



The Resistance: The French Fight Against the Nazis

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The French resistance to Nazi occupation during World War II was a struggle in which ordinary people fought for their liberty, despite terrible odds and horrifying repression. Hundreds of thousands of Frenchmen and women carried out an armed struggle against the Nazis, producing underground anti-fascist publications and supplying the Allies with vital intelligence. Based on hundreds of French eye-witness accounts and including recently-released archival material, The Resistance uses dramatic personal stories to take the reader on one of the great adventures of the 20th century. The tale begins with the catastrophic Fall of France in 1940, and shatters the myth of a unified Resistance created by General de Gaulle. In fact, De Gaulle never understood the Resistance, and sought to use, dominate and channel it to his own ends. Brave men and women set up organisations, only to be betrayed or hunted down by the Nazis, and to die in front of the firing squad or in the concentration camps. Over time, the true story of the Resistance got blurred and distorted, its heroes and conflicts were forgotten as the movement became a myth. By turns exciting, tragic and insightful, The Resistance reveals how one of the most powerful modern myths came to be forged and provides a gripping account of one of the most striking events in the 20th century.

The Resistance: The French Fight Against the Nazis Details

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Author : Matthew Cobb

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Mehrdad says

Excellent piece of research with great number of references to various sources. If you are looking for an action thriller with lots of battle scenes, this book is not for you. But if you want to understand the social and political complexities of the Resistance and its interaction with De Gaulle's Free French government in exile, this is an excellent starting point. It has been written with great integrity and compassion for those who really mattered: The French People. I found it a refreshing and exciting read.

R.M.F Brown says

When the legend becomes fact, print the legend.

Anybody familiar with the film, 'The Man who shot Liberty Valance,' will remember that famous quip.

It could equally apply to the French Resistance. Charting their history from France's humiliating defeat at the hands of the German in 1940 (a six week campaign that stunned the world) we learn of the total paralysis that struck France, a nation unable to comprehend the disaster that befell it.

As antipathy is replaced by defiance, we learn of the Resistance in its infancy, and how it struggled to get off the ground. In fact, many people considered it a nuisance, pinprick attacks that had no real military impact, but brought crushing retribution from the German occupiers in return.

As the tides of war shifted against Germany, and forced labour acts were met by defiance from the French, the resistance bloomed.

By liberation day in 1944, every man and his dog was claiming resistance membership, much to the annoyance of those who had fought alone, and had been dismissed as fools, for years.

It is at this moment that Cobb earns his salt - separating fact from fiction, myths from reality.

As a primer to a crucial chapter of French history, this book is first class.

Melissa Michelle says

It was a fascinating read on how the French chose to fight against the Nazis when the Vichy government appallingly chose to collaborate with the Nazis. Ordinary citizens chose to stand up against the vast injustice inflicted on so many people!

Nicki says

This was too stolid a retelling for my tastes. It focused more on the political situation surrounding the French Resistance than the acts of resistance. That might float someone else's boat, but it left me wanting a bit cold. Even when Mr Cobb described the action, it was dull and lacked any tension.

This would be a better book if it was written less as a lecture and more as a series of stories. I realised it's a factual book, but that doesn't mean it has to be dull. Basic things like shorter sentences and using active instead of passive voice would make a huge difference.

I also bumped up against a couple of inaccuracies that jarred for me. Basic things like the author stating the Battle of Britain had not yet begun by 31 July 1940 and wrongly referring to D-Day as Operation Overload instead of Overlord, not once but twice. It made me wonder what else was incorrect. Mr Cobb's habit of repeatedly calling the German army "Nazi soldiers" at the same time as explicitly stating that the rank and file were generally not Nazis, just soldiers following orders also bothered me.

It's not a bad book, but it's not as interesting as a book about this fascinating slice of history should be.

As an aside, I read the Kindle edition and the book itself finishes at 58%. The rest of the space is taken up with the glossary, bibliography, further reading, notes and a list of people and what happened to them. It made the book seem very slow going.

Kate Taylor says

I loved this book. Filled with first hand accounts, it captures the intrigue and danger of being a part of the French Resistance, whilst also describing in detail what life was like for people under Occupation. Incredibly moving in places, some of the stories of people's (including teenagers) bravery blew my mind. A must for anyone who has any interest in World War II.

Kim says

This book has really knocked me sideways. Of course we learn about the resistance at school and through films, and my image was of a well-organised and controlled underground group including just about every French man and woman.

In reality it was highly fragmented, highly disorganized and highly political, and only 2 per cent of the French population were involved: their courage and sacrifice immeasurable. The extraordinary waste of life is overwhelming – one in five involved was killed. And yet the quote from a member of the resistance used at the beginning of the book just won't leave me: "I want to say to all the young people watching, who do not know what it was like to be in the résistance: it was one of the greatest times to be alive"

Jenny Nolan says

The topic is fascinating, but it is written in a way that is difficult to follow with many acronyms used for the various resistant factions of war time France. It seems the author could have broken topics down differently; perhaps covering one resistance group at a time, culminating in their ultimate convergence with the Allies towards the end of the war.

Greg Subias says

I found this to be really an informative read and formatted so that while it was quite factual, I didn't feel that I was reading a text book. It was a little choppy in spots and maybe could have flowed more smoothly to keep me engaged for longer periods but overall I found it to be an amazing account of most details the world is unaware of about the sacrifice, horrors and commitment a few men, women and young adults made to reclaim their country.

Anne-Marie says

This is clearly a well researched book, and I don't want my rating to detract from it. However, for me it was just too in depth in terms of the political situation of France during WW2. I found it very hard to keep track of who was who and what side they were on, which dulled my interest in the subject quite quickly. If you're in to the detail of this kind of thing it would be a fantastic read I'm sure.

Jill Hutchinson says

Europe was aghast when France fell to the Nazis in June, 1940. Even more horrifying was the division of the country into the Occupied Zone and Vichy, a puppet government with the WWI hero, Petain, as the nominal leader of a pseudo France. At first, the population was stunned and then they became angry and humiliated. Ordinary people decided to do something about it, to change things even though they had neither the organization nor the resources to make things happen. Thus the Résistance was born and its story has lived on, partially in fact and partially in myth. This book tackles the complex and political aspects of putting together a viable "army" of men and women with one objective....wrest their country back from the Nazis.

DeGaulle who fled to London, declared himself the leader of the Free French forces and the Résistance. But this was not the case to many of the résistants and he was despised by Churchill and Roosevelt.. The French Communists, labor unions and various other organizations did not recognize his leadership and formed their own groups and took action independently. It soon became apparent that planning and disciplined organization would be the key to success.

The author delves into the confusing and fragmented growth of the Résistance and the activities of the mostly unknown amazing people who participated, against overwhelming odds. He does not concentrate on the military actions but rather the problems of unifying these "soldiers" into a cohesive group. The author has done in-depth research and uses eye witness accounts and archival material that was not previously available.

I would highly recommend this book

Ellie Midwood says

If you're looking for research material on the French Resistance or simply would love to learn the details of their operations, "The Resistance" is a perfect read for this purpose. It's very detailed, includes multiple witnesses' accounts, historical speeches, and documents. The photographs were also a very nice addition to the narration and helped me better visualize everything that was taking place. Separate stories told by (or about) different participants were also incredibly fascinating. Each chapter deals with a separate period of time and stage of the movement's development: the birth of the very first clandestine newspapers, first sabotage operations, the SOE involvement, the Maquis, the liberation, the aftermath, and many more. What I also highly appreciated about this book is that it was purely historical, presenting the facts and historical accounts for a reader to judge for themselves who was the hero, who was the villain, and who was a simple opportunist. A true must-read for all WWII history lovers - I really can't recommend it enough!

Rob Kitchin says

In Resistance, Matthew Cobb provides a broad social and political history of the French resistance movement in France during the Second World War, drawing on extensive archival and interview research. What his analysis demonstrates is that the Resistance was, in fact, many resistances, made up of hundreds of groups and cells working in broad alliances, cross-cut with deep political schisms, clashes of personalities, differences in opinion, tactics and strategies, and answering to different masters. A real strength of the book is that Cobb manages to, on the one hand, contextualise resistance within wider European and global politics and the war, and within what was happening in France with respect to the Vichy regime and the apparatus of Nazi oppression, and on the other, to provide in-depth discussion of particular individuals and groups, and their motivations, aspirations, actions and fate. As such, he provides by both breadth and depth, dispassionate contextualisation and poignant intimacy. It's a powerful combination that leads to a huge amount of information being crammed into a relatively short book without it ever feeling rushed or truncated. In addition, rather than simply describing events as with many historical texts, Cobb provides an explanatory framework, seeking to interpret why certain decisions were undertaken, and he does so from a relatively neutral position, detailing how others have interpreted the same events and why his view concurs or differs. In my view, it's an excellent piece of work, covering a huge amount of ground in a lively, engaging and informative voice. If you want a rounded, synoptic introduction to the various Resistance movements in France, this is a great place to start.

Jill Mackin says

A great book. Really helps you to understand time, the players and the different missions the resistance had to undermine the Nazis.

Keith says

Well I never expected this.....it seems the resistance was a hot bed of political intrigue only with more political schemes and players than can be imagined-at the top at least. Across the rest of occupied France the resistsants were the truly brave individuals of what is fast becoming folklore. This book explores both sides in depth and opened a wholly unknown (to me at least), page of WW2 history.

Faye Powell says

The resistsants, as the Resistance fighters were called, held various and often conflicting political views but were all committed to the overthrow of the Nazi occupation by whatever means possible. Cobb's heavily researched work details the personal stories of the courageous men and women who risked - and often lost - their lives to defeat the Nazis and the collaborationist Vichy government that the Nazis established. Over 75,000 Jews were deported from France during the Occupation, with only one in thirty returning after the war. As the resistsants fought in the cities and countryside, de Gaulle, who at the beginning of the war was a relatively minor and unknown general, appointed himself head of the opposition and attempted to control the war effort from England with a view toward his own political future as head of the country post-liberation, even going so far as to order the resistsants not to engage in sabotage without his consent. They pretty much ignored his demands as he, in turn, refused to acknowledge their contributions to the war effort. It's not easy to keep track of the many factions of the Resistance with their often conflicting political agendas. Fortunately, Cobb provides an appendix of acronyms.

The actions of the resistsants included everything from publishing and distributing underground newspapers to sabotaging vital transportation lines to assassination of German soldiers and French collaborators and betrayers. The response of the Nazis was immediate and merciless: execution, torture, deportation to concentration camps, and massacres of large numbers of ordinary citizens in retribution for acts committed by the Resistance. It is estimated that approximately 500,000 people took part in the Resistance and approximately 100,000 died.

What makes this history of the Resistance so compelling for me is the personalization of the individual resistsants in all their human complexities and the vivid descriptions of their day-to-day lives as well as those of the rest of the French population who suffered appalling conditions and deprivations.

Full of historical information that is heavily footnoted, the narrative still reads like a fast-paced novel. The Resistance, Cobb says, has a mythic hold on the French psyche. "Over sixty years later, the Resistance still retains its power to inspire. These were ordinary people who made extraordinary sacrifices, and many of them paid a terrible price. They fought for a variety of reasons, with different means. But the main point is that they did fight, they did not accept what appeared to be the inevitable. And in doing so they discovered things about themselves." (p. 293)
