World War. London played host to numerous governments-in-exile. For France, the British needed a symbol to counteract the myth of Pétain and attract French citizens who opposed German rule. Prime Minister Winston Churchill had been a vocal champion for France, believing the United States and Great Britain had mistreated France after the Treaty of Versailles. In and out of power since July 1921, Churchill had consistently pressed for a treaty committing Britain to the defense of France, culminating in the spring of 1939 in a close military alliance.

The British latched onto de Gaulle in the final days of the battle for France because the general ardently favored continuing the fight. John Colville, Churchill's Private Secretary, described the British need for de Gaulle:

Charles de Gaulle was no more a Churchillian than Churchill was a Gaullist; but it may be said without undue exaggeration that Churchill created de Gaulle, though certainly not in his own image, and with still

less fear of contradiction that had it not been for Churchill, de Gaulle would in all probability have been discarded at an early stage in the war.¹

The British thought they could control de Gaulle, a newcomer to the international political scene, but de Gaulle proved them wrong. Desperation and calculation produced confusion. Official British words and actions reflected short-term concerns without thinking through long-term consequences. Combined with ambiguous rhetoric, uncertainty of de Gaulle's place in the overall war effort, and the general's irascible personality, a daze of confusion emerged and enveloped British policy toward de Gaulle.

British War Cabinet minutes first mentioned de Gaulle on 9 June 1940. Churchill made reference to a conversation with the general held that afternoon. The new Undersecretary for National Defense gave the prime minister "a more favorable impression of French morale and determination,"² than the rest of the old guard in the French government. When Churchill and Secretary of War Anthony Eden traveled to Briare on 11 June for a meeting with Reynaud, Churchill saw that only Reynaud and de Gaulle wanted to continue the fight

¹John Colville, *Winston Churchill and His Inner Circle* (New York: Wyndham Books, 1981), 247.

²Great Britain. War Cabinet (Minutes), Conclusions (of Meetings), 9 June 1940, 159(40). Churchill mentioned the young general and urged Roosevelt's support a few days later. Ambassador in the United Kingdom (Kennedy) to the Secretary of State (Hull), 12 June 1940, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1940*, vol. 1 (Washington, DC: GPO, 1959), 247. Hereinafter cited *FRUS*.

against Germany.³ Eden wrote of the French government's reaction to Churchill's statement that Britain would fight on, even if alone, "Reynaud was inscrutable and [commander-in-chief General] Weygand polite, concealing with difficulty his skepticism. [Vice-President of the Council] Marshal Pétain was mockingly incredulous. Though he said nothing, his attitude was obviously *C'est de la blague*."⁴

On 13 June, Churchill related to the War Cabinet another meeting he had that day in Briare with Reynaud, who asked Churchill to release France from her pledge not to seek a separate peace so that he could arrange for an armistice. The two men agreed to appeal once more to President Franklin Roosevelt who had not responded to Reynaud's previous appeal for help of 10 June. Later that day, Churchill received a copy of Roosevelt's response to Reynaud's 10 June letter.

[T]his government is doing everything in its power to make available to the Allied governments the material they so urgently require, and our efforts to do still more are being redoubled. This is so because of our faith in and our support of the ideals for which the Allies are fighting. . . . It is most important to remember that the French and British fleets continue mastery of the Atlantic and other oceans; also to

³Churchill, *Finest Hour*, 159.

⁴*The Memoirs of Anthony Eden, Earl of Avon: The Reckoning* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965), 133.

remember that vital materials from the outside world are necessary to maintain all armies.⁵

Churchill wrongly inferred American action in the near future. The message "came as near as possible to a declaration of war and was probably as much as the President could do without Congress. The President could hardly urge the French to continue the struggle, and to undergo further torture, if he did not intend to enter the war to support them."⁶ The War Cabinet concluded:

[A]lthough the implications of the message might be clear to the Anglo-Saxon mind, they might appear in rather a different light to the French, who would be looking for something more definite. It would be necessary to point out to them that the message contained two points which were tantamount to a declaration of war—first, a promise of all material aid, which implied active assistance; and second, a call to go on fighting even if the government was driven right out of France.⁷

The French, however, better understood the ambiguities, implications, and lack of commitment in the American response. Reynaud sought a firm declaration

⁵Secretary of State (Hull) to the First Secretary of Embassy in France at Tours (Matthews), 13 June 1940, *FRUS, 1940*, vol. 1, 248.

⁶War Cabinet (Minutes), 13 June 1940, 165(40). Some American diplomats inferred war too. "Churchill sees in your note an absolute commitment of the United States to the Allies that if France fights on the United States will be in the war to help them if things go bad at some later date. Frankly as I read the message that is what I see in it." Ambassador in the United Kingdom (Kennedy) to Secretary of State (Hull), 14 June 1940, *FRUS, 1940*, vol. 1, 249. For an opposite view, see Ambassador in France (Bullitt) to the Secretary of State (Hull), 18 May 1940, *FRUS, 1940*, vol. 1, 227.

⁷War Cabinet (Minutes), 165(40).

of war from Roosevelt. "[I]f you cannot give to France in the hours to come the certainty that the United States will come into the war within a very short time, the fate of the world will change."⁸ This irony emerged on 15 June, when Roosevelt told Churchill that his message in no way committed the United States to military participation.⁹

Whether or not American military support would have altered Reynaud's subsequent moves in light of the pressure on him to seek an armistice, the American reply did influence British actions. French capitulation drew nearer, leaving Britain alone to battle Germany. Churchill met with de Gaulle about a proposed declaration of closer union between Britain and France. De Gaulle asserted that dramatic support was essential for Reynaud to keep France in the war. The declaration provided for a constitution that included a single War Cabinet, joint citizenship, and joint defense, foreign, financial, and economic policies.¹⁰ The plan backfired. The majority of the French Council reacted

⁸Deputy Ambassador in France (Biddle) to the Secretary of State (Hull), 14 June 1940, *FRUS, 1940*, vol. 1, 253.

⁹War Cabinet (Minutes), 15 June 1940, 167(40); Secretary of State (Hull) to the Ambassador in the United Kingdom (Kennedy), 13 June 1940, *FRUS, 1940*, vol. 1, 250; *Ibid.*, 14 June 1940, 254; Churchill, *Finest Hour*, 187; John Colville, *The Fringes of Power: 10 Downing Street Diaries 1939-1955* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1985), 156; Eden, *Reckoning*, 135-36.

¹⁰War Cabinet (Minutes), 16 June 1940, 169(40). Although de Gaulle did not foresee an actual fusion of the two countries, he believed the show of solidarity would prove significant. De Gaulle, *Narrative*, 81.

adversely to the proposed declaration. They expected instead a reply to the idea of armistice terms. The Council found the British move arrogant, provincial, and pompous. Pétain refused to examine the declaration on the principle that it relegated France to British Dominion status.¹¹

That the British War Cabinet considered, yet alone drafted, this declaration illustrated its desperation. Over the centuries, Britain and France had spent more time as enemies rather than allies. To make such a leap of faith to complete political integration and to expect France to submit its sovereignty to Britain but not to Germany was peculiar, even under those dire circumstances. The War Cabinet's reliance on de Gaulle's advice, a newcomer defending the minority position of the French Council opinion, was unrealistic. The declaration represented a desperate eleventh-hour move to keep France in the war more than a viable foundation for a future. At the same time, however, the War Cabinet, though under strain, recognized that "such a proclamation raised some very big questions with which it was difficult to deal at such short notice."¹² Future actions raised those and more problematic questions within a matter of days. On 16 June, Reynaud succumbed to mounting pressure within the French Council and resigned. Marshal Pétain, the Victor of Verdun, formed a new government and established the *État Français* at Vichy.

¹¹Churchill, *Finest Hour*, 212-13; Colville, *Fringes*, 166.

¹²War Cabinet (Minutes), 169(40).

To avoid arrest and execution, on 17 June, de Gaulle flew to England with Major-General Sir Edward Spears. Once de Gaulle arrived in England, the British did not know how to handle him. On the one hand, he represented the remnants of a French will to fight the Germans, but he was an unknown quantity. On 18 June, the War Cabinet agreed that de Gaulle should not broadcast on the BBC because he was *persona non grata* in France. The Cabinet hoped the new Vichy government would follow Allied interests. Later, however, after consulting each other individually, the Cabinet reversed its initial decision. Concern over the fate of French aircraft in Bordeaux and German propaganda against continuing the fight led the Cabinet to believe the broadcast would provide a rallying point for French pilots and citizens.¹³ Within the short span of one week, de Gaulle evolved from a newly appointed undersecretary to a potential symbol of resistance.

An early change in de Gaulle's speeches illustrated his conversion. His broadcast of 18 June called on the French to keep fighting and get *in touch* with him. Twenty-four hours later, he spoke of his leadership role. "Faced by the bewilderment of my countrymen, by the disintegration of a government in thrall to the enemy, by the fact that the institutions of my country are incapable, at the moment, of functioning, I, General de Gaulle, a French soldier and military

¹³War Cabinet (Minutes), 18 June 1940, 171(40); Colville, *Fringes*, 164-66.

leader, realize that I now speak for France."¹⁴ The confusion, tension, and disaster of that week, however, merely set the tone for more uncertainty the following week and tenuous relations in the future. In plucking de Gaulle out of obscurity, the British ignored his own transformation, ideas, and personality traits. They saw him as a wind-up doll and thought they could program his words and actions.

British intelligence operative F. W. Deakin described the prevailing attitude toward resistance movements: "The idea of irregular warfare against a continental enemy had never been in historical terms a theme of enquiry in official British military quarters."¹⁵ Other countries had used guerrilla warfare since the Napoleonic Wars, and with the fall of France, Churchill considered new methods of military operations. On 23 June, the War Cabinet agreed in principle to recognize a French National Committee headed by de Gaulle but postponed official announcement until he proposed specific members.¹⁶

With the armistice signed, the Cabinet worried about the fate of the French fleet in the Mediterranean and whether it would fall into German hands.

¹⁴Charles de Gaulle, *The Complete War Memoirs of Charles de Gaulle, Documents*, vol. 2, trans. Jonathan Griffin and Richard Howard (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1964), 11-13.

¹⁵F. W. Deakin, "Great Britain and European Resistance," *European Resistance Movements 1939-45: Proceedings of the Second International Conference on the History of the Resistance Movements Held at Milan 26-29 March 1962* (New York: Pergamon Press, 1964), 98.

¹⁶War Cabinet (Minutes), 23 June 1940, 177(40).

Time was of the essence to find a legitimate and credible focus for any Frenchmen, including the fleet commanders, inclined toward the Allied cause.¹⁷ De Gaulle's broadcast of 23 June preached sedition,¹⁸ which neither complemented British efforts to encourage Frenchmen to fight Germans, not other Frenchmen, nor ensured friendly control of the French fleet. The British still maintained diplomatic relations with the Pétain government and hoped to avoid formal war with Vichy. Sir Hugh Dalton, Minister of Economic Warfare, wrote on 26 June 1940:

Another day of infuriating uncertainty. Still no Frenchmen blowing any trumpets anywhere except de Gaulle in London, and his trumpet blasts are becoming a bit monotonous. The "National Committee" is still only a name. There are rumors of this and that notable Frenchman on his way to England, or, in North Africa. . . . Still no hard news about the fleet. . . . These Frenchmen have all become sawdust, or, if you prefer another metaphor, we see before our eyes nothing less than the liquification of France.¹⁹

¹⁷The War Cabinet disbelieved Reynaud's continued assurances that the fleet would not go to the enemy. The former premier had broken his government's treaty obligations to Britain and promises not to arrange for a separate peace. From the British viewpoint, Reynaud now laid under the German thumb with the rest of the former government. *Ibid.*, 24 June 1940, 178(40).

¹⁸Colville, *Fringes*, 169.

¹⁹*The Second World War Diary of Hugh Dalton 1940-45*, ed. Ben Pimlott (London: Jonathan Cape, 1986), 48.

On 28 June, the British government prepared a statement for de Gaulle's broadcast that evening. "His Majesty's Government recognize General de Gaulle as the leader of all free Frenchmen, wherever they may be, who rally to him in support of the Allied cause."²⁰ The British pledged moral and material aid but narrowly interpreted the statement. As Foreign Secretary, Anthony Eden later wrote that "recognition which H.M.G. have accorded to de Gaulle [was] strictly limited."²¹ The general was the leader of all Frenchmen who rallied to him in conjunction with Allied aims but not the leader of the government of France.

Colville wrote in his diary on 26 June 1940 that it was "never intended that de Gaulle should be any more than a rallying point for expatriated Frenchmen."²² The opposite occurred. Just as the British over optimistically interpreted Roosevelt's vague response to Reynaud's 10 June letter and wrongly anticipated America's entry into the war, many Frenchmen now read more into the British declaration than its authors had intended. De Gaulle thought his committee would be dealt with on all matters pertaining to the war.²³ Two days earlier he had sent Churchill a memorandum outlining his plans for a committee regardless of the

²⁰War Cabinet (Minutes), 28 June 1940, 186(40).

²¹Eden to Sir Samuel Hoare, Ambassador in Madrid, 10 Feb. 1942, PRO, FO 371, 880/32040.

²²Colville, *Fringes*, 172.

²³De Gaulle, *Narrative*, 99.

War Cabinet's formal and final decision.²⁴ French journalists who distrusted de Gaulle believed Major-General Spears created de Gaulle.²⁵ Some American diplomats viewed the announcement as recognizing de Gaulle's committee as the only sovereign authority of France,²⁶ while others held to the British view.²⁷

Though the British anticipated that trouble would follow in the wake of the announcement, they hoped to avoid its consequences. A Confidential Annex to the War Cabinet Minutes of 24 June suggested that the British declaration had gone too far. It implied severing relations with the new French government. "The declaration had not, however, gone as far as this. But in any event those present at the discussion had agreed that we could not draw back. The waverers would be influenced only by strong action on our part. If we hesitated, they would give way all along the line."²⁸ Therefore, a formal agreement of the "organization, employment, conditions of service and equipment of Free French Forces was

²⁴Ibid., *Documents*, 17-18.

²⁵Colville, *Fringes*, 172.

²⁶Deputy Ambassador in France (Biddle) to Secretary of State (Hull), 24 June 1940, *FRUS, 1940*, vol. 1, 266-67.

²⁷Cordell Hull, *The Memoirs of Cordell Hull*, vol. 1 (New York: Macmillan, 1948), 806.

²⁸Great Britain. War Minutes, 24 June 1940, (40)179th Conclusions, Minute 3, Confidential Annex.

drawn up between the prime minister and General de Gaulle, and ratified by an exchange of letters on 7 August 1940."²⁹

Not until the following year did a draft pamphlet describe formal British policy toward de Gaulle as established on 27-28 June. De Gaulle's French National Committee had jurisdiction over those Frenchmen on British territory and administration and military direction over those in Britain. "H[is] M[ajesty's] Government declare that they will recognize such a Provisional French National Committee and will deal with them in all matters concerning the prosecution of the war, *so long as* that Committee continues to represent all French elements resolved to fight the common enemy."³⁰ The words "so long as" precluded open-ended, unconditional support of de Gaulle in the collective mind of the War Cabinet. The broadcast statement supported de Gaulle only as far as other Frenchmen chose to follow him. It did not elevate de Gaulle as *the* leader of France, but rather as *a* symbolic leader for those who supported him. A cover note attached to the draft pamphlet illustrated the deterioration of relations with de Gaulle. "The pamphlet shows the Free French movement in the best light, but

²⁹Draft pamphlet on Free French and de Gaulle and H. M. G. policy, 9 June 1941, PRO, FO 371, 11/28213; De Gaulle, *Documents*, 24-26.

³⁰Draft pamphlet, 9 June 1941. Emphasis added. Apparently de Gaulle disliked the title French National Committee because it implied political ambitions, which he disclaimed at the time, so the War Cabinet amended recognition to the Free French on 28 June. This objection contradicted his rhetoric of 18-19 June.

it would be wrong to ignore its critics.³¹ The Foreign Office viewed de Gaulle as a supporter of both the left wing and quasi-fascist sectors of French politics.³²

Several incidents in the first few months of the war increased Anglo-Free French tensions. On 3 July, the British acted on their concerns about the French fleet in the Mediterranean with Operation *Catapult*. The British fleet sailed to Mers-el-Kébir, a North African port where the French fleet awaited further orders to disarm. The French Navy assumed the British fleet had come to fight the Italian Navy for control of the Mediterranean. Instead, the British Navy told the French to join the British ships in order to fight Germany, or sail under British supervision to ports in England, the West Indies, or the United States to be disarmed until the end of the war, or prepare for a battle with the British fleet. Anglo-French negotiations and the ensuing battle destroyed the French fleet. *Catapult* also took possession of French ships in British ports, such as Alexandria, Egypt.³³

Catapult proved detrimental to the Anglo-French relationship. Designed to demonstrate British determination, the affair eliminated any chance of the French

³¹Ibid.

³²Ibid.

³³War Cabinet (Minutes), 2 July 1940, 191(40); Ibid., 4 July 1940, 193(40); Ibid., 7 July 1940, 196(40); Dorothy Shipley White, *Seeds of Discord: De Gaulle, Free France and the Allies* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1964), 76-79, 82, 84-85.

Navy joining the Allies.³⁴ It increased not only anglophobia among the French population and Vichy officials but also collaboration with the Germans. The operation hindered de Gaulle's recruitment from London because of his association with the British. De Gaulle believed that the French fleet would never be used against the Allies. He was furious when he heard about the *fait accompli*, especially as it caused several large French colonies not to rally to the Free French.³⁵

The joint Anglo-Free French naval expedition to Dakar, a West African colony under Vichy control, proved equally disastrous. Before the attack began on 30 September, a security leak in de Gaulle's headquarters in England resulted in a surprise meeting with Vichy ships positioned south of Gibraltar. Dakar's Governor Boisson, who was pro-Vichy yet anti-German, feared a German occupation of North Africa if he did not order the inhabitants to defend the colony.³⁶ When it became clear only a major expedition could overtake the area, the British ended

³⁴Algiers Consul-General to Foreign Office, 12 Dec. 1942, PRO, FO 371, 8325/32146.

³⁵White, *Seeds of Discord*, 100-101.

³⁶Ambassador in the United Kingdom (Kennedy) to the Secretary of State (Hull), 27 Sept. 1940, *FRUS, 1940*, vol. 3 (Washington, DC: GPO, 1958), 48. See also Robert Mengin, *No Laurels for de Gaulle*, trans. Jay Allen (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1966), 128-30.

the operation.³⁷ Free French credibility decreased with the British, resisters, potential resisters, and opponents. The British Foreign Office stated:

Vichy had been forewarned of the enterprise owing to indiscretions, if not worse, at [de Gaulle's headquarters], and that de Gaulle had been grossly misinformed by his agents about the strength of his following in French West Africa. These suspicions of Free French reliability played their part in fomenting later troubles.³⁸

British support of de Gaulle wavered. "His Majesty's Government will no doubt continue, on the wireless and by other means, to dissociate themselves publicly from any intention of endeavoring to influence Frenchmen as regards their future form of government."³⁹

War secretary Eden, who became foreign secretary for a second time in December 1940, disliked and distrusted the French and de Gaulle from the start.⁴⁰ Eden had little use for any Frenchmen, let alone the peevish and difficult de

³⁷Foreign Office minute, 26 Sept. 1940, PRO, FO 371, C10384/65/17; War Minutes, 16 Sept. 1940, (40)250th Conclusions, Minute 4, Confidential Annex; Ibid., 17 Sept. 1940, (40)252nd Conclusions, Minute 1, Confidential Annex; Ibid., 18 Sept. 1940, (40)253rd Conclusions, Minute 4, Confidential Annex; Ibid., 25 Sept. 1940, (40)258th Conclusions, Minute 2, Confidential Annex; Ibid., 26 Sept. 1940, (40)259th Conclusions, Minute 2, Confidential Annex.

³⁸Outline of Relations between His Majesty's Government and General de Gaulle between June 1940 and June 1943, 8 July 1943, PRO, FO 371, 665/36064.

³⁹Lisbon Chargé d'Affaires Scriveness to Halifax, 22 Sept. 1940, PRO, FO 371, C10293/65/17.

⁴⁰He once told Colville, half-laughing, half-serious, "I hate *all* Frenchmen." Colville, *Fringes*, 404.

Gaulle, because France irreparably humiliated herself by quickly capitulating to Germany. He seldom backed de Gaulle, preferring to leave Britain's options open regarding policy toward France and Vichy. His motto was "cover all bases and hedge all bets."⁴¹ Eden avoided direct contact with de Gaulle when the general acted outrageously.

I expect that most of the Frenchmen you meet regard de Gaulle as being in our pocket, and consider that everything he says or does has our prior approval. If you had to deal with him for a week you would know that this is far from being the truth!⁴²

He arranged for all Free French communications to the Foreign Office to go through French National Committee member Maurice Déjean, who served as de Gaulle's spokesman on foreign policy.⁴³

Even though Eden realized that Britain built up de Gaulle as a symbol of resistance to Germans in France, he still saw an overall disadvantage in affiliating with de Gaulle.⁴⁴ "Unfortunately the main obstacle, which seems to be insuperable, to harmonious relations within the movement and to harmonious collaboration with ourselves is [de Gaulle's] personality and the domination of his

⁴¹Eden note, 8 July 1942, PRO, FO 371, 880/32040.

⁴²Eden to Hoare, FO 371, 880/32040.

⁴³War Cabinet (Minutes), 5 Oct. 1942, 131(42); Eden to Maurice Déjean, 16 Oct. 1942, PRO, FO 371, 90/31950.

⁴⁴Eden note, 8 July 1942.

mind by an extravagant conception of his mission."⁴⁵ With the advantage of hindsight to de Gaulle's later political accomplishments, Eden's memoirs softened his opinion of the general.

I had the most sincere admiration for this great Frenchman's qualities. To know him was to understand how exaggerated was the picture, often created of him in the public mind of arrogance and even majesty. . . . His selflessness made it possible for him to keep the flame of France alive when in political and more diplomatic hands it must have flickered out.

Yet de Gaulle was the victim of his qualities, for the fervor of his faith made him at times too suspicious of the intentions of others. . . . On the most egoistic grounds of national advantage, it was to our interest that France should be strong and that the French empire should survive, if possible intact, but I doubt if General de Gaulle ever believed this.⁴⁶

Other officials found de Gaulle's headquarters chaotic, his behavior a threat to Churchill's personal credibility, and his organization an embarrassment to British dealings with the French people and Vichy.⁴⁷ Foreign Office Permanent Undersecretary Alexander Cadogan's initial impression was that de Gaulle had a "head like a pineapple and hips like a woman."⁴⁸ De Gaulle's enthusiasm and

⁴⁵Eden to Halifax, 13 May 1942, PRO, FO 371, 115/31965. See also Mack to Peake, 1 April 1942, PRO, FO 371, Z2813/161/17/31980.

⁴⁶Eden, *Reckoning*, 290.

⁴⁷Colville, *Fringes*, 276-77, 283.

⁴⁸*The Diaries of Sir Alexander Cadogan O.M. 1938-1945*, ed. David Dilks (London: Cassell, 1971), 302. Hugh Dalton slightly misquoted Cadogan's description, substituting banana for pineapple. *Diary of Hugh Dalton*, 60.

devotion failed to overcome his lack of political experience or eradicate the impression he conveyed of an unnatural leader. Sir Samuel Hoare, British ambassador in Madrid, said the de Gaulle movement "excites interest, but not great confidence; de Gaulle is popular but considered unsuitable for the task of leadership on account of his junior rank."⁴⁹

W. H. B. Mack, head of the Foreign Office's French Department, agreed that de Gaulle lacked an aptitude for the art of politics but disagreed that he possessed popular appeal or charm.⁵⁰ More experienced leaders initially joined with Pétain, such as Admiral J. F. Darlan, or refused to leave France, such as Jewish politician Georges Mandel, or left France and the fighting entirely, such as former secretary general of the French Foreign Office Alexis Léger.⁵¹ John Colville wrote:

There was no other available politician of comparable renown and experience. The lot therefore fell on Charles de Gaulle. He was a single-minded man with one supreme obsession: the honor and glory of France.

⁴⁹Hoare note, 8 Oct. 1940, PRO, FO 371, C10909/65/17/24313.

⁵⁰Mack to Permanent Undersecretary Sir Alexander Cadogan, 5 Nov. 1940, PRO, FO 371, C12069/24314.

⁵¹Léger took up exile residence in Washington, D.C., and worked at the Library of Congress. On the eve of British recognition of de Gaulle in June 1940, Léger expressed deep concern over supporting such an unknown leader, believing it caused more harm than good. War Cabinet (Minutes), 178(40). Léger was an outspoken critic of de Gaulle in Washington diplomatic circles. Raoul Aglion, *Roosevelt and de Gaulle, Allies in Conflict: A Personal Memoir* (New York: Free Press, 1988), 184-90.

Scrupulously honest and unself-seeking where his personal interests were concerned, he was devious and offensive when he thought the interests of his country were at stake. For him any means whatever justified his only end, which was to restore the greatness of France.⁵²

The British government struggled to ascertain the extent of de Gaulle's political ambitions. Originally, the Free French movement had a military focus but as British distrust of de Gaulle grew, so too did his exclusion from military matters.⁵³ Major Sir Desmond Morton of the Foreign Office suggested a political focus for the Free French⁵⁴ but that contradicted the British principle of letting the French people choose their own leader. Just as de Gaulle's political skills had been questioned, so too were his democratic tendencies when the movement lacked a diversity of independent minds.⁵⁵

Throughout the war, the British disliked much of what de Gaulle broadcasted because of the potential implications of his words but failed to recognize their own shortcomings and potential for disaster in their statements and actions. The Ministry of Information, under Viscount Brendan Bracken,

⁵²Colville, *Inner Circle*, 249.

⁵³Draft pamphlet, 9 June 1941; Outline of relations, 8 July 1943; Cadogan note, 28 Sept. 1942, PRO, FO 371, 90/31950.

⁵⁴Morton to Mack, 3 Sept. 1941, PRO, FO 371, 11/28214; Foreign Office note, 18 July 1941, PRO, FO 371, 11/28213.

⁵⁵Eden to Halifax, FO 371, 115/31965; War Cabinet (Minutes), 96(41); Mack note, 30 Dec. 1940, PRO, FO 371, Z114/114/17/28362.

regularly crossed swords with de Gaulle. Unlike the other governments-in-exile, the general frequently submitted copies of his proposed broadcast speeches long after the Ministry's standard deadline for review.⁵⁶ De Gaulle attacked Pétain, a tactic Bracken disliked because the Marshal was a sacred symbol to many French citizens.

De Gaulle's independence sabotaged the British government's overall propaganda plan.⁵⁷ Bracken spoke of de Gaulle's detrimental effect on the war effort:

Propaganda should be presented as an indivisible whole. Talks, news, and entertainment should be carefully planned by one authority with a view both to short- and long-term policy. Not only should the propaganda to each foreign country be so planned but coordination between the lines of propaganda to be put out to the different countries must be ensured by the responsibility of one authority. If this is generally true of propaganda for all countries, it is still more true for France where our line of policy is a delicate one requiring the greatest care in presentation and in the avoidance of pitfalls.⁵⁸

Symbolism and reality conflicted in the delivery of rhetoric to the subjected people of France. De Gaulle threatened not to broadcast if the Ministry of

⁵⁶Ministry of Information note, 3 Jan. 1941, PRO, FO 371, Z176/114/17/28362; War Cabinet (Minutes), 19 Jan. 1942, 9(42).

⁵⁷Ministry of Information note, 3 Jan. 1941; Yencken, British Embassy in Madrid, to Mack, 27 Aug. 1940, PRO, FO 371, C9234/65/17/24312; Speight note, 12 Feb. 1941, PRO, FO 371, Z964/114/17/28362.

⁵⁸Ministry of Information note, 3 Jan. 1941.

Information censored his speeches. Bracken recognized the value of de Gaulle's voice over the airwaves but feared that allowing de Gaulle to speak uncensored undermined the whole propaganda policy.⁵⁹

Churchill, the most ardent champion of France in the British government, admired de Gaulle but neither particularly liked him nor forgave de Gaulle's constant suspicions of British motives throughout the war.⁶⁰ De Gaulle resented both the lack of attention given to his Free French cause and the British propensity for "professional decorum and habit to respect the normal order of things—that is to say, Vichy and its missions."⁶¹ De Gaulle suspected that Britain had selfish designs, which Britain disclaimed, on the French colonies, such as Syria and Lebanon.⁶² The general privately protested the term "minor ally"⁶³ and publicly protested treatment as one. "Over a period of 1,500 years, [France] has become accustomed to being a great power, and insists that everybody, and first of all her friends, should not lose sight of this fact."⁶⁴

⁵⁹Ibid.

⁶⁰Churchill, *Finest Hour*, 35.

⁶¹De Gaulle, *Narrative*, 93-94.

⁶²Colville, *Inner Circle*, 249.

⁶³Ministry of Information note, 19 Oct. 1942, PRO, FO 371, 90/31950.

⁶⁴General Charles de Gaulle speech, 1 April 1942, PRO, FO 371, Z2813/161/17/31980.

Not surprisingly, Churchill questioned each step he took in support of de Gaulle, in spite of his admiration for the general's spirit. John Colville explained: "Almost the only obstacle to the surge of anti-French feeling in government circles was Winston Churchill."⁶⁵ When de Gaulle's behavior irritated Churchill, the prime minister subtly pulled back British support. For example, when de Gaulle gave an interview in August 1941 that included several anti-British statements, Churchill told the governmental departments to "adopt a cautious and dilatory attitude toward all requests made by the Free French."⁶⁶

When Eden replaced Viscount Edward Halifax as Foreign Secretary, Halifax became Ambassador to the United States. As American involvement in the war evolved from benevolent neutrality toward the British cause to active involvement by December 1941, Halifax served as a conduit between divergent British and American views of the French Resistance and Vichy regime. Already strained relations between Churchill and de Gaulle grew more tenuous as American influence over the course of the war increased. British support of the Resistance movement waned but did not disappear with the emergence of a stronger ally. Halifax reported that, to the Americans, it would be a "fatal mistake for the United States government to recognize any refugee group [de Gaulle] as a

⁶⁵Colville, *Inner Circle*, 250.

⁶⁶War Cabinet (Minutes), 1 Sept. 1941, 88(41); *Ibid.*, 28 Aug. 1941, 87(41); Mack to Morton, 28 Aug. 1941, PRO, FO 371, Z7696/114/17/28363; Outline of relations, 8 July 1943; Colville, *Fringes*, 439.

government."⁶⁷ For the British, however, "tiresome though he is, General de Gaulle possesses qualities which are not possessed by any other members of the Free French movement or by any of the Frenchmen in London or the United States who have hitherto held themselves aloof. Moreover, he symbolizes resistance in occupied France itself."⁶⁸ Eden saw opportunity in this difference of opinion to sideline, at least temporarily, de Gaulle. He proposed a compromise that de Gaulle "should put his house in order and form a more broadly based committee, bringing in at least a few more of independent mind who do not obey blindly. . . ."⁶⁹

Support of de Gaulle contradicted the Americans' Wilsonian principles of self-determination. The French population had not chosen him to lead the fight against the Axis. For many, de Gaulle was a British lackey with little support inside or outside of France.⁷⁰ Personal animosity developed between Roosevelt and de Gaulle. The president found de Gaulle arrogant, bad-tempered, over-

⁶⁷Halifax to Foreign Office, 8 May 1942, PRO, FO 371, 115/31965. See also Assistant Undersecretary of State Strang to Foreign Office, 4 Sept. 1941, PRO, FO 371, 11/28214.

⁶⁸British response to Halifax, 12 May 1942, PRO, FO 371, 115/31965. See also Foreign Office note, 26 Aug. 1942, PRO, FO 371, 115/31966.

⁶⁹Anthony Eden reply to Halifax, 13 May 1942, PRO, FO 371, 115/31965.

⁷⁰See, for example, Memorandum of Conversation by the Undersecretary of State (Welles), 8 May 1942, *FRUS, 1942*, vol. 2 (Washington, DC: GPO, 1962), 511-13; Memorandum of Conversation, 11 May 1942, *FRUS, 1942*, vol. 2, 513-14; Memorandum of Conversation, 13 May 1942, *FRUS, 1942*, vol. 2, 516.

sensitive, and uncooperative. Those traits convinced Roosevelt that the people of France would never elect de Gaulle as their leader. Officials around Roosevelt also had little respect for de Gaulle and found him anti-American.⁷¹ British frustration with de Gaulle, in spite of its alleged support, made growing American influence easier to accept and harder to refute. Halifax stated that the Americans were not alone in describing de Gaulle as a difficult person.⁷² Just as Eden wanted to pursue all avenues of relations with the French factions, Halifax stated an advantage to American relations with Pétain. "In this manner, whatever way things might develop each . . . could benefit by the relations with the other."⁷³

Even before the United States entered the war in December 1941, the British relied on the Americans more than the Free French, and the Resistance suffered from material and moral neglect. Churchill told de Gaulle that the British could not afford any major conflicts with the Americans. In August 1941, Churchill and Roosevelt signed the Atlantic Charter, and the Americans might

⁷¹See, for example, Memorandum of Conversation by Undersecretary of State (Welles), 28 Sept. 1942, *FRUS, 1942*, vol. 2, 540; President of the French National Committee at London (de Gaulle) to President Roosevelt, n.d. Oct. 1942, *FRUS, 1942*, vol. 2, 541-44; Memorandum by Acting Chief of the Division of European Affairs (Atherton) to the Undersecretary of State (Welles), 26 Oct. 1942, *FRUS, 1942*, vol. 2, 544; Memorandum of Conversation by Secretary of State (Hull), 21 Dec. 1942, *FRUS, 1942*, vol. 2, 553.

⁷²Halifax note, 18 June 1942, PRO, FO 371, 115/31965.

⁷³Halifax to the Foreign Office, 27 Dec. 1941, PRO, FO 371, 56/28326. See also Consul General Haggard to Foreign Office, 16 Dec. 1941, PRO, FO 371, 56/28326.

construe recognition of de Gaulle as a violation of its terms. Article Three respected "the right of all peoples to choose the form of government under which they will live. . . ."74 In January 1942, when the Allies redrafted the Charter as the Declaration of United Nations, Roosevelt refused to include de Gaulle's Fighting French.⁷⁵

De Gaulle ignored the Charter's application to French territory, particularly Saint Pierre and Miquelon, two French islands ten miles off the Newfoundland coast. In September 1940, many islanders expressed their interest in Gaullism and formed the Légion du Général de Gaulle, despite the Vichy Governor de Bournat's attempts to suppress the movement. Knowing that the Canadians and the Americans intended to take the islands, de Gaulle ordered Admiral Muselier and four Fighting French vessels to seize control of Saint Pierre and Miquelon on Christmas 1941. Roosevelt demanded that de Gaulle turn the islands over to Canada because Free French possession endangered relations with Pétain. De Gaulle's actions frustrated bad American-Free French relations and increased Anglo-American tensions.⁷⁶ Secretary of State Cordell Hull accused

⁷⁴Sir Llewellyn Woodward, *British Foreign Policy in the Second World War*, vols. I, II (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1970), 202.

⁷⁵*Ibid.*, 209-10.

⁷⁶Concern of the United States Over the Control of the Wireless Radio Station at Saint Pierre and the Seizure of Saint Pierre and Miquelon by the Free French Forces, 3 Nov. to 31 Dec. 1941, *FRUS, 1941*, vol. 2 (Washington, DC: GPO, 1959), 540-70; Concern of the United States Over the Seizure of Saint

Great Britain of initiating the entire affair since Churchill had given de Gaulle his moral and financial blessing. The prime minister, however, disapproved of de Gaulle proceeding without notifying the Americans and found the subsequent conflict embarrassing for the British and threatening for the Free French.⁷⁷

A British military expedition in May 1942 stifled de Gaulle's plans to reassert his military authority. De Gaulle had planned with the British a joint Anglo-Free French takeover of the French colony Madagascar because of a feared Japanese capture of the Indian Ocean island. The British, however, decided to capture unilaterally Madagascar on 6 May, which angered de Gaulle. The expedition may have damaged Anglo-Free French relations and dismissed Free French claims to sovereignty,⁷⁸ but Free French exclusion limited provocation of Vichy. The importance of Pétain's reactions had increased with the Anglo-

Pierre and Miquelon Islands by Free French Forces, 1 Jan. to 26 March 1942, *FRUS, 1942*, vol. 2, 655-71.

⁷⁷War Cabinet (Minutes), 26 Dec. 1941, 136(41); *Ibid.*, 12 Jan. 1942, 4(42); *Ibid.*, 5 March 1942, 29(42); *Ibid.*, 9 March 1942, 32(42); *Ibid.*, 16 March 1942, 34(42); *Ibid.*, 18 March 1942, 35(42); War Minutes, 14 Jan. 1942, (42)6th Conclusions, Minute not known, Confidential Annex; Outline of relations, 8 July 1943.

⁷⁸Ambassador in the United Kingdom (Kennedy) to the Secretary of State (Hull), 16 June 1942, *FRUS, 1942*, vol. 2, 528.

American invasion of North Africa, Operation *Torch*, which was scheduled to begin in six months.⁷⁹

Another major conflict between the British and the French Resistance arose over intelligence operations. Prior to the fall of France, British Military Intelligence cooperated with the French Deuxième Bureau. In July 1940, with this link broken, the British created the Special Operations Executive (SOE) to work independently and with resisters on specific military missions. According to SOE operative F. W. Deakin, the SOE recruited "individual agents for precise tasks of intelligence and sabotage, and to avoid as far as possible the centralizing tendencies both of the Resistance groups now appearing inside France and the Free French headquarters in London."⁸⁰ Sir Colin Gubbins, head of the SOE during the Second World War, said the SOE combined elements of various government departments for the purpose of attacking the enemy with unorthodox methods.

Here was the problem and the plan, then: to encourage and enable the peoples of the occupied countries to harass the German war effort at every possible point by sabotage, subversion, go-slow practices, coup de main raids, etc., and at the same time to build up secret forces therein, organized,

⁷⁹Memorandum of Conversation by the Assistant Secretary of State (Berle), 12 May 1942, *FRUS*, 1942, vol. 2, 514.

⁸⁰Deakin, "Great Britain," 107. This did not stop Free French propaganda, however, claiming de Gaulle as the "sole voice of France in respect of SOE work in France. . . ." Outline of relations, 8 July 1943.

armed, and trained to take their part only when the final assault began. These two objects are, in fact, fundamentally incompatible: to divert attention from the creation of secret armies meant avoiding any activity which would attract German attention; to act offensively entailed attracting the special attention and efforts of the Gestapo and S.S. and the redoubling of vigilance on their part. Not an easy problem, but somehow the two had to be done.⁸¹

Aware of incompatible goals, SOE leaders faced problems in the field similar to the Metropolitan Resistance. The overlapping of sections, hostility between British and French intelligence units,⁸² and animosity between British military and intelligence agents hindered operations. Maurice Buckmaster, a British intelligence agent, described many of the problems. "Subversive warfare was a new and untried weapon: there was no code for the underground warrior, except to think and act faster than the German security police or the French Milice."⁸³ Because this secret warfare was new on such a large scale in the Second World War, an initial reluctance emerged among the military and experienced spies to accept these agents. Many disliked the independence these new spies developed and believed their unwarranted arrogance caused needless errors in judgment. Buckmaster continued, "the value of our activities was not easily

⁸¹Major-General Sir Colin Gubbins, "Resistance Movements in the War," *Royal United Service Institution Journal* (May 1948): 211.

⁸²See, for example, Speight note, 14 Jan. 1941, PRO, FO 371, 82/41904.

⁸³Maurice J. Buckmaster, *Specially Employed: The Story of British Aid to French Patriots of the Resistance* (London: Batchworth Press, 1952), 64.

intelligible. . . . It was difficult to get the military authorities to take us seriously. What proved to be a new arm of the service seemed, in their eyes, to be an elaborate and dangerous charade."⁸⁴ Agents could not disclose the specifics of a mission or its place in the general war plan, even if they knew, and had difficulty receiving material resources from the military.⁸⁵

Hostilities between British and Free French intelligence overshadowed intra-British conflicts. The strained Churchill-de Gaulle relationship precluded most opportunities for successful collaboration between the SOE and the Bureau Central de Renseignements et d'Action, the civil executive committee of the Conseil National de la Résistance. De Gaulle "had to be rude to the British to prove to French eyes that he was not a British puppet. He certainly carried out this policy with perseverance."⁸⁶ SOE had been ordered not to work too closely with de Gaulle because he lacked solid support in Britain and Metropolitan France. De Gaulle made this order easier to carry out. According to historian Michael Bird, "The SOE resented the fact that Churchill had agreed to the Free French setting up an independent intelligence service, while de Gaulle and his

⁸⁴Ibid., 60-61.

⁸⁵Ibid., 61.

⁸⁶Churchill, *Finest Hour*, 23.

officers, blinded by an almost overwhelming inferiority complex, were bitterly opposed to any British agents working in France."⁸⁷

SOE resisted giving de Gaulle any real authority to back up his role as a symbol of Fighting France.⁸⁸ De Gaulle wanted control of the two SOE sections operating in France. The F section encompassed both French and non-French recruits who received directives from the British Chiefs of Staff and would assist in demolitions during the Normandy invasion. Historian Jorgen Haestrup found that many of the French recruits were those "who volunteered for work in the section often because . . . [they] did not feel at home in the de Gaulle circles. . .

⁸⁹ The RF section consisted mostly of French people who conducted some sabotage but focused on an explosion of French opinion for the Allies to exploit later. Haestrup contrasted the two sections:

The F Section was afraid of centralization and the inevitable roundups which it brought with it; the RF section had the duty of cultivating the idea of the centralized structure of all Resistance within one great superstructure. The inevitable overlapping and friction

⁸⁷Michael J. Bird, *The Secret Battalion* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1964), 23.

⁸⁸War Minutes, 20 Aug. 1942, (42)114th Conclusions, Minute 2, Confidential Annex; Draft statement, 14 July 1942, PRO, FO 371, 115/31966; Foot, *SOE*, xviii-xix.

⁸⁹Jorgen Haestrup, *Europe Ablaze: An Analysis of the History of the European Resistance Movements 1939-1945* (Odense University Press, 1978), 307.

between the two sections' work was the price which had to be paid.⁹⁰

The F and RF sections created several independent circuits in France and armed thousands of resisters. SOE circuits and Resistance networks argued over who received the limited amount of available supplies. Delivering supplies to the Resistance had proven problematic. Infiltration through neutral countries permitted only small shipments. Sea delivery imposed a heavy risk just to reach a coastline, let alone the inland regions of France. Airplanes were unable to fly over enemy territory with minimal risk, especially early in the war. Difficult mountain airdrops exposed the maquis and their arsenals. After his first trip as de Gaulle's special envoy, Jean Moulin submitted a report to the British in October 1941 describing the needs of the Resistance, which included moral support, establishment of intra-Resistance communications, money, and armaments. He requested three million francs a month for three networks, to be doubled at year's end. The money would be used to increase propaganda but not violence against the *État Français*.⁹¹ Although the Allies did not wish to incite a rebellion yet, the intensified propaganda conflicted with their emphasis on military aims.

⁹⁰Ibid., 312.

⁹¹Jean Moulin, "Report on the Activities, Plans and Requirements of the Groups formed in France with a view to the eventual liberation of the country," (October 1941) Appendix E in Foot, *SOE*, 498.

With little Anglo-French Resistance cooperation, British intelligence and sabotage units received the bulk of available resources. This irritated the Resistance networks⁹² and fostered the perception that the Resistance lacked the necessary commitment to fight the Germans.⁹³ SOE believed the Resistance asked British agents to relay a high proportion of inappropriate political messages.⁹⁴ Complications would multiply when the SOE combined in September 1943 with its American counterpart, the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), into the SOE/SO under predominantly American control. The failure to establish good British-French Resistance relations meant that Resistance networks would receive less moral and material support in future operations.

British policy toward de Gaulle developed quickly and incompletely in June 1940. De Gaulle's symbolism was important, even during the times of strained relations with the British. Churchill expected the Cabinet to avoid the appearance of anything but blissful British relations with de Gaulle and solidarity within the Free French movement, regardless of reality. The prime minister often "emphasized the extreme importance of not allowing any public mention in the press of differences in the Free French movement. The movement was of the

⁹²See Mack note, 15 Nov. 1943, PRO, FO 371, 36059B; Ibid., 25 Nov. 1943, PRO, FO 371, 36059B.

⁹³Charles Peake, British representative to the Free French, to Mack, 3 Nov. 1943, PRO, FO 371, 36059B.

⁹⁴Robert Brook to Mack, 15 Nov. 1943, PRO, FO 371, 36059B.

utmost importance, but its influence might suffer seriously if it were split."⁹⁵

Churchill's motivation laid not in promoting de Gaulle as the legitimate head of a French government but rather in counteracting the image of Pétain as the only savior of France. If other viable leaders emerged at anytime before Moulin's efforts to unify the French Resistance around de Gaulle, few in the British government would have hesitated to cast de Gaulle aside.⁹⁶ Even Churchill might have done so without much remorse given the number of times de Gaulle had tested his patience.⁹⁷

This ambivalent and fragile support for the Free French coincided with a dual policy of developing de Gaulle's movement and keeping other options open, including one with Vichy. Even by February 1942, long after formal diplomatic relations ceased between Britain and Vichy, Eden advocated casting a wide net with regard to France. "Pétain, of course, is quite wrong in thinking that we regard de Gaulle as our only French friend. Our policy is—and I have made this clear to many Frenchmen during the last year—to collaborate with any Frenchman

⁹⁵War Cabinet (Minutes), 24 Sept. 1941, 96(41).

⁹⁶An opportunity arose after the invasion of North Africa in which de Gaulle and General Henri Giraud attempted cooperation, but de Gaulle soon forced Giraud out.

⁹⁷Colville wrote on 27 August 1941, "I was on late duty and most of the time was occupied with de Gaulle, whose attitude is deplorable and whose pronouncements, private and public, are intolerable. The P.M. is sick to death of him." Colville, *Fringes*, 432.

who is prepared to collaborate with us in resistance to our enemies."⁹⁸ Rooker, the British representative to the Fighting French, reported a conversation where de Gaulle said to Déjean: "*Je joue tout contre tout et je gagne chaque fois.*" During the past two years, bluff has stood de Gaulle in good stead. It is important to make it clear that cooperation, and not bluff, is the only policy likely to benefit him."⁹⁹

The dynamic nature of the French Resistance exasperated efforts to control symbolism and pursue all options and led to clashes and jealousies with Britain over SOE activities. British frustration with de Gaulle mounted over failed and forbidden military missions, including Dakar in September 1940, when many thought it would be his undoing, and Saint Pierre and Miquelon in December 1941, when many hoped it would be his undoing. The British Foreign Office frequently wondered if de Gaulle would do less damage and be more controllable if he stayed in London or went to North Africa. Cadogan believed de Gaulle would be more effective in the Allied war effort if he remained on French soil but more controllable if he stayed in London. W. H. B. Mack thought de Gaulle would be more successful and controllable if stayed in London, but the Foreign Office would have trouble dissociating from him should the need arise.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸Eden to Hoare, 10 Feb. 1942.

⁹⁹Rooker, British Representative to Fighting French, to Foreign Office, 28 Sept. 1942, PRO, FO 371, 90/31950.

¹⁰⁰Mack to Cadogan, 5 Nov. 1940.

The British government often fell short of its own expectations. The government pursued a foolhardy policy of building up an image of de Gaulle without taking into account the general's personality. Churchill found the Resistance valuable for future use but did not provide proper support. Sir Samuel Hoare, British Ambassador in Madrid, summarized the British policy.

I have for some weeks been chewing the cud of ignorance about France, and my belief is gradually hardening that neither H.M.G. nor their experts have any solid background against which they could effectively defend, before a debating society of judges from Mars, their day-by-day actions and reactions to French developments.¹⁰¹

By the time the Americans joined the war effort, strained British-French Resistance relations could not turn around with rising American influence over military and strategic operations.

By November 1942 and the invasion of North Africa, the desperate and vacuous gesture by the British of recognizing de Gaulle as a leader of those French citizens who rallied to him in June 1940 had failed. On 3 November 1942, Churchill told Eden, "I propose to break *Torch* to [de Gaulle] on the night before myself personally. I want no 'olive branch,' but a soldierly compliment about his men."¹⁰² This remark illustrated the problem of knowingly creating a symbol out of

¹⁰¹Hoare to Sir Orme Sargent, Foreign Office, Political Intelligence Department, 4 March 1942, PRO, FO 371, 880/32040.

¹⁰²Winston Churchill to Eden, 3 Nov. 1942, PRO, FO 371, 90/31950. See also Cadogan note, 8 Nov. 1942, PRO, FO 371, 90/31950.

an unknown individual, without fully thinking through the consequences, and then trying to maximize the symbol's potential and minimize its independence. British relations with de Gaulle and the French Resistance movement as a whole during the remainder of the war would not develop diplomatically and militarily. The British misunderstood de Gaulle, and the general abused and snubbed the support of his early benefactor.

CONCLUSION

In 1941, an official in the British Foreign Office accurately described his government's relationship with de Gaulle. "In fairness to de Gaulle, it should be remembered that, as incomprehensible Frenchmen are to us, we are still more incomprehensible to Frenchmen."¹ This mutual perception set the tone for British-French Resistance relations throughout the Second World War. The Resistance neither emerged as a unified and efficient movement nor earned substantive British respect and support.

The inability of the Resistance to unify and centralize power resulted from several factors. After years of unstable French governments and military occupation, an exhausted French population looked to several leaders. De Gaulle and Pétain both believed France had to be saved to rise again but disagreed on the course of her salvation. They exemplified the vacillating French population. The armistice left its opponents dangling. Wartime conditions imposed an enormous strain on those citizens opposed to resistance and saw resisters as creating more problems for France. Resisters were homeless and had no stable past to promote and reassert. Instead, resisters advanced their own personal philosophies. A wide array of politically oriented networks and individuals led small loyal followings. Only 10 percent of the population participated in the

¹Draft pamphlet, 9 June 1941.

Resistance through most of the war, but the movement was larger than anything in prior French experience. Politics overshadowed early objectives of ridding France of the Germans and consistently set back unification at each stage.

De Gaulle emerged as a symbolic and nominal leader of the Resistance because he had access, though tenuous, to the British. Still, de Gaulle's egotistical, authoritative, and opinionated personality caused tensions within the Metropolitan Resistance and with the British. The general lacked the legal legitimacy of other exiled governments in London. He had no basis on which to stake a claim for the political leadership of France, and the British avoided endowing him with such legality and responsibility. Many British officials refused to accept de Gaulle as the best intermediary with the Metropolitan Resistance and leader of French interests. They resorted to political games to thwart de Gaulle. The British were reluctant, understandably, to arm civilians without military experience. SOE units within France antagonized resisters because agents performed tasks the Resistance felt better qualified for and took away recruits and armaments. Without armaments, resisters could not act or prepare to act militarily. However just the British policy, it left politics as the resisters' primary outlet for dissent.

Unification of the Resistance did not begin until January 1943 when Moulin arranged for Combat, Libération, and Franc-Tireur to combine into the

"Mouvements Unis de la Résistance".² Continued ideological differences and a deep distrust for one another ensured a fragile alliance. Combat's Frenay held talks with a member of the Vichy government in hopes of recruiting some of his old comrades. Libération's d'Astier was suspicious of Frenay's military past and present dedication and temporarily broke off negotiations. Moulin's troubles also encompassed de Gaulle. The general tried to exert centralized control from London over the Metropolitan Resistance. He believed this would end continental rivalries and advance his program of *attentisme*. Interior forces strongly opposed outsiders dictating actions within France.

In March 1943, Moulin added a national structure to the Mouvements Unis de la Résistance with the creation of the "Conseil National de la Résistance". It incorporated politicians, anti-politicians, trade unionists, churchmen, soldiers, and four of the major northern networks, which were the "Organisation Civile et Militaire", "Ceux de la Résistance", "Ceux de la Libération", and "Libération-Nord". The primarily Gaullist Zone Occupée made incorporation of the northern networks into the Conseil simpler. The fifth major network the Communist "Front National" did not join this attempt at national unification.³ The Conseil tried to deemphasize ideology and supported de Gaulle as the symbolic leader of the

²See also BBC Monitoring of Radio France, 2 Feb. 1944, PRO, FO 371, 318/41923.

³Foreign Office note, 11 Aug. 1944, PRO, FO 371, 318/41925.

Resistance. Conflicts concerned the level of paramilitary operations, but the lack of armaments avoided a confrontation within the Conseil.⁴

In May 1943, the Conseil National de la Résistance completed its constitution. A few weeks later, however, the organization suffered irreparable damage, despite being under the nominal leadership of de Gaulle. The Gestapo arrested General Delestraint, Moulin, and the other Conseil delegates. Moulin died in a Lyon prison of wounds sustained from torture. Although he died without revealing Resistance secrets, Moulin failed to arrange for his successors and left the Conseil, in effect, leaderless. Questions about Moulin's motivations for secrecy have revolved around the need for security, his desire for power and control, and his possible role as a Soviet agent. Without a charismatic leader to fill the void, the Gaullist delegation left the Conseil. Georges Bidault, Frenay's second in command in Combat, finally took over the leadership.⁵

The Conseil National de la Résistance held only one more meeting before liberation in December 1943 in Paris. The Conseil agreed that its members would

⁴A Mouvements circular to the maquis calling for enlistment into the united cause stated a death penalty for losing one of the very rare weapons to be supplied. Foreign Office note, 25 May 1943, PRO, FO 371, 36059B.

⁵Ibid., 242, 244-45. Ironically, after this structural disaster, British papers exaggerated the unity of the Resistance and its inclusion in the Allied war effort. The *Times* referred to the developments as a "national mass movement," and the *Manchester Guardian* stated, "[o]rganized resistance is looked to by 85 to 90 percent of the population. . . ." Foreign Office note, 2 Sept. 1943, PRO, FO 371, 36059B; Ibid., 9 Sept. 1943, PRO, FO 371, 36059B.

consist of Libération, Franc-Tireur, Combat, Radical-Socialist, Parti Démocratique Populaire, Organisation Civile et Militaire, Fédération Républicaine Nationale, Confédération Générale du Travail, Confédération Française de Travailleurs Chrétiens, Communists, Socialists, Alliance Démocratique, Ceux de la Résistance, Ceux de la Libération, Libération-Nord, and this time, Front National.⁶ Prior to liberation, other attempts at unification occurred but never equaled the one-time accomplishment of continental and Gaullist delegations under Moulin. The Conseil unified diverse networks on paper but not in character and effectiveness. Moulin may have accumulated too much power for himself. He held the three important positions of president of the Conseil National de la Résistance, member of the Conseil National Français, which was the directing organ of la France Combattante in London, and General de Gaulle's personal envoy in France. Moulin, however, was the only trusted link between de Gaulle and the Metropolitan Resistance, and his actions may have been necessary.

The attempt at unification came too late to improve the status of the Resistance with the British. In November 1942, the Allies invaded French North Africa in Operation *Torch*. When the subsequent Italian campaign stalled outside of Rome, Churchill increased supplies to the Resistance, especially the southern maquis. The Allies were in the process of deciding on an invasion of Normandy, *Overlord*, or southern France, *Anvil*, or both. *Anvil* meant Churchill could

⁶Foreign Office note, 12 Oct. 1944, PRO, FO 371, 318/41926.

concentrate on Italy and possibly gain more of Europe. Despite his troubles with de Gaulle, which included stymying the general's words and actions,⁷ the prime minister promoted the Resistance in discussions with Roosevelt. He tried to prove to the Americans that resisters could play a major role in *Anvil*, which would take away fewer troops from Italy. Churchill's arming of the maquis gave resisters a false hope because he used the tactic as a tool in the Anglo-American dispute over the second front. Churchill told de Gaulle that Britain would not side with the Resistance against the Americans. When the Allies decided to launch *Overlord* in early June 1944 and follow up with *Anvil*, later called *Dragoon*, in August, Churchill drastically reduced shipments to the Resistance. The British did not explore the continuation of material support.⁸

A few in the British government supported utilizing the Resistance. Rooker, the British representative to the Comité Français, believed British, American, and French representatives needed to coordinate better supply distribution. "Failure to arm and to use the forces prepared in accordance with the wishes of Allied propaganda to fight in the enemy's rear at the moment of landing

⁷See, for example, Churchill to Eden, 30 April 1944, PRO, FO 371, 2870/41980; *Ibid.*, 7 May 1944, PRO, FO 371, 2870/41980; Eden to Churchill, 8 May 1944, PRO, FO 371, 2870/41980; Mack note, 8 May 1944, PRO, FO 371, 2870/41980.

⁸See Gerhard L. Weinberg, *A World at Arms: a Global History of World War II* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

would have grave military, political, and psychological consequences."⁹ Another British official said, "There is unfortunately only too much justice in the French claim that full use is not being made, and at the present rate could hardly be made before D-Day, of the potential support of Resistance groups at the time of an Allied landing."¹⁰

Still, the British feared arming a particular group of resisters or civilians. Despite growing unity, if one network possessed a lot of weaponry, it would no doubt concentrate on increasing its own political position. At a meeting between Churchill and d'Astier in January 1944, the latter reassured the prime minister that the various Resistance groups would put politics aside until the enemy left. He pleaded for arms for the desperate maquis. Churchill expressed reservations about Free French security, press leaks, and the Resistance's sincerity in unequivocally accepting Eisenhower's instructions on D-Day.¹¹

Proposed D-Day tasks for resisters included interfering with German troop movements on railroads and roads, disrupting the German Air Force, attacking local enemy headquarters, harrassing the enemy generally, preserving or

⁹Rooker to Foreign Office, 11 Jan. 1944, PRO, FO 371, 82/41904.

¹⁰Aide-Mémoire on current deliveries to French Resistance, 15 Jan. 1944, PRO, FO 371, 82/41904.

¹¹Notes on Prime Minister's meeting, 27 Jan. 1944, PRO, FO 371, 82/41904; Ibid., 28 Jan. 1944, PRO, FO 371, 82/41904. Some even feared that the French would fight each other after ousting the Germans. O. C. Harvey to Peake, 19 Sept. 1944, PRO, FO 371, 82/41907.

demolishing certain communication sites, fomenting civilian uprisings, and encouraging strikes and passive resistance.¹² Not depending on execution of those plans, the Allies designed similar plans for the combined SOE/SO. The British also agreed that any political administration would submit to the authority of the Combined Chiefs of Staff through a Combined Civil Affairs Committee, which countered Resistance plans for self-government.¹³ During the invasion, the inadequately armed Resistance managed to hinder the Wehrmacht's retreat. A better armed Resistance might have eased the slow Allied breakout from some of the Normandy beachheads.

The Second World War provided the British with a new opportunity to use resistance movements as part of military and political strategy. New methods proved difficult to implement without mistakes and faced prejudice among traditional military soldiers. Although the French Resistance received more attention than other resistance movements in western Europe during the first half of the war, British priorities still ebbed and flowed as other theaters of war heated up, including the Pacific in late 1940 and 1941 and the Balkans in 1941. De Gaulle was irascible, tenacious, and perhaps vindictive. John Colville believed the Churchill-de Gaulle relationship affected Europe and the United States for

¹²Appreciation of Strength, 26 Jan. 1944. See also Foreign Office note, 18 April 1944, PRO, FO 371, 82/41905.

¹³BBC monitoring of Radio France, 31 March 1944, PRO, FO 371, 318/41923; Ibid., 1 May 1944, PRO, FO 371, 318/41923.

decades. Colville thought the war in Indochina was de Gaulle's partial revenge on Roosevelt.¹⁴ The French Resistance did not play a larger and more dependable role in the Second World War because it lacked cohesion and focus. The British overestimated its ability to control a diffuse movement and a renegade general. Early problems in their relationship precluded future strategic cooperation.

¹⁴Colville, *Inner Circle*, 247.

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Laurie West Van Hook grew up in Holden, Massachusetts, and received a B.A. in History from Bates College in 1984. She received a J.D. from the University of Richmond T.C. Williams School of Law in 1993. Laurie was very active in the American Bar Association/Law Student Division and served as its National Chair in 1992-93. She currently resides in Charlottesville, Virginia, where she is a Ph.D. candidate in History at the University of Virginia and practices law part-time.