

UC Irvine

Humanities Honors Theses 2024

Title

Une Résistance Égale: The Gendering of Resistance in World War II France

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/2gs4d8kp>

Author

Amidon, Lily

Publication Date

2024-06-14

Copyright Information

This work is made available under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution License, available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

Peer reviewed

Lily Victoria Amidon

“Une Résistance Égale: The Gendering of Resistance in World War II France”

Advisor: Dr. Sarah Farmer, Department of History

In fulfilment of the Campuswide Honors Collegium and Humanities Honors Program thesis

component

Completed Spring 2024

Graduation: Spring 2025

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements – 2
Abstract – 3
Acronyms and Abbreviations – 4
Introduction: Women at War – 5
Problematizing Postwar Narratives of Resistance – 7
I. Organizing French Resistance – 10
Hostile Forces in France – 11
Women’s Wartime Roles and Auxiliary Units – 13
Recruiting and Training Women Operatives – 14
Women’s Resistance and Gender Roles – 19
Building a French Resistance – 21
II. Espionage and Evasive Resistance – 25
Intelligence Organizations Working in France – 26
Women Spies Abroad – 33
Escape Lines, Safe Houses, and Evasive Resistance – 38
III. Political and Intellectual Resistance – 45
Political and Intellectual Resistance Groups – 47
Clandestine Publications and the Underground Press – 51
IV. Resistance on the Home Front – 55
Support Work and the Home Front – 57
German and Vichy Women’s Policies – 61
Conclusion: Postwar <i>Résistantes</i> – 63
Reckoning with Women’s Resistance – 67
Bibliography – 70

Acknowledgements

I could not have completed this thesis without the support, guidance, and advice of Dr. Sarah Farmer and Dr. Jeffrey Wasserstrom from the History Department at the University of California, Irvine. I would also like to thank Nicole Arnold, the history librarian, and Elizabeth Hernandez, the political science librarian, for their help with the research process.

Thanks to the Yorba Linda Public Library, where I discovered my thesis topic between 2016 and 2020. I would not have discovered my love for research, education, gender studies, and history without the support of my middle and high school history and English teachers. Without my professors and advisors at Santiago Canyon College, I would not be at UCI. Thank you for your constant support of my academic goals and for the role you played in my academic journey.

I would never have been able to complete this thesis without the constant support, patience, tolerance, and love from my family (Mom, Dad, Nath, Sophie, Bosco, Sam, and Ollie), who had to deal with me (and my constant references to World War II, espionage, France, and its connections to *Star Wars* or *Doctor Who*) during this project. Thanks for getting me here.

*Et aussi pour "la mémoire des ... femmes britanniques et françaises parachutées."*¹

¹ Robyn Walker, *The Women Who Spied for Britain: Female Secret Agents of the Second World War* (Stroud, Glos.: Amberley, 2014), 120.

Abstract

This thesis explores resistance work in Nazi-occupied France and Vichy France during World War II. The research uses paramilitary acts of resistance as a foil to political resistance, intelligence gathering and evasive resistance, and the home front as a site of resistance to spotlight women's contributions to the French resistance. By exploring several types of resistance work and women's participation (or lack thereof) in various resistance organizations, this thesis seeks to not only establish the extent of women's participation in the French resistance but also explore their challenge to the established gender roles within the resistance. This thesis explores the extent of women's resistance activities across World War II France through internal organizations, such as the French Communist Party and the French Resistance, and external organizations like the *Bureau Central de Renseignements et d'Action* (BCRA), British Special Operatives Executive's F (French) Section (SOE), the British Secret Intelligence Service, and the American Office of Strategic Services (OSS). In the context of these organizations' activities, this thesis analyzes the gendering of resistance while considering the presence of women in various resistance organizations and their resistance activities to contextualize scope and scale of women's contributions to resistance work in occupied and Vichy France.

Acronyms and Abbreviations

SOE – Special Operations Executive

F Section – French Section of the SOE

RF Section – Part of the French section of the SOE that consults with the Free French

SIS – Secret Intelligence Service (includes MI5, MI6, and MI9)

FANY – First Aid Nursing Yeomanry (British civilian women’s auxiliary)

ATS – Auxiliary Terrain Service (British women’s army auxiliary)

WRNS – Women’s Royal Navy Services (British women’s navy auxiliary)

WAAF – Women’s Auxiliary Air Force (British women’s air force auxiliary)

W/T – Wireless Transmission (or transmitter or telegraphy)

BCRA – *Bureau Central de Renseignements et d’Action* (Free French intelligence)

FTP – *Francs-Tireurs et Partisans* (paramilitary wing of the French Communist Party)

PCF – *Parti communiste français* (French Communist Party)

FFL – *Forces Françaises Libres* (Free French forces)

STO – *Service du Travail Obligatoire* (German work conscription order)

FFI – *Forces Françaises d’Intérieur* (local French resistance)

OSS – Office of Strategic Services (American foreign intelligence)

FBI – Federal Bureau of Investigation (American domestic intelligence)

COI – Office of the Coordinator of Information (initial name for the OSS)

Introduction: Women at War

What do mothers, shop assistants, a few aristocrats, a consular service clerk, a writer, journalists, secretaries, a portrait artist, museum curators, sex workers, waitresses, labor organizers, card-carrying French Communists, and students all have in common? Military records, espionage training, grassroots political organizing, pamphlet articles, and knowledge of French history, culture, language, and geography – all skills that translate over to working for Allied intelligence or resistance organizations in occupied France during World War II. Women across the Allied nations, from the memorialized – American Virginia Hall, Australian Nancy Wake, British-Indian-American Noor Inayat Khan, British Pearl Witherington, and French Marie-Madeleine Fourcade – to those who were forgotten or erased in the postwar world, participated in the war in some way on, behind, and around the front lines of the war and on the French home front. For the women on the front lines of the war in France, these challenges transcended their prescribed gender norms and their assigned place in society, and many of these actions involved more direct action against hostile forces for their side's war efforts.

While French men enlisted in armed forces, dodged labor and military, or kept their heads down during the years of the German occupation of France (1940-1944), French women took on new, independent roles that challenged cultural prescriptions of gender norms and expectations. With so many French men imprisoned by the Germans, drafted to work or fight for Germany, or hiding to avoid prison or drafts, the number of women-run households soared to over 800,000 across the French state.² Such a shift, coupled with the disappearances of men across the country, changed the gender makeup of the country, with women vastly outnumbering their male counterparts and making male spies more distinct from the French societies they sought to

² Caroline Moorehead, *A Train in Winter: An Extraordinary Story of Women, Friendship, and Resistance in Occupied France* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2012), 169.

disappear into. As the war progressed and the situation in France continued to worsen, internal French forces such as the French Communist Party (*Parti communist français*, or PCF)³, their armed wing *Franco-Tireurs et Partisans* (FTP), and local resistance groups shared a common goal of liberation and freedom from the German occupiers with external forces such as British intelligence (MI6, MI9, and the Special Operations Executive, SOE), American intelligence (Office of Secret Services, OSS), and Charles de Gaulle's Free French intelligence networks the *Deuxième bureau* and the *Bureau Central de Renseignements et d'Action*, BCRA.⁴

After the fall of France, the British Special Operations Executive (SOE), along with other intelligence and resistance organizations, began recruiting and training French-speaking or French women for infiltration to France, where they would liaise with existing French underground resistance groups, existing British or British-backed intelligence networks, or other recently infiltrated agents to coordinate acts of sabotage and resistance to undermine the German hold on the nation. Several French women, already involved with local resistance organizations, were exfiltrated back to Britain to undergo SOE training to learn new skills to better serve the larger French resistance. However, acts of sabotage and circuit (or *réseau*) organizing were not the only forms of resistance work that these women could undertake; many women members of the PCF and intellectual *résistance* fought back against the German occupiers by printing and distributing pamphlets and underground newspapers, while other British agents worked as radio operators, forgers, and couriers for larger intelligence networks. Other French women close to the Spanish and Swiss borders and the demarcation line acts as *passeurs* and helped escaping Allied pilots and agents avoid German patrols and checkpoints.⁵ Others took on paramilitary

³ Moorehead, *A Train in Winter*, 25.

⁴ Lynne Olson, *Madame Fourcade's Secret War: The Daring Young Woman Who Led France's Largest Spy Network against Hitler* (New York: Random House, 2019), 56.

⁵ Moorehead, *A Train in Winter*, 85.

roles in the resistance; trained by the SOE, Jeanne Bohec worked as an explosives expert and instructor in Brittany and Normandy with the local *Maquis* cells.⁶

With such a breadth of intelligence work needing experts (or at least trained novices, given the urgent need for information), Allied intelligence agencies and local French resistance groups direly needed women, who could pass more inconspicuously in a male-deficient France and could carry out the same duties, to take on the demands of resistance work. With their active recruitment of women, government agencies, along with local resistance groups, encouraged a temporary challenge to gender norms to facilitate the war effort. The women who answered the call for resistance work in France, while motivated by their love for their countries, used their service and their acts of resistance to further challenge their societies' ideas of women belonging on the home front, not behind enemy lines in a combat situation. Exploring the presence of women in resistance work across France between 1940 and 1944 allows for a larger understanding of the gender structures and hierarchies in the French resistance, the impact of the ideas of acceptable roles for women, and the evolution of these institutions' gender structures and hierarchies as women agents' successes grew over the course of the war.

Problematizing Postwar Narratives of Resistance

Acts of sabotage, assassinations, violence, and paramilitary resistance in urban centers (and later the countryside) characterized the official narrative of French resistance against the German occupation, and they are commonly associated with male-dominated resistance groups such as the *Maquis*, who became the preferred narrative of the struggles of the French under German occupation. Women were not generally associated with paramilitary violence during World War II, they were certainly capable of such violence, and they did participate in acts of

⁶ Bernard O'Connor, *SOE Heroines: The Special Operations Executive's French Section and Free French Women Agents* (Stroud: Amberley Publishing, 2021), 246-251.

sabotage throughout the war as part of *Maquis*, SOE, SIS, and BCRA operations. SOE agents Pearl Witherington and Nancy Wake were critical resistance fighters, bombing bridges and railways across France to slow down the Germans' movement of men, supplies, and prisoners. These women conducted acts of sabotage and paramilitary resistance, contrary to their assigned gender roles, because these actions were critical to the larger international coalition and the resistance. These paramilitary and sabotage actions were critical to the war effort, and if women *résistantes* return to their prewar gender roles after the war, the temporary rejection of gender roles was patriotic, and women resistors substituted for male soldiers given the occupation.

The great woman theory of history impacts the long-term recollection of women whose resistance work occurred on the home front or quietly behind enemy lines. Women *résistantes* and foreign agents who resisted in paramilitary, intelligence, or political organizations have made their way into the historical record by organizational association, while women on the home front have not entered resistance narratives unless they were extraordinary in comparison to other home front women, and, even then, they remain in the historical margins. Resistance on the home front received much less attention than the intelligence, political, and intellectual organizing given the masculinist postwar narrative, but the combination of a difference in the memorialization of men's and women's resistance work in occupied France, the limited recording of women's history after World War II, the deaths of many of these *résistantes* before they could tell their stories, and the classification of government and military documents continues to obscure the full extent of women's contributions to the French resistance during the German occupation of World War II.⁷ Such historiographic trends are not unique to France and appear across Western military historiographies due to the dominance of male perspectives.

⁷ Margaret Collins Weitz, *Sisters in the Resistance: How Women Fought to Free France, 1940-1945* (New York: J. Wiley, 1995), 7.

In the postwar period, French women were less likely to seek official recognition for their work partly because they did not see themselves as veterans actively choosing a life of resistance; instead, women saw their duties as “what had to be done” and their roles as “minor” despite the risks they took (arrest, torture, and death).⁸ The sexism and discrimination in the Resistance (overt or unconscious) and the obstacles restricting women’s access to particular roles and occupations in the French resistance reappear in the postwar period when women did not become a president of a department liberation committee, a postwar prefect or commissioner, or a regional or departmental head in the FFI.⁹ Jeanne Chaton, describing her work as “nonactivities” during both World Wars, went on to receive the Legion of Honor, the Medal of the Resistance, the Medal of French Recognition, and an honor from the Polish government; the work considered by women as inactivity and basic human decency was, in this instance, recognized as resistance and rewarded by two governments as it should be.¹⁰

Further, definitions of “capital ‘R’ resistance” emphasize collective organizations and military or paramilitary actions as undertaken by foreign intelligence, the *Maquis*, and the Free French and was far more likely to be celebrated and memorialized in the postwar period; women’s resistance on the home front and in the political and intellectual circuits fall under “little ‘r’ resistance” as individual actions undertaken independently from any larger organization without external support or resources and is thus overlooked by the historical record.¹¹ While the military careers of women resisters may appear in the record, they are framed as anomalous rather than a representation of a larger group of women who chose combat and combat-adjacent roles to liberate France from occupation. Besides the division between “Resistance” and

⁸ Weitz, *Sisters in the Resistance*, 7.

⁹ Weitz, *Sisters in the Resistance*, 66-7.

¹⁰ Weitz, *Sisters in the Resistance*, 244.

¹¹ Weitz, *Sisters in the Resistance*, 8.

“resistance,” ideas of “active” and “passive” resistance further carry gendered connotations; passive resistance implies inaction, creates a very limited definition of resistance and resistance work, and ignores a variety of resistance activities undertaken by women which seriously crippled the German war effort and their occupation of France.¹²

By establishing the issues with the current definitions of resistance as applied to occupied France during World War II, the limitations of the standing postwar narrative, as perpetrated by de Gaulle, reveal a masculinist and militaristic emphasis which actively excludes the resistance of women in several spheres of the larger French resistance. Through the creation of a woman-centric counternarrative, the shape, size, and scope of the French resistance expands to create a more inclusive and holistic picture of women’s activities as part of the resistance networks across France. By considering the actions of Allied women in the country, the resistance work of American, British, and Commonwealth women also joins the narrative, encompassing more resistance activities critical to larger operational successes. While other historians have explored women’s contributions to the various Allied war efforts during World War II, this thesis seeks to expand definitions of women’s resistance and argues that the work of resistance was not inherently gendered; instead, postwar records assigned gender to resistance work to marginalize the contributions of women and their centrality to multiple spheres of resistance during the war.

I. Organizing French Resistance

The Allied countries operated intelligence networks across France in the last years of World War II; the French government-in-exile and the British began their operations in late 1941 and early 1942 and the Americans joined in the last two years of the German occupation. Of course, the occupying German force and the Vichy French also used their own intelligence and

¹² Weitz, *Sisters in the Resistance*, 9.

armed forces to identify resistance and Allied intelligence circuits and arrest *résistants* across France. However, the German and Vichy forces were not the only threats faced by French *résistants* and Allied agents; ordinary French citizens could be undercover German or Vichy operatives hunting for *résistants* or tracking wireless transmitter signals, or they could simply be collaborators reporting suspicious activity to the occupiers.

Hostile Forces in France

Several hostile organizations operated across Nazi-occupied France during the occupation, and these organizations were composed of German agents and French collaborators. In Vichy France, the *Police Nationale* swore a new oath of loyalty to Marshal Pétain and Premier Laval to seek out “enemies of the state,” and cooperation between the Vichy regime and the German occupiers resulted in the presence of German armed forces and secret service in Vichy territory, though such a presence was technically unsanctioned.¹³ Also working in Vichy France, the *Milice* lacked the formal scruples as the Vichy police; the French fascist paramilitary organization targeted opponents of the Vichy regime (including French Jews, French communists, and *résistants*) with brutal violence.¹⁴ As for the German forces, various military intelligence agencies worked across occupied and Vichy France, including the *Sicherheitspolizei* (the Nazi secret police), *Sicherheitsdienst* (the security force), and the *Abwehr*, the military intelligence agency which focused on counterintelligence.¹⁵ In the *Englandspiel* game of intelligence and counterintelligence, Allied intelligence forces faced off with the Germans based in their Paris headquarters at 84 Avenue Foch and the *Geheime feld polizei* (the Gestapo secret

¹³ Gordon Thomas and Greg Lewis, *Shadow Warriors of World War II: The Daring Women of the OSS and SOE* (Chicago, IL: Chicago Review Press, 2016), 214.

¹⁴ Thomas and Lewis, *Shadow Warriors of World War II*, 214.

¹⁵ Sarah Rose Crown, *D-Day Girls: The Untold Story of the Female Spies Who Helped Win World War II* (Crown, 2019), 69. Moorehead, *A Train in Winter*, 17. Olson, *Madame Fourcade's Secret War*, 62. Thomas and Lewis, *Shadow Warriors of World War II*, 42.

police), who operated out of Marseille and Paris.¹⁶ Hans Josef Kieffer of the *Sicherheitsdienst* and Hugo Bleicher of the Abwehr were two of the masterminds behind the arrests of hundreds of SOE agents across northern France.¹⁷ Men like Kieffer and Bleicher enforced Hitler's *Nacht-und-Nebel-Erlass*, night and fog decree, of December 7, 1941, which specifically targeted resisters in occupied countries "[intending] to undermine the security of German troops" to be transported to Germany for trial after which they disappeared, many to concentration camps like Karlsruhe, Natzweiler-Struthof, or Ravensbrück.¹⁸ Hitler later issued his "commando order" of October 1942, which ordered the execution of all arrested spies and saboteurs – with no regard for the Hague conventions – and the women prisoners, formerly of the French resistance and Allied intelligence, fell under both the commando and the *Nacht un Nebel* orders.¹⁹

With so many hostile organizations operating in France, Allied and resistance agents had to dodge several prongs of attack, though the various Nazi intelligence organizations all used similar strategies to locate and arrest resisters across the country. Given that many arrests occurred in waves (such as the Prosper raids in 1943), the danger came and went but never fully disappeared. For the arrested women operatives, they faced physical and sexual violence while imprisoned, often at Fresnes prison outside Paris. The deportees usually died in concentration camps (Karlsruhe, Natzweiler-Struthof, and Ravensbrück), though many arrested *résistantes* including Odette Samson and Geneviève de Gauller survived to return to France and the United Kingdom. Despite the overwhelming numbers and resources of the Nazi forces in occupied France, many resisters remained out of their reach and continued to fight the occupiers.

¹⁶ Crown, *D-Day Girls*, 69-70. Thomas and Lewis, *Shadow Warriors of World War II*, 42, 213, 252.

¹⁷ Sarah Helm, *A Life in Secrets: The Story of Vera Atkins and the Lost Agents of SOE*. (Anchor Books, 2007), 112-4.

¹⁸ Moorehead, *A Train in Winter*, 111. Thomas and Lewis, *Shadow Warriors of World War II*, 190.

¹⁹ Thomas and Lewis, *Shadow Warriors of World War II*, 269.

Women's Wartime Roles and Auxiliary Units

Many of these women took on gender-typical wartime activities before their recruitment by Allied intelligence or the French resistance. Many women remained in their prewar occupations and adjusted to the war, while others joined the auxiliary services and undertook a range of duties from decoding German transmissions at Bletchley Park to

driving ambulances and ferrying planes, decoding intelligence messages, operating barrage balloons, serving as air raid wardens, manning anti-aircraft guns and radar stations, providing ground communications with Allied pilots and filling factory positions.²⁰

Such military duties were socially acceptable, as it theoretically kept women away from coming face to face with armed enemy forces but still allowed them to meaningfully contribute to the national war effort. But living as civilian non-combatants was no guarantee of personal safety, especially during World War II, and these women understood that. Some women agents like Nancy Wake and Christine Granville had already engaged in resistance activity before their recruitment, while others like Virginia Hall worked as ambulance drivers during the German invasion of France. All women in France lived beyond enemy lines following the fall of France in 1940, while British women across the country were vulnerable to the Blitz and the Luftwaffe's bombing raids. Women who enlisted in the FFL, the ATS, the FANY, the WAAF, or the WRNS as auxiliary support experienced a traditional military structure and undertook standard women's wartime work while dealing with traditional patriarchal military expectations that did not allow women to participate in missions and segregated them from the troops.²¹

The women who joined intelligence organizations with the intent of training for field work were given commissions in the civilian First Aid Nursing Yeomanry (FANY), the only

²⁰ Walker, *The Women Who Spied for Britain*, 11.

²¹ Weitz, *Sisters of the Resistance*, 169.

British women's auxiliary organization which allowed women to bear arms, and British intelligence hoped that enlisting their women in the FANY, rather than with SIS or the SOE, would protect women from being executed as spies and give them prisoner of war protection under the Geneva Convention.²² Women who had joined the Auxiliary Terrain Service (ATS), the Women's Royal Navy Services (WRNS), or the Women's Auxiliary Air Force (WAAF) were transferred to the FANY upon their acceptance into British intelligence; most of the women who enlisted with the FANY would merge into the ATS with 20,000 other officers.²³ French women working for the BCRA were often commissioned by the *Corps des Volontaires Françaises* (CVF), the *Corps Féminin*, the *Forces Françaises Libres* (FFL), or the *Corps des Auxiliares Féminines de l'Armée de Terre* (AFAT).²⁴ American women could join the Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASP), Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC), Women's Army Corps (WAC), or the United States Naval Reserve (Women's Reserve) (WAVES) before being recruited for intelligence work. The number of auxiliary organizations available for American, French, and British women enabled them to participate in non-traditional wartime work with their national military organizations, thus allowing them to challenge their societies' wartime gender roles before actively participating as *résistantes* in France.

Recruiting and Training Women Operatives

The women recruited by the SOE, OSS, MI6 and MI9, the PCF, and the *Maquis* came from all backgrounds, but they all shared a love for France and their home country if they were not French and possessed linguistic skills and a certain strength of character. Selwyn Jepson, who

²² Rick Stroud, *Lonely Courage: The True Story of the SOE Heroines Who Fought to Free Nazi-occupied France* (n.p.: Simon & Schuster UK, 2017), 79.

²³ Tania Szabo, *Young, Brave and Beautiful: The Missions of Special Operations Executive Agent Lieutenant Violette Szabo, George Cross, Croix De Guerre Avec Etoile De Bronze* (Stroud, UK: History Press, 2016), 224.

²⁴ O'Connor, *SOE Heroines*, 22.

interviewed most of the SOE's women recruits noted that these women "had a far greater capacity for cool and lonely courage" than many of their male recruit counterparts in the service of Allied intelligence.²⁵ The women agents sent into occupied or Vichy France had to be fluent in French, have lived in France for extended periods (such as attending school), know some of the regions and cities very well, and have at least one French parent or extended family in France (if they were British or American nationals), among other qualities. Throughout the recruiting interviews and the training process, instructors would also report on the recruits' progress, their skills or challenges in training, and their potential suitability for circuit work in France. These women used their femininity and the Germans' stereotypes of women against them in their resistance operations, from dressing the part of a well-to-do woman to faking nervous fits, feigning ignorance of a larger operation, and reproducing other feminine roles and qualities.²⁶

The SOE requisitioned manor houses across England to convert into training schools, the most famous of which were the paramilitary schools in the Western Highlands of Scotland, the parachuting "secondary schools" at Ringway Field near Manchester, and security training school at Beaulieu Abbey in Hampshire.²⁷ The specialist schools, such as Brickendonbury Manor in Hertfordshire and Thame Park in Oxfordshire, provided more specific training in munitions and explosives, wireless telegraphy (W/T) and Morse code, "silent killing," and courier work.²⁸ Almost all SOE agents underwent parachuting training at Ringway Field, and most were required to complete two or three jumps since parachuting via Lysander was a common mode of infiltration.²⁹ BCRA, through their agreements with MI6 and the SOE, gained access to the SOE

²⁵ Stroud, *Lonely Courage*, xviii.

²⁶ Weitz, *Sisters in the Resistance*, 247, 255.

²⁷ Thomas and Lewis, *Shadow Warriors of World War II*, 6, 38-9, 47-8.

²⁸ Marcus Binney, *The Women Who Lived for Danger: Behind Enemy Lines in World War II* (Perennial, 2004), 14-5.

²⁹ Thomas and Lewis, *Shadow Warriors of World War II*, 47, 53-4. O'Connor, *SOE Heroines*, 29.

training schools, and some of the BCRA's female agents trained at the SOE's facilities across Britain, ensuring consistent and quality training for women agents working in occupied France.

French women faced a particular challenge with the recruitment process, however; the Free French were reluctant to enlist the services of Frenchwomen because of their gender, and this response led to women applying to a more accepting agency like the SOE. Then the Free French would become angry that Frenchwomen were working for the British government instead of the government-in-exile and, as in the case of SOE agent Andrée Borrel, demand that "she would give them all the intelligence concerning the organisation [*sic*] for which she was working in France" and "refuse to employ her (in the BCRA) unless she does [*so*]." ³⁰ By 1944, this would prove to be a mistake; the PCF and their paramilitary wing FTP would welcome SOE and OSS help in fighting the German occupation, a closeness of collaboration which de Gaulle and his intelligence service did not have. ³¹ As the war progressed, however, the PCF phased out the female members of the FTP just when de Gaulle allowed women to join the FFL's auxiliary wing – to free up men for enlistment and military service in preparation for the opening of the second front in France, not because he had changed his stance on allowing women to enter combat. ³² Practicing unorthodox military techniques, the BCRA did eventually recruit women as couriers, radio operators, code clerks, instructors, and saboteurs, but they did so at slower rates than their British counterparts; the BCRA deployed eleven female agents in 1944, all of whom survived. ³³

The BCRA, too, actively recruited operatives who had not undergone formal training (unlike the SOE, SIS, and OSS circuits) to build grassroots resistance and intelligence organizations. Claire Chevrillon recounts her recruitment by FFL and BCRA operative Robert

³⁰ Stroud, *Lonely Courage*, 76.

³¹ Szabo, *Young, Brave and Beautiful*, 153.

³² Weitz, *Sisters in the Resistance*, 147.

³³ Margaret L. Rossiter, *Women in the Resistance* (New York: Praeger, 1986), 14.

Gautier (actually Jean Ayrat) in late 1942 and the extent of her resistance work into early 1943; Gautier, who parachuted into France in July 1942, simply walked up to Chevrillon “in a public garden in Clermont-Ferrand” and asked her to be his mailbox, courier, and (eventually) a wireless operator for his circuit who would “receive his mail, his phone calls, packages, and messages, and give them to him.”³⁴ Through 1942, the French resistance was not central to the Free French’s military strategy; de Gaulle refused to work with *réseaux* organized or allied with the British and consistently underestimated and disregarded the work done by the resistance. De Gaulle perceived the FFL and the BCRA as more organized and professional, and he ordered them to work independently from the Resistance, directly in opposition to the untrained amateurs of the Resistance who relied on connections and *cloisonnement* as a strategic method.³⁵

Some organizations, like the PCF, had underground organizations and resistance systems in place by the fall of Paris in 1940, while other organizations like the SOE had to build their entire organization during wartime.³⁶ The PCF in particular relied on a policy of *cloisonnement*, compartmentalization, which relied on the creation of three-person teams to minimize the security risks should one operative become compromised through arrest, interrogation, collaboration, or defection; other organizations operating in French cities would adopt similar policies.³⁷ Three was also a critical number for more traditional intelligence work, particularly for the British SIS and SOE and the American OSS, who trained agents for three particular roles in occupied France: organizer, courier, and wireless operator. Women typically took on the courier or wireless operator roles, which were dangerous positions given their visibility and their

³⁴ Claire Chevrillon, *Code Name Christiane Clouet*, trans. Jane Kielty Scott (College Station, TX: Texas A & M University Press, 1995), 72-4.

³⁵ Weitz, *Sisters in the Resistance*, 62.

³⁶ Paula Schwartz, *Today Sardines Are Not for Sale: A Street Protest in Occupied Paris* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2020), 59-61, 119, 169, 175.

³⁷ Schwartz, *Today Sardines Are Not for Sale*, 16-7, 27-9, 81.

transportation of sensitive materials and documents (including wireless sets, explosives, or messages). Wireless operators in particular faced several challenges, as they generally only operated undetected for around six weeks before being arrested.³⁸ Men primarily took on the role of organizer, though some were also wireless operators, but some women, such as Marie-Madeleine Fourcade (though she was recruited by and reported to a man), Nancy Wake, Pearl Witherington, Vera Leigh, Odette Sansom, and Commandant Gérard, took on these organizer positions in addition to their other duties; all were initially recruited as couriers or wireless operators but, through various circumstances, took on additional responsibilities.³⁹

Operatives across France, both foreign and national, had varying levels of training or experience based on their prewar and early occupation experiences; women like Agnès Humbert⁴⁰, for instance, had little experience with resistance strategies (intellectual, espionage, or paramilitary) given her background in art history and her age, but Lucie Abrac, a schoolteacher turned PCF comrade and *combattante* during the occupation, was much more familiar with various subversive resistance activities given her participation with the PCF during the years it was banned in France. Both women, however, contributed to their resistance cells and participated in the creation of clandestine newsletters and publications (acts which fall under intellectual and political resistance), and both had backgrounds at the Sorbonne.

During a war and occupation, training or experience in resistance was a luxury – many Allied agents parachuted into France without fully completing their training, and many would remain beyond their agent “shelf life” out of necessity. The most famous example of abbreviated

³⁸ O'Connor, *SOE Heroines*, 36-40.

³⁹ Helm, *A Life in Secrets*, 62, 67, 68, 110. Thomas and Lewis, *Shadow Warriors of World War II*, 134-7, 180-2, 185-6, 203, 220-1, 224, 242, 244-5, 254-6, 266-7, 270. O'Connor, *SOE Heroines*, 115-150.

⁴⁰ See Humbert's *Résistance: A Woman's Journal of Struggle and Defiance in Occupied France* (Bloomsbury, 2008) for more about her work with the Groupe du Musée de l'Homme circuit in Paris, which employees of the Musée de l'Homme in Paris formed, and her imprisonment. I used the Bloomsbury 2008 edition, translated by Barbara Mellor.

training and sudden deployment is British SOE agent and radio operator Noor Inayat Khan, whose security training and non-WT capacities were less than ideal for work in France, yet this did not stop Buckmaster from authorizing her deployment in June 1943, and she operated in and around Paris for nearly four months before her capture, far exceeding the expected six weeks. The variety in training and prior experience of agents and operatives explains the differences (in several areas) between various organizations and circuits across France. Ultimately, training was not the defining factor of resistance, as trained agents could be less successful than untrained local recruits, but a shared set of skills and knowledges, as well as different skills and knowledges, were critical to the construction of resistance cells across France and their acts of resistance against the German occupiers and Vichy collaborators.

The high standards for recruits by the OSS, SIS, SOE, and BCRA were not explicitly gendered masculine or feminine but instead focused on the ideal traits for successful undercover and resistance work in occupied France. At this point in the twentieth century, women certainly possessed the necessary civilian skills and could handle the training to be an agent in wartime France. By creating and constructing gender-blind training for their agents, the OSS, SOE, SIS, and BCRA could retain elements of their training programs for the future agents in the Cold War. In the world of espionage and resistance, the ambiguous morality (as relating to the rules of engagement) of such missions and operations allowed the gender line that historically barred women from combat to also blur, especially in an occupied territory like France that bridged the usually insurmountable divide between the home front and the front lines.

Women's Resistance and Gender Roles

The recruitment of women for intelligence and resistance work in occupied France, though not highly advertised, explicitly challenged standing gender roles in Europe. The Nazi

ideology of *Kinder, Küche, und Kirche* (children, kitchen, and church) clearly defined the state's line on the roles and duties of women within the Nazi state, if not their occupied European territories. Women recruited for resistance or intelligence work in France would, on the surface, appear to follow *Kinder, Küche, und Kirche* and the accepted domestic and public roles and associated duties of French society, yet they used these expected gender role prescriptions as a cover for their “unfeminine” activities for Allied intelligence or the French resistance. Women such as Pearl Witherington or Nancy Wake, who lived and worked in the countryside with the *Maquis*, further strayed from their gender role expectations as they undertook paramilitary activities with *Maquisards*, many of whom Witherington and Wake had trained themselves.⁴¹ On the other hand, the PCF heavily relied on the recruitment and creation of women's groups as the “public” face of their resistance during market demonstrations and other protests against food shortages, rationing, and other economy-based crises especially during 1942.⁴²

The visible adherence to *Kinder, Küche, und Kirche* and socially acceptable gender roles critically impacts the optics of resistance, a trend which the PCF, out of the many French resistance groups, uses as a tool of resistance and of organization. Though the thirty-nine women agents of the SOE's F Section, along with their SIS, OSS, BCRA, resistance, and Free French female colleagues, often outright rejected their socially assigned gender roles, many of these women's gender role deviations were not made public given the secretive nature of their work and the need for compartmentalization among resistance cells. Those that survived the occupation and the end of the war often returned to their prewar gender roles and duties; only after the war, in 1945, did French women obtain the vote, suggesting that the true extent of

⁴¹ Helm, *A Life in Secrets*, 62, 68. Thomas and Lewis, *Shadow Warriors of World War II*, 134-7, 203, 220-1, 224, 242, 244-5, 254-6, 270.

⁴² Schwartz, *Today Sardines Are Not for Sale*, 63-4, 67, 70.

women *résistantes*' gender role rejection or deviation was not as large or as long-term as it may appear. As for the women whose roles and duties did not fall outside their gender roles (safe houses, *passseurs*, collection or distribution of supplies), they too challenged their gender roles by running businesses or households; although women's work in a family business or the running of a household was not abnormal, the politicalization of their actions through their resistance connections and the rise in female-led households in wartime France granted women a new level of political and economic autonomy. By weaponizing the German and Vichy policies and assumptions which policed women's behavior, women continued to build a cover for their resistance work and lay the foundations for future subversions of gender roles and expectations.⁴³

Building a French Resistance

The internal resistance networks, from escape lines to the *Maquis* and resistance cells, had to respond to the unique situations and challenges present in their part of France. *Combattantes* and *groups francs* conducted early acts of resistance in urban centers like Paris, Bordeaux, Rouen, and Marseille, with the move to *Maquis* camps in French forests happening towards the middle of the occupation (1942-1943).⁴⁴ As the German and Vichy regimes continued to implement new policies and reshape French society, French resisters from the PCF and the larger resistance began responding to the changing state of affairs in a variety of methods from paramilitary resistance and political and intellectual organizations to espionage efforts and escape lines, occasionally in coordination with external Allied organizations.

Whether they belonged to a local *résistance* or PCF cell or were trained by British, Free French, or American intelligence, women involved in resistance activities across occupied and

⁴³ See "IV. Resistance on the Home Front: German and Vichy Policies" for more.

⁴⁴ H.R. Kedward, *In Search of the Maquis: Rural Resistance in Southern France, 1942-1944* (Oxford, U.K., Oxford University Press, 1993), 30, 68.

Vichy France generally participated in three kinds of resistance work: intelligence work (intelligence gathering, espionage, courier work, and wireless transmitting) and evasive resistance (working as *passeurs*, organizing safe houses, or working on escape lines), political and intellectual resistance (underground publications, food strikes, protests and marches, and the creation of fake papers), and home front resistance, challenging Vichy and German policies at home. These three types of resistance share motivations and subversive components, but the positions that women occupied in these various organizations and the resistance-specific duties which they took on and conducted are critical because of the diversity of operations that women completed and how these operations challenged established gender norms.

Many Resistance cells and Allied intelligence networks and escape lines formed organically along organizational lines such as student, social, familial, political, and professional groups; however, women were less likely to occupy prominent positions or be well-represented in organizational *réseaux*, thus encountering more difficulties and obstacles in their attempts to join such resistance circuits.⁴⁵ Participation in local French resistance cells developed organically; cities and regions across France independently developed resistance cells, though cells close to foreign countries or coastlines may have developed in coordination with or splintered from foreign organizations. One agent named Marcel described the Resistance as “an all-too-often changing unstructured series of disparate groups and groupings” rather than the single, unified organization the postwar narrative would try to portray.⁴⁶ The earliest organizations responded to immediate local needs during the onset of German occupation; in the occupied zone, patriots and proto-*résistants* helped Allied prisoners of war and Jews escape south and collected intelligence about the arriving German force as they began building the

⁴⁵ Weitz, *Sisters in the Resistance*, 64.

⁴⁶ Szabo, *Young, Brave and Beautiful*, 139.

framework for later resistance efforts: shelters for escape lines, false papers and identity cards, weapons stockpiles, and materials for the clandestine press.⁴⁷ Multinational resistance cells were particularly common in major cities (especially Paris, Lyon, Marseille, and Bordeaux), while international and multinational cells tended to form a segment of an escape line to neutral Switzerland or Spain. Some of the foreign members of French resistance cells joined deliberately; American Virginia Hall signed up as an ambulance driver in the summer of 1940 following the invasion of France, while others like American Sarah Wilkins, who ended up joining the French resistance in 1942, got stranded in occupied Europe after the United States entered the war.⁴⁸ *Combat*, one of the original underground pamphlets based in Paris, framed local resistance participation as a matter of duty, national unity, and preservation of a French identity; by framing resistance in terms of survival and identity, *Combat* and underground papers like it discredit the Nazi occupational government and the Vichy government as legitimate governing bodies, especially when *Combat* used phrases like “Crusade of Truth against Falsehood, Good against Evil, ... [and] Liberty against Slavery” in their pamphlets.⁴⁹

In the second year of the occupation, the French resistance groups across the country became more and more organized; in 1941, there were three main resistance organizations, *Combat*, the *Francs-Tireurs* of the French Communist Party, and *Libération*, which developed independently and eventually joined forces with de Gaulle’s Free French, taking orders from the government-in-exile in London. As the war progressed and the need for a unified French resistance grew, de Gaulle advocated for the smaller resistance groups to “merge their action

⁴⁷ Rossiter, *Women in the Resistance*, 4.

⁴⁸ William B. Breuer, *War and American Women: Heroism, Deeds, and Controversy* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1997), 48.

⁴⁹ John Simkin, "French Resistance," Spartacus Educational, accessed January 15, 2024, <https://spartacus-educational.com/FRresistance.htm>.

units with units of the Secret Army now being formed” to “avoid the proliferation of numerous, small organizations which could hamper one another, arouse rivalries, and create confusion,” detracting from the larger goal of the liberation of France.⁵⁰ A combination of inaction on their other allies’ behalf and de Gaulle’s abrasive relationship with the other Allied leaders led to an emphasis on internal resistance and organizations and a skepticism towards foreign resistance cells operating in France. He permitted some international activity in France, and the deployment of OSS, SOE, or SIS agents into France benefited the local resistance, particularly when SOE agents Pearl Witherington, Nancy Wake, and Jeanne Bohec worked with *Maquis* groups to conduct paramilitary attacks against the Nazi war machine. As long as the resistance groups kept to their current course of action, they would be able to organize a “powerful political uprising ... against the enemy and the traitors in his service.”⁵¹ The contributions of French resistance groups did not go unnoticed by Allied leadership; American general Dwight D. Eisenhower noted in 1948 that “the Resistance had been of estimable value” and, without the resistance’s contributions to the destruction of French and German infrastructure, the demoralization of the enemy, and the rallying of the French people to the war effort, “the liberation of France would have consumed a much longer time and meant greater losses” for the Allies.⁵²

Through concentrated efforts inside and outside France, military, political, and civilian organizations began building separate resistance groups across France. While many of these cells developed and operated independently of each other, they would grow to unite as part of the *Forces Françaises d’Intérieur* formed in the last years of the war. This multi-pronged approach of espionage, political, and home front resistance as conducted by women, along with the majority

⁵⁰ Simkin, "French Resistance," Spartacus Educational.

⁵¹ Simkin, "French Resistance," Spartacus Educational.

⁵² Simkin, "French Resistance," Spartacus Educational.

male paramilitary resistance, gave the occupied French population several ways to organize and resist, making the German ability to stop and punish such acts more difficult. By considering women's roles in the espionage, evasive, political, and home front resistance groups, this challenges the dominant postwar narrative of paramilitary and sabotage resistance that centered the acts of male *Maquisards* and soldiers over women resisters. Through the centering of women's resistance activities, this new narrative seeks to redefine resistance in occupied France and reframe the exclusionary male-centric narrative to create a more complete image of the scope and scale of resistance operations in France during World War II.

II. Espionage and Evasive Resistance

Intelligence gathering was critical for Allied and French resistance networks, as they informed plans for paramilitary and sabotage actions. British and American intelligence networks were heavily involved in this aspect of resistance in occupied France, and both organizations heavily recruited women given their ability to be less recognizable as foreign or unusual in the social climate of occupied France. French-speaking women were ideal candidates for undercover work since the two work drafts, the STO and the *Relève*, depleted the male half of the French population, which made men less ideal candidates for undercover work. Intelligence circuits relied on women agents to gather intelligence and carry out various operations, and women WT operators were vital for the success of other forms of resistance across France as they transmitted intelligence back to London. Espionage operations carried out by women were critical to the success of the larger espionage objectives, and women agents, though occupying a traditionally masculine role, were vital across occupied France. With the noticeable absence of French men in France, Allied intelligence forces such as the SOE, OSS, BCRA, MI5, MI6, and MI9 actively recruited women for intelligence work and escape line operations throughout the war.

Intelligence Organizations Working in France

The Special Operations Executive (SOE), approved by Winston Churchill in July 1940 following the evacuation of British forces from Dunkirk and the fall of France, brought “ungentlemanly warfare”⁵³ to the British forces’ military handbook. Known by a variety of monikers and belonging to the Ministry of Economic Warfare, the Special Operations Executive, acting separately from the existing Intelligence Service, took the lead on the British infiltration of agents across Europe.⁵⁴ The Minister of Economic Warfare, Dr. Hugh Dalton (later succeeded by Lord Selborne), and Winston Churchill represented the SOE in the War Rooms and the Cabinet, while Brigadier Colin McVean Gubbins undertook training, recruitment, organization, and assignments.⁵⁵ Gubbins personally appointed key leaders in the SOE, including future F (French) Section chief Colonel Maurice Buckmaster, intelligence officer Vera Atkins, and recruiter Selwyn Jepson, among the other chiefs and officers of other sections.⁵⁶ Senior Intelligence Officer Atkins of SOE’s F Section played perhaps the most significant role in terms of agent interactions out of the F Section officers; she conducted secondary interviews with potential recruits after Jepson’s initial interview⁵⁷ and built rapports with many of the female agents, eventually travelling across Europe in 1946 and 1947 to discover the fates of the thirteen female agents who did not return from their assignments.⁵⁸

The SOE’s ultimate mission, as outlined by Churchill and Gubbins, was to support continental resistance efforts (especially in France) against German occupying forces by training agents in resistance, sabotage, and subversive strategies; the SOE’s F (French) Section under

⁵³ Thomas and Lewis, *Shadow Warriors of World War II*, 38.

⁵⁴ Thomas and Lewis, *Shadow Warriors of World War II*, xi-xii, 2.

⁵⁵ Thomas and Lewis, *Shadow Warriors of World War II*, x, 52.

⁵⁶ Thomas and Lewis, *Shadow Warriors of World War II*, xii.

⁵⁷ Thomas and Lewis, *Shadow Warriors of World War II*, 8-9.

⁵⁸ For more information on Vera Atkins’ postwar search for F Section’s missing women agents, consider Sarah Helm’s *A Life in Secrets: The Story of Vera Atkins and the Lost Agents of SOE* (Anchor Books, 2007).

Buckmaster focused on working with resistance groups across France which were not allied with de Gaulle and the BCRA as well as working with nonpolitical resistance groups and directly acting on new intelligence.⁵⁹ Created specifically for World War II and the needs of continental resistance groups across Europe, the SOE serves as the trailblazer for the active recruitment of women for intelligence work and military service, with Gubbins' initial proposal inspiring Donovan while creating the OSS and encouraging shifts in Free French and MI6 recruitment strategies.⁶⁰ F Section sent the most agents into France, a total of 39 female agents, while RF Section of the SOE liaised with the Free French; the SOE also liaised with the War Office, Royal Navy intelligence, and Royal Air Force intelligence.⁶¹

SOE agent Jacqueline Nearne, beyond working as a courier in northern France, maintained the relationship between her British circuit and the local *Maquis* group, while her sister Eileen trained as a radio operator for a different circuit.⁶² Women like the Nearne sisters, trained and dropped into France by the SOE, took on a variety of duties yet were only defined by a single phrase (radio operator or courier) that did not cover the magnitude of their work and the risks they took to protect circuit leaders and maintain that connection with SOE headquarters back in the United Kingdom. Pearl Witherington, one of the top SOE agents in France, received several awards for her military service (Medal of the Resistance, the Croix de Guerre, the Legion of Honor), but the British government refused her superior officers' recommendation for a Military Cross on the grounds that women were ineligible for the award; instead, the government offered her a civil MBE which she refused, ultimately accepting a military MBE for her wartime

⁵⁹ Thomas and Lewis, *Shadow Warriors of World War II*, 3. O'Connor, *SOE Heroines*, 15.

⁶⁰ O'Connor, *SOE Heroines*, 15.

⁶¹ O'Connor, *SOE Heroines*, 16.

⁶² Rossiter, *Women in the Resistance*, 170.

service.⁶³ Such a minimization of women's work and a reluctance to classify women's wartime service as deserving of a military medal reflects the difficult position that spies and women (especially women spies like Witherington) had as nontraditional military participants.

As for the British Secret Intelligence Service (SIS), it consisted of several departments that worked with other Allied intelligence agencies and local resistance groups. The SIS, upon the arrival of European refugees to Britain's shores (often via MI9 escape lines), would conduct initial interrogations about the individual and the state of the country they had immigrated from and then conduct background checks; the SOE used these entry interviews to create an initial pool of recruits.⁶⁴ During the war, Stewart Graham Menzies served as the head of SIS.⁶⁵ Menzies shared intelligence and strategies with the SOE, the OSS, and the BCRA. SIS used passport controls officers in British embassies and the British Security Coordination (BSC) as covers for agents and as contact points for SIS agents operating in these countries.⁶⁶ Claude Dansey, the deputy chief of MI6, had very specific ideas about the role and goals of British intelligence organizations; he hated the SOE because neither he nor MI6 had control of the organization or its possible interference with MI9 or MI6, and Dansey also perceived women agents as untrustworthy, prejudicing him against the recruitment of women agents.⁶⁷ SIS eventually recruited female agents, though not to the same scale as the SOE; their most notable recruits include Marie-Madeleine Fourcade, chief of Alliance's 3,000 agents, and American Betty Pack, who used her husband's diplomatic postings and her numerous affairs to the SIS's advantage.⁶⁸

⁶³ Rossiter, *Women in the Resistance*, 181.

⁶⁴ Thomas and Lewis, *Shadow Warriors of World War II*, 22.

⁶⁵ Thomas and Lewis, *Shadow Warriors of World War II*, 23, 26-7.

⁶⁶ Thomas and Lewis, 90, 113-4.

⁶⁷ Helen Fry, *MI9: A History of the Secret Service for Escape and Evasion in World War II*, (Yale University Press, 2020), 35.

⁶⁸ For more information on Marie-Madeleine Fourcade, see Lynne Olson's *Madame Fourcade's Secret War*. For more information on Betty Pack, see *The Last Goodnight* (Harper Perennial, 2017) by Howard Blum.

At peak activity, the SIS (both MI5 and MI6) would run around twelve intelligence networks in France despite losing agents, contacts, and numbers when the Germans arrived.⁶⁹ MI5 built up B Section to oversee and organize counterintelligence under Guy Liddell.⁷⁰ MI6, in operation since the early 1920s, was more established than the SOE, thus possessing sound recruiting strategies and being somewhat less creative and flexible with this new idea of ungentlemanly warfare. MI6 oversaw intelligence operations like those run by the SOE, the most notable of which being Marie-Madeleine Fourcade's Alliance network. Throughout the war, wireless operators at secure Alliance locations would transmit back to London and MI6 to organize drops of weapons, munitions, and currency, while agents could be infiltrated or exfiltrated by parachuting in with the cargo or through Lysander landings.⁷¹ MI6 officially began to support the Alliance network after meeting Jacques Bridou, Fourcade's brother, in London and meeting Major Georges Loustanou-Lacau (who recruited Fourcade in 1936) in neutral Portugal in early 1941.⁷² Under their new arrangement with MI6, Fourcade's network passed on a fifty-five foot map of German anti-invasion defenses on the Cotentin peninsula in Normandy (a projected Allied landing site) and critical intelligence regarding the V-1 and V-2 rockets (as identified and reported on by Alliance agent Jeannie Rousseau).⁷³ This new cooperation with MI6 sparked the name change from Crusade to Alliance.⁷⁴

As the leader of the French government-in-exile, General Charles de Gaulle felt entitled to have access to British intelligence's information as gathered by their operatives, even going as far as to speak to Gubbins about the absorption of the SOE by Free French intelligence.⁷⁵ De

⁶⁹ Rossiter, *Women in the Resistance*, 113.

⁷⁰ Thomas and Lewis, *Shadow Warriors of World War II*, 3.

⁷¹ Olson, *Madame Fourcade's Secret War*, 88-9.

⁷² Olson, *Madame Fourcade's Secret War*, 14-5, 45-6, 48-9, 52.

⁷³ Rossiter, *Women in the Resistance*, 129.

⁷⁴ Olson, *Madame Fourcade's Secret War*, 58.

⁷⁵ Thomas and Lewis, *Shadow Warriors of World War II*, 4-5.

Gaule had a rival general in France, Henri Giraud, who was notably anti-Gaullist, and Giraud's potential communication with Allied forces at Gibraltar in late 1942 threatened de Gaulle's monolithic cooperation with the Allies.⁷⁶ Testing out several names in the first months of the German occupation, Free French intelligence ultimately settled on *Bureau Central de Renseignements et d'Action*, or BCRA, and de Gaulle appointed André Dewavrin to head the organization.⁷⁷ Dewavrin worked closely with André Manel, Captain Raymond Lagier who ran *Action Militaire* and liaised with the SOE, and several other men with military and intelligence backgrounds.⁷⁸ Between the BCRA and MI6, several Gaullist intelligence circuits, including *Confrérie de Notre Dame* led by Gilbert Renault, operated in France.⁷⁹ The BCRA had close ties with the British armed forces (though the arrangement with the British RF section was often difficult) after August 1940, when Churchill signed an agreement which allowed the BCRA to receive financial aid and support towards their shared goal of resisting the German occupation.⁸⁰

Drawing heavily from their predecessor the *Deuxième Bureau*, the BCRA added sabotage to its mandate in April 1941.⁸¹ The BCRA had two main intelligence sections: S2 focused on information gathering about military, political, economic, and social circumstances and individuals in France (including the D-Day landings), while S3 used the information gathered by S2, MI6, and the SOE to plan and prepare for operations which supported pro-de Gaulle resistance networks.⁸² By 1943, the BCRA would operate 60 *réseaux* staffed by 30,000 operatives working across France.⁸³ BCRA agent Marguerite Petitjean formerly worked as a code

⁷⁶ Olson, *Madame Fourcade's Secret War*, 150-9.

⁷⁷ O'Connor, *SOE Heroines*, 19.

⁷⁸ O'Connor, *SOE Heroines*, 19-20.

⁷⁹ Olson, *Madame Fourcade's Secret War*, 56.

⁸⁰ O'Connor, *SOE Heroines*, 19. Rossiter, *Women in the Resistance*, 14.

⁸¹ O'Connor, *SOE Heroines*, 19.

⁸² O'Connor, *SOE Heroines*, 20.

⁸³ Rossiter, *Women in the Resistance*, 113.

clerk in the Free French's London headquarters before convincing BCRA leadership to train her as an agent; despite being trained for sabotage work in France, BCRA assigned Petitjean as a courier working out of Marseille, a demotion and missed opportunity regarding Petitjean's training.⁸⁴ With both the Free French and British intelligence operating out of London, de Gaulle felt a sense of entitlement to British intelligence gathered from France and did not like it when French women joined the SOE or SIS, as they were not serving "their" country.⁸⁵

Jeanne Bohec's struggles to join the BCRA and the *Maquis* reflect the institutional difficulties and discrimination that women faced in joining sabotage and paramilitary organizations; sexism and anti-Semitism were rampant in the Resistance and the *Maquis* in particular, making it difficult for women with intense training and clear skill like Bohec to be accepted by their compatriots and allowed to do their job.⁸⁶ Instead, women had to overcome stereotypes of feminine weakness and shortcomings to join resistance groups, and they had to continue to prove themselves and disprove the stereotypes once officially part of an organization – and even then, their place was not secure and these women had to continue to fight the sexism and discrimination in these organizations.⁸⁷ Bohec (the first woman agent of the BCRA) and Commandant Gérard's (one of two female heads of a *Maquis* group) experiences in the BCRA and the FFL are anomalous in the larger scope of French women's resistance and are indicative of their challenges to larger institutional and societal norms of the period.⁸⁸

The United States of America did not have, by the outbreak of World War II in 1939, an organization that specialized in foreign intelligence and threats like MI6 or the *Deuxième*

⁸⁴ Rossiter, *Women in the Resistance*, 171.

⁸⁵ O'Connor, *SOE Heroines*, 16-7, 19-24, 59.

⁸⁶ Weitz, *Sisters in the Resistance*, 66.

⁸⁷ Weitz, *Sisters in the Resistance*, 147.

⁸⁸ Weitz, *Sisters of the Resistance*, 151, 153.

Bureau. After the outbreak of World War II, William “Wild Bill” Donovan began gathering intelligence on Britain’s ability to hold off a German invasion.⁸⁹ These preparations throughout 1941 included observing British intelligence’s current operations as well as their recruitment and training protocols. Impressed by Gubbins’s proposal to recruit and implement women agents into the SOE, Donovan returned with plans to organize an American foreign intelligence service with the intent to support French and British efforts in occupied Europe.⁹⁰ Donovan eventually became the head of the Office of Strategic Services (OSS).⁹¹ By the time the United States joined World War II in December 1941, Donovan’s OSS had headquarters in Washington, D.C., and in New York City, where Allen Dulles⁹² served as Donovan’s deputy before being posted to Switzerland as the OSS’s section chief in Bern.⁹³

Donovan built X-2 (counterintelligence), the Biographical Records Division (which conducted interviews with new European immigrants), Morale Operations (anti-Axis propaganda objectives) and Communication and Propaganda, Research and Analysis (planning sabotage and subversive operations), Secret Intelligence (SI), Special Operations (SO), Sabotage, Country Units (who worked with the Free French), the Labor Branch (recruited from immigrants arriving in Britain), and training camps in Maryland and Virginia.⁹⁴ Along with Dulles and Donovan, other key leaders of the SOE included Colonel Ellery C. Huntingdon, eventually the head of the OSS’s special operations, Emma Crisler Rado who conducted interviews, London station chief David Bruce, Eleanor Greccay Weis (one of Donovan’s first hires), and Evangeline Bell, who

⁸⁹ Thomas and Lewis, *Shadow Warriors of World War II*, 19.

⁹⁰ Thomas and Lewis, *Shadow Warriors of World War II*, 27-32.

⁹¹ Thomas and Lewis, *Shadow Warriors of World War II*, 60.

⁹² Dulles would eventually become a director of the OSS’s successor, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). Thomas and Lewis, *Shadow Warriors of World War II*, 127.

⁹³ Thomas and Lewis, *Shadow Warriors of World War II*, 80, 127.

⁹⁴ Thomas and Lewis, *Shadow Warriors of World War II*, 85-6, 133-4.

worked for X-2 counterespionage and helped set up the London station.⁹⁵ By 1943, the OSS could send operatives into occupied France and established eight networks controlled by the Bern office, ten networks controlled by the Spain branch, and twelve networks controlled by the Algiers team, a total of 100 agents and fifteen teams supporting the D-Day preparation efforts.⁹⁶

By understanding the sheer number of agents and Allied organizations working in occupied France and how many of those were women, this provides an insight into the involvement and integral nature of women spies working in occupied France and the importance of French resistance and its eventual liberation to the Allied war effort. Through separate and joint operations with other foreign intelligence agencies, the local resistance groups gained access to the necessary supplies and weapons to conduct their operations against the Nazi war machine. Only one part of the larger resistance, the establishment of official intelligence circuits operated by trained agents, both male and female, across the country worked in concert with the local resistance cells to damage the Nazi and Vichy regimes.

Women Spies Abroad

Virginia Hall worked for both the SOE and the OSS during the war, but she was only one of many women working in France for the OSS. Hall, out of all of the OSS American women agents during the war, was the only one to receive the Distinguished Service Cross and the first female civilian to receive the award.⁹⁷ American agent Devereaux Rochester, like Hall, started her military career with the SOE and F Section, training at their facilities across the United Kingdom and working as a courier in the Annecy region for the Marksman circuit; however, she occasionally strayed from her courier mandate to help with safe houses, the local escape line, and

⁹⁵ Thomas and Lewis, 85-6, 117-8, 120, 125, 127, 133, 138, 195.

⁹⁶ Rossiter, *Women in the Resistance*, 114.

⁹⁷ Rossiter, *Women in the Resistance*, 198.

a single sabotage mission in 1944 before her arrest during an ill-advised trip to Paris.⁹⁸ The other four OSS female agents that operated in France never worked for the SOE and primarily worked as *passeurs* on escape lines.⁹⁹ American Virginia d'Albert Lake worked with the Comet line as a safe house operator and a guide for downed Allied pilots in Paris, but she still had an American accent and was listed as American on her paperwork, so she lacked the inconspicuousness of Rochester and Hall who blended into French society.¹⁰⁰ D'Albert Lake and Genevieve de Gaulle were imprisoned together at Ravensbrück towards the end of the war, though the SS transferred her to the Liebenau Red Cross camp for American and British women later in the war.¹⁰¹

Two other American women, Dorothy Tartière and Rosemary Maeght worked on the Burgundy escape line, Tartière in Paris for about a year and Maeght in Pau and the Pyrenees (while also occasionally working with the Kümmel and Visigotha-Lorraine lines), while American Betty de Mauduit operated safe houses near Plouha, a critical stop on the Shelburne line.¹⁰² Marriage to French citizens, living in France, or being born in France are commonalities between the American OSS female agents that operated in and around France during the war, and their courage in remaining in France and not leaving before December 1941 reflects their shared dual loyalties and their bravery and courage in taking up the work of resistance with their fellow patriots. Hélène Deschamps and Annie Thinesse, lacking official training, crossed German lines to work in the field for the OSS Jacques networks and supply intelligence to the Seventh Army, invading from Algiers and the Mediterranean.¹⁰³ Once the Allies had a foothold in southern

⁹⁸ Rossiter, *Women in the Resistance*, 198, 201-3.

⁹⁹ Rossiter, *Women in the Resistance*, 204.

¹⁰⁰ Rossiter, *Women in the Resistance*, 204-5.

¹⁰¹ Rossiter, *Women in the Resistance*, 210.

¹⁰² Rossiter, *Women in the Resistance*, 211, 213, 215.

¹⁰³ Rossiter, *Women in the Resistance*, 118.

France, many of the women officers and clerks of the OSS transferred to Lyon, Caserta (in Italy), and other military bases across southern Europe.¹⁰⁴

The Interallié network, like other Allied intelligence circuits, had French agents reporting

the strength of the land forces in each French sector, the location of fuel dumps and power stations, the number of ships seen in certain harbours [*sic*] on any given day, pill box locations, invasion exercises, the number of genuine and dummy aircraft at given airfields, and numerous vital bits of intelligence.¹⁰⁵

Henri Gorce's courier for the Famille *réseau* was his cousin, Dr. Aimée Batier, who received a pharmaceutical degree before attending medical school; Batier worked as a courier, liaison agent, a doctor, and mother, and she eventually became a chief in the Gallia circuit in Paris until she had to go into hiding until her arrest and deportation to Ravensbrück in late 1944.¹⁰⁶ Batier's work as a courier, liaison agent, and resistance chief preserves her place in the historical record where so many other couriers and liaison agents, only identified by first name, were forgotten and not identified by the resistance chiefs they worked for. Other networks across France, such as the Paris-based Prosper circuit and Fourcade's massive Alliance network in the South of France, had similar levels of success. The Allied success in establishing *réseaux* across occupied France prompted the German SS to post radio-detecting equipment around the city and scan constantly, making the tasks of female radio operators and couriers even more difficult, and increased patrols would go on to affect other systems like the PCF's underground organization and the success of Allied intelligence-backed escape lines.¹⁰⁷

As liaison and courier agents, women ran the risks of random searches while delivering messages from agents in their circuit and also faced an elevated risk of torture since the Gestapo

¹⁰⁴ Rossiter, *Women in the Resistance*, 120.

¹⁰⁵ Walker, *The Women Who Spied for Britain*, 148.

¹⁰⁶ Rossiter, *Women in the Resistance*, 121-2.

¹⁰⁷ Walker, *The Women Who Spied for Britain*, 149.

knew that these couriers carried sensitive communications.¹⁰⁸ Relying on the bicycle as transportation across and between cities, these women carried compromising materials and sensitive messages from one circuit to another because they were less suspicious than a young man traveling across France and bikes did not need gas coupons or raise suspicion.¹⁰⁹ These couriers would also ensure the success of radio operators (many of whom were also women) by bringing them the necessary components and other supplies (food, tobacco, black market goods, and the occasional document) and braving the highly monitored roads of occupied France.¹¹⁰

Intelligence work became glamorized in official postwar records and memories of the German occupation of France, and women's roles in intelligence work and evasive resistance in World War II have become in the historical fiction genre. The intelligence gathering and evasive resistance found in popular media, however, takes on some of those idealized paramilitary characteristics to add action and excitement to radio broadcasts, clandestine meetings, and time spent hiding in barns, attics, and basements across France. Women's contributions to these two types of resistance work could be glamorous, following the models of spies Virginia Hall and Marie-Madeleine Fourcade, or it could be mundane, such as running a café as a front for several networks in Paris and forging paperwork as SOE agent Julienne Aisner did.¹¹¹ Many women gathered intelligence without being officially recruited; counting boats in the harbor, paying attention at work (especially at the Postal, Telegraph, and Telephone Service buildings), and distinguishing military unit colors provided critical intelligence to Allied headquarters in London.¹¹² Such simple acts of intelligence gathering were still incredibly dangerous for

¹⁰⁸ Weitz, *Sisters in the Resistance*, 77.

¹⁰⁹ Weitz, *Sisters in the Resistance*, 77.

¹¹⁰ Weitz, *Sisters of the Resistance*, 201.

¹¹¹ O'Connor, *SOE Heroines*, 182-5.

¹¹² Rossiter, *Women in the Resistance*, 114-5.

operatives. Simone Michel Lévy used her position at the Postal, Telegraphy, and Telephone office to send information to London, organize resistance activities that targeted the communications hubs, and transport illegal radios and funds, but she and her team were betrayed in 1943; Lévy would be executed in April 1945, the very end of the war, and became one of six women awarded the Cross of the Liberation (who was also depicted on a postage stamp).¹¹³

Sex workers could also occupy a precarious position in the world of intelligence and espionage in occupied France. As *collabos horizontales*, loyal French patriots saw them as betraying France when these sex workers were often trying to survive the new occupation or were doing so for a larger purpose (obtaining necessary goods for families, friends, or neighbors or using it as a cover for resistance work); these *collabos horizontales* rarely betrayed the Resistance in the years when massive arrests were too common.¹¹⁴ The danger of being labeled a collaborator was particularly dangerous; sexual violence towards women suspected of being *collabos horizontales* often faced the risk of sexual violence at the hands of *Maquis* and other Frenchmen in the resistance; Nancy Wake, an SOE agent working with the rural *Maquis*, heard of three Frenchwomen who had been captured, raped, and abused by *Maquis* because they were allegedly spies; one of the three women admitted to spying for the Germans, while another had had an affair with a Milice officer and the third was vulnerable and attractive, only seventeen years old.¹¹⁵ Such incidents reflect the larger danger of espionage and evasive resistance for Frenchwomen; threats did not only come from the Germans, depending on the cover story.

By considering the role of women as formal, trained spies in and across occupied France, this dismantles the predominant image of men as the dominant actors of paramilitary and

¹¹³ Rossiter, *Women in the Resistance*, 115.

¹¹⁴ Szabo, *Young, Brave and Beautiful*, 139.

¹¹⁵ Stroud, *Lonely Courage*, 224-5.

espionage operations in occupied France. Working in a male-deficient France, women were the best candidates for such operations in France, and, with their gender-blind training, were fully prepared to undertake such work for the resistance and the Allied war effort. Through this lens, women's work as spies in wartime France refute the long-held gendered associations between the military and intelligence work and masculinity. Going against the male-centric narratives of combat and French resistance, surveys of women spies, popular choices for World War II historical fiction novels and World War II historians upon the declassification of the relevant documents, challenge hegemonic notions of gender and the established postwar narrative, creating a new inclusive representation of wartime espionage and the French resistance.

Escape Lines, Safe Houses, and Evasive Resistance

Evasive acts of resistance were not as glamorous or memorialized as acts of sabotage, armed resistance, or espionage, yet they, like the French political and intellectual resistance organizations, were some of the first *réseaux* to begin operation early into the occupation. Many of the escape lines that crossed France began in the Netherlands or Belgium, both occupied in 1940, and the *passeurs* and couriers along the Dutch and Belgian lines brought their knowledges and expertise to the French portions of the major escape lines. Women, again, could operate along these resistance lines because their gender and ability to speak local languages made them less suspicious to the German officers they encountered along the routes. By organizing and working on escape lines, women across occupied Europe contributed to the war and resistance efforts, albeit in a less recorded manner, by ensuring that war and resistance efforts would continue via the safe passage of pilots and agents to neutral territories. Madame X (Marie-Louise Le Duc of the Breton *Maquis*, sheltered Allied pilots and facilitated their escape to Britain.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁶ Weitz, *Sisters of the Resistance*, 215.

Many local French and Belgian groups organized escape lines of their own, just as local French people organized their own intelligence and resistance networks that worked with or under foreign intelligence organizations. These acts of evasive resistance facilitated future acts of resistance when resistance agents, pilots, and foreign operatives escaped and returned to the United Kingdom, as many who used these escape lines would return to combat. Escape line work also involved harboring individuals wanted by the Germans; if the Nazis caught them, sheltering political refugees, Allied airmen, Allied soldiers, young men dodging the STO, Jewish refugees, escapees, or other *résistants* spelled disaster for the women and their guests.

MI9, part of British intelligence, focused on escape routes across Europe to exfiltrate downed pilots, airmen, or agents from occupied Europe back to London, usually via overland routes into Spain, Portugal, or Switzerland. MI9 also dropped a handful of agents into occupied France to work on their European escape lines, often in collaboration with MI6 and the SOE. Founded in December 1939, MI9 originally had two divisions: MI9(a), which oversaw prisoners of war (POWs), and MI9(b), which organized the escape and evasion of British POWs held in enemy camps; by 1942, the mandates of MI9(a) and MI9(b) and their names changed, with MI9(a) becoming MI19 and MI9(b) becoming MI9.¹¹⁷ Brigadier Norman Crockatt became the head of MI9 after its formation, recruiting members and instructors from former escapers who knew the risks and difficulties of returning to England via an occupied continent.¹¹⁸

MI9's core officers were military men, many of whom had been "escapers" (POWs who escaped their prison) during World War I. Christoph Clayton Hutton, and Charles Fraser-Smith created "Q gadgets" for the organization and its operatives.¹¹⁹ Claude Dansey, the deputy head of

¹¹⁷ Fry, *MI9*, 3-4.

¹¹⁸ Fry, *MI9*, 5.

¹¹⁹ Fry, *MI9*, 6-8, 10-11, 13-22, 105.

MI6, also worked with Crockatt and MI9, on the escape lines; this led to some overlap between MI9 and MI6 and created some close calls when German forces picked up on a MI9 escape line and nearly discovered parallel MI6 operations.¹²⁰ Interrogators like Hughes, Jackson, de Bruyne, and Burnell conducted arrival interviews of all escapers, military and civilian, upon their arrival to England; these interviews became key sources of information and clothing for other military intelligence organizations, including the SOE and MI6.¹²¹ MI9, MI6, and the SOE used the same air base, RAF Tempsford, and the same squadrons to parachute agents into France.¹²² After the United States entered the war in December 1941 following the bombing of Pearl Harbor, MI9 liaised with the American government and advised them on the creation of Military Intelligence Service-X (MIS-X) in the US Military Intelligence Division.¹²³

In response to the sudden defeat of France, Belgium, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands, one of the first immediate needs that arose was the urgent need to help all able Allied pilots avoid capture which, beyond helping the Allied war effort, also reduced the strain of safety and resources on safehouse operators across France.¹²⁴ The Comet, Françoise, Marie Claire, and Marie Odile escape lines, numbering about 100,000 resistors over the course of the war, facilitated the escape of at least 6,600 Allied soldiers and prisoners of war (3,000 American pilots, 2,000 British and Commonwealth pilots, 500 American soldiers, and 1,100 British soldiers) from occupied Europe into the neutral zones of Spain and Switzerland.¹²⁵ MI9 ran three main escape lines in Europe, with exits at British embassies in neutral Spain and Switzerland, with the goal of reaching Gibraltar and traveling back to Britain. The Pat Line, organized by Ian

¹²⁰ Fry, *MI9*, 1, 35.

¹²¹ Fry, *MI9*, 105.

¹²² Fry, *MI9*, 111. O'Connor, *SOE Heroines*, 50-58.

¹²³ Fry, *MI9*, 61.

¹²⁴ Rossiter, *Women in the Resistance*, 23, 31.

¹²⁵ Rossiter, *Women in the Resistance*, 17, 23, 73.

Garrow, started in northern France (Rouen, Amiens, Lille, and Rheims) before passing through Paris and central France across three routes to the Côte d'Azur (with headquarters in Marseille and Toulouse), ultimately helping escapers cross the Pyrenees and end in Gibraltar; the Comet Line began in Belgium, crossed Paris and west-central France to the Pyrenees and the British embassy in Bilbao, before going south to Madrid and Gibraltar; and the Shelburne Line originated in Paris and Rennes before ending in Plouha and Falmouth on the English coast.¹²⁶

All three MI9 lines employed women at various stages of the routes as *passeurs* (smugglers and guides) across the Pyrenees, organizers of safe houses, and as couriers with MI9; the Belgian Comet Line in particular relied heavily on female agents such as Andrée (Dedée) De Jongh (whom the line was initially named after), Madame Elvire de Greef and her mother Bobonne, Janine de Greef, Elsie Maréchal and her mother Elsie Maréchal, Madame Scherling, Suzanne De Jongh Wittek, Eugenie De Jongh, Francia Usandizaga, sisters Andrée and Aline Dumont, Peggy van Lier, Sophie Grandjean, and Olympe Biernaux; many of the women of the Comet Line would be arrested during the war.¹²⁷ Dedée de Jongh in particular was critical to the success of the Comet Line until her arrest in 1943, as she established contact with MI9 in Spain yet insisted on organizational independence and refused a British-trained wireless operator, citing a necessity for self-determination and the ability to make rapid decisions.¹²⁸ The evasive resistance network was also particularly important for French Jews; women like Marianne Cohn worked with the *Éclaireurs Israélites Français* to smuggle French Jewish children to neutral Switzerland and Spain and away from the Nazis; two-thirds of the group escaped to Switzerland, while the remainder were captured; Cohn was beaten to death by the German officers.¹²⁹

¹²⁶ Fry, *MI9*, 17, 37-8.

¹²⁷ Fry, *MI9*, 78, 83, 88-90, 94, 108-9.

¹²⁸ Fry, *MI9*, 81-3.

¹²⁹ Weitz, *Sisters of the Resistance*, 172.

Women played major roles in these organizations, as at least ten lines had female chiefs like the Comet line (founded by Andrée de Jongh), while many others occupied lower positions of leadership; the Burgundy escape line was 40% women *passeurs*, Marie Odile was 36% women, Françoise 20%, and Brandy 35%.¹³⁰ On the Comet line, Belgian and French operatives transported Allied pilots from Belgium to Paris and then the Pyrenees, risking arrest, imprisonment, and death for themselves and their packages (pilots).¹³¹ De Jongh recruited other women to her escape line, including Elvire de Greef, Comet's chief in southwest France; Madame de Greef organized her sector's guides, safehouse keepers, convoyers, and supplies while also traveling into Paris and over the Pyrenees as the line required, ultimately personally facilitating the escape of 337 pilots.¹³² The Pat Line originated in Toulouse (with connections into Paris, Marseille, and Perpignan) and had a female chief in Marie Louise Dissard, and she, along with 123 other agents, helped 250 pilots escape occupied France.¹³³ English Mary Lindell, Comtesse de Milleville, worked with the Red Cross and also founded the Marie Claire escape line to help French and British soldiers and civilians escape the occupation via Bordeaux, Sauveterre de Béarn, St. Malo in Brittany, or Marseille.¹³⁴ The Gestapo arrested Lindell in 1941 and sentenced her to thirty months in Fresnes prison (later reduced to nine months in solitary confinement), after which she went into hiding.¹³⁵ An arrest by the Gestapo and prison time did not deter Lindell, as she left hiding for Lyon and Britain, eventually returning in October 1941 to reestablish an escape line based in Lyon that extended from northern France and Paris to Pau, Ruffec and Andorra.¹³⁶ Lindell relied on her secretary, Ginette Favre, as a guide (though she

¹³⁰ Rossiter, *Women in the Resistance*, 24.

¹³¹ Rossiter, *Women in the Resistance*, 25.

¹³² Rossiter, *Women in the Resistance*, 26, 31.

¹³³ Rossiter, *Women in the Resistance*, 31, 35.

¹³⁴ Rossiter, *Women in the Resistance*, 35-6.

¹³⁵ Rossiter, *Women in the Resistance*, 37.

¹³⁶ Rossiter, *Women in the Resistance*, 37, 39, 41.

would eventually get arrested with Lindell in 1943), and Comtesse Pauline Barr de St. Venant (alias Marie Odile) also worked on Marie Claire and would eventually lead the line following Lindell's second arrest in November 1943, relying on her escape work in Alsace-Lorraine.¹³⁷

Beyond these major escape lines, women like Berthe Fraser, Sylvette Leleu, Sister Marie Laurence, Marie Madeleine Davy, and Elisabeth Barbier set up escape lines around France or worked as regional or sector heads for major escape lines, helping hundreds of Allied soldiers avoid capture even if these women would be arrested or deported for their resistance against the Reich.¹³⁸ Flore Marie Spiquel worked the northern section of the BCRA's Brandy line, while Gabrielle Buffet Picabia worked the southern half, and the two women ran the BCRA's main escape line between 1942 and 1943 until they were betrayed or evacuated.¹³⁹ Women guides like Peggy Van Lier, Micheline de Jongh, Andrée de Jongh (founder of the Comet line), worked along these escape lines, pretending to be the sisters, wives, or girlfriends of Allied pilots and acted as their voices to mask their inability to speak French or their American- and British-accented French.¹⁴⁰ The accent and language difficulties plagued Allied operations of all types across France, from espionage and intelligence work to the escape lines and safehouses; accents, clothes, personal possessions, and a general lack of knowledge of the French situation could throw operations such as the escape lines into immediate jeopardy.¹⁴¹

The Shelburne line, which operated out of Brittany in 1944, sent 128 Allied pilots and 19 other men across the Channel after dropping supplies off for the local *Maquis*.¹⁴² Of course women played a major role in the short-lived Shelburne line, and American Marie Rose Zerling,

¹³⁷ Rossiter, *Women in the Resistance*, 41-2.

¹³⁸ Rossiter, *Women in the Resistance*, 45-6.

¹³⁹ Rossiter, *Women in the Resistance*, 47.

¹⁴⁰ Rossiter, *Women in the Resistance*, 56-7, 60, 64.

¹⁴¹ Rossiter, *Women in the Resistance*, 65.

¹⁴² Rossiter, *Women in the Resistance*, 77, 96.

a professor at the Valenciennes lycée turned courier, was one of the first recruits (of around 200 total members) and transported messages between Bostsarron and the Cavailles *arrondissement* in Paris, eventually becoming the most important female member in the Paris section of the Shelburne line.¹⁴³ Zerling recruited other women to work the Paris Shelburne section, including a radio operator Ginette Dorré, who stayed in contact with MI9, and other female guides like Marie Thérèse Le Calvez and Countess Bertranne d’Hespel (whose mother Comtesse Elisabeth de la Bourdonnaye was arrested with the Musée de l’Homme circuit) along the route.¹⁴⁴ D’Hespel operated both as part of the Shelburne line and as a safehouse operator, taking on dual resistance roles as so many other women did by working locally to serve the larger effort.

The safehouses intersected with the home front resistance, the escape lines, the paramilitary resistance, and the spy circuits operating in France; what threatened each of these resistance organizations also threatened the safehouse operators, often putting them in a dangerous position. Renée Nouveau and her husband, based in Marseille, set up one of the first official safehouses in occupied or free France after meeting British Ian Garrow, founder of the Pat O’Leary escape line.¹⁴⁵ Safe houses were particularly crucial in large cities like Marseille and Paris where there was a large German presence; women like Gabrielle Wiame, Germaine Royannez, and Genevieve Soulié operated safe houses as part of a larger network, verified security checks, supplied food and clothing to their guests, controlled transportation to and from the safehouse, and distributed funds to other operators, as Wiame was one of fifty-five safe house operators (three-quarters of which were other women) with the Comet line in Paris.¹⁴⁶ Country safehouses, while more isolated and farther from a German police presence, came with their own

¹⁴³ Rossiter, *Women in the Resistance*, 81, 97.

¹⁴⁴ Rossiter, *Women in the Resistance*, 82, 96-7.

¹⁴⁵ Rossiter, *Women in the Resistance*, 65.

¹⁴⁶ Rossiter, *Women in the Resistance*, 67-9.

difficulties as there were fewer places to hide, other safe houses might be farther away, and local farmers might be supplying the *Maquis* (which came with a slightly different set of risks).

Religious communities such as an Augustinian convent in Malestroit, Brittany, and the Sisters of Providence convent in Belgium also worked safe houses separate from the escape lines and hid pilots in medical clinics, the bishop's suite, and in other facilities attached to the convent.¹⁴⁷

By including safe houses and escape lines as acts of resistance, this expands the definition of resistance to include a critical yet marginalized set of resisters, many of whom were women, in the history of occupied France. While escape lines and safe houses could easily fall under the category of home front resistance, the secrecy involved with such operations and the importance of such facilities to the paramilitary and espionage *réseaux* highlight the hybridization of resistance operations and the significance of the most minor acts, many of which women participated in, to the larger resistance, which the postwar narrative male-washed. Through the expansion of ideas of resistance to include escape lines and safe houses and women's work, this expansion further challenges the limitations of the postwar narratives of resistance that perpetrated a male-centric and paramilitary-centric agenda that marginalized the importance of other acts of resistance and the women who carried them out.

III. Political and Intellectual Resistance

Paramilitary organizations and their acts of sabotage and violence remain the main image of French resistance activity during World War II and after, dominating the official histories of the French resistance and the Nazi occupation in France. This mainstream narrative overshadowed the intelligence work undertaken by French, British, and American organizations; in comparison to political and intellectual resistance, however, espionage and subversive

¹⁴⁷ Rossiter, *Women in the Resistance*, 72.

resistance occupy a comparatively prominent and glamorized position in the collective official memory of French resistance. Some of the first resistance groups formed in France, however, were formed by intellectuals and the French Communist Party, which had gone underground following the 1938 elections and the Nazi-Soviet non-aggression pact; this early resistance by political and intellectual organizations set the tone for resistance work in occupied France.

Unsurprisingly, women *partisanes* make up a tiny percentage of the total armed members of the PCF's paramilitary FTP and the *Maquis*, but they occupied critical positions within the larger command structure of the French Communist Party as officials, liaisons and agents committed to fighting against the German occupation of France.¹⁴⁸

Local French resistance cells primarily conducted political and intellectual resistance during the occupation. The British and American forces, already stretched thin, were not interested in creating further conflict among the various French factions; while de Gaulle did not always cooperate (especially when concerning intelligence work), he was fairly predictable, and other Allied resources could not extend to the local political and intellectual resistance circles in France. French movements ran and organized these operations largely independently from foreign agencies, and women such as Groupe du Musée de l'Homme member Agnès Humbert and PCF members Lucie Aubrac and Madeline Marzin were critical to the growth of resistance work amongst the intelligentsia and working class in French cities. Organizations like the PCF, which already operated underground because of prewar political persecution, prepared to resist by continuing their strategies of cover names, clandestine publications, compartmentalization (adopted by the larger French and Allied resistances), and other subversive strategies.

¹⁴⁸ Weitz, *Sisters of the Resistance*, 148.

Women were, of course, critical to the movements that heavily relied on collective action, such as dividing the publication and recruiting processes among a larger group or mass protests or boycotts (particularly in urban centers and places of food distribution). Under German and Vichy policies, women lost the ability to work in select occupations, and they found themselves relegated to largely domestic tasks affected by government policies on wages and food and clothing rations. While political and intellectual resistance may not seem as glamorous, political and intellectual resistance and women's contributions to these *réseaux* helped start the resistance efforts against the German occupation and the Vichy regime. A discussion of political and intellectual resistance emphasizes a broader scope of women's resistance and can expand the examination of resistance organizations.

Political and Intellectual Resistance Groups

The French Communist Party (*Parti Communist Français*, or PCF) went underground with the signing of the German-Soviet nonaggression pact in 1939 and resurfaced when the Germans reneged on the agreement in 1941 with the launch of Operation Barbarossa, the invasion of the Soviet Union, signifying a spike in resistance activity across France.¹⁴⁹ The PCF had two major wings: the political wing, which focused on acts of protest and *intellectual résistance* (such as the publication and distribution of anti-Nazi pamphlets and newspapers by underground presses), and the military wing, the *Francs-Tireurs et Partisans* (FTP); ideally, both wings operated separately and ran their own missions as part of the larger resistance strategy of compartmentalization, but there were occasions where the two wings worked together on a larger aboveground operation.¹⁵⁰ Within political and intellectual resistance in France, organizations like the PCF split into political and paramilitary wings; other resistance groups and the *Maquis*

¹⁴⁹ Schwartz, *Today Sardines Are Not for Sale*, 59-60.

¹⁵⁰ Schwartz, *Today Sardines Are Not for Sale*, 63.

would adopt the paramilitary wing's name, *Francs-Tireurs et Partisans* (FTP). Women members of the PCF, including Lucie Abrac and Madeline Marzin (organizer of the Rue de Buci protest in May 1941), increasingly found themselves attached to the political wing of the PCF. While women occupied roles in the PCF and resistance underground, they also were able to act and organize aboveground, a privilege that their male counterparts did not possess.

Other elements of the French Communist population participated in majority-Communist unions, local Communist cells, the *Association Républicaine des Anciens Combattants* (ARAC, a veterans' organization), committees, women's cells, and youth cells.¹⁵¹ Given the political differences and the concerns of the French people about the rise of the Soviet Union, the PCF often did not work with the local, less political resistance groups across France, representing a streak of disunity among the French resisters.¹⁵² The *Maquisards*, the PCF, and the Free French dealt with interorganizational and intraorganizational divisions and rivalries. The *Maquis* and the Free French, for instance, were anti-Communist, and many *Maquisards* did not support de Gaulle, his agenda, and his government-in-exile, instead preferring other French leaders such as General Giraud.¹⁵³ A critical interwar Communist organizer, Danielle Casanova, went on to organize *Les Jeunes Filles de France* and the Gaullist *Union des Femmes Françaises*.¹⁵⁴

Some intellectual resistance groups had ties to foreign intelligence organizations after developing inside France. Jeannine Picabia organized a smaller group of intellectuals, professors, civil servants, artists, and writers in Paris in 1940 into the SMH *Gloria réseau*; her mother Gabrielle Buffet Picabia worked as part of the Brandy escape line.¹⁵⁵ This circuit of intellectuals

¹⁵¹ Schwartz, *Today Sardines Are Not for Sale*, 70.

¹⁵² Schwartz, *Today Sardines Are Not for Sale*, 165.

¹⁵³ Olson, *Madame Fourcade's Secret War*, 150.

¹⁵⁴ Rossiter, *Women in the Resistance*, 167.

¹⁵⁵ Rossiter, *Women in the Resistance*, 131.

and prewar pacifists spread to Brittany and Normandy, sending intelligence on to the Americans and the British; Germaine Tillion of the Musée de l'Homme circuit remained in contact with SMH Gloria until her arrest in August 1942, and this arrest also resulted in the capture of Gloria agent Simone Lahaye.¹⁵⁶ Jeannine Picabia would escape arrest when Gloria collapsed in 1942 by going into hiding in Paris and Lyon.¹⁵⁷ Suzanne Bertillon organized the *réseau* HI HI and led it in partnership with the OSS, who wanted to build a trans-Pyrenees escape network (and would eventually have fourteen such trains); Bertillon came from a prominent French medical family, traveled across Europe as a journalist, and worked for the Vichy censorship service where she met American SOE and OSS agent Virginia Hall.¹⁵⁸ The HI HI network, under Bertillon, supplied the Americans and the Allies with information for the invasion of France and eventually used 100 agents to cover a massive section of southwestern France.¹⁵⁹ The Parisian Mithridates *réseau* of 40 agents and headed by Simone St. Clair (a novelist and journalist) worked in coordination with the BCRA to send information out of Paris to the Free French headquarters in London; women students like Paule Mayet were heavily recruited by the Mithridates cell, and St. Clair was recruited by her literary agent Denise Clairouin.¹⁶⁰ The Mithridates circuit would eventually be infiltrated by Hugo Bleicher, an Abwehr counterintelligence specialist who recruited the infamous La Chatte, and the circuit would collapse in late 1943 with St. Clair's arrest.¹⁶¹ St. Clair would survive her arrest and time at Ravensbrück, but many others would not survive imprisonment, including the chief of the Dijon Brutus network Marcelle Pardé and her secretary Simoen Plessis, who both died at Ravensbrück.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁶ Rossiter, *Women in the Resistance*, 132.

¹⁵⁷ Rossiter, *Women in the Resistance*, 132.

¹⁵⁸ Rossiter, *Women in the Resistance*, 133.

¹⁵⁹ Rossiter, *Women in the Resistance*, 133.

¹⁶⁰ Rossiter, *Women in the Resistance*, 137.

¹⁶¹ Rossiter, *Women in the Resistance*, 138.

¹⁶² Rossiter, *Women in the Resistance*, 138-9.

The political branch of the PCF did not limit their activities to clandestine newspapers; instead, it expanded to include intelligence work, support services, protests like the Buci marketplace protest, and popular committees, so the true spectrum of resistance activities which PCF women had jurisdiction over was quite large.¹⁶³ Of course, men also participated in political activities, and some women were involved with the FTP, but the gender divide between the two branches of the PCF generally remained separated by gender and by skill. The demand for false identification cards skyrocketed after the German occupation and the forced labor services were firmly in place, and the lucky organizations had men and women like Suzanne Borel working in civil service jobs, thus having access to official stamps and papers as well as up-to-date information.¹⁶⁴ Half of the members of the Jewish resistance were women and all required false identity cards, some for resistance work and others for survival.¹⁶⁵

By framing political resistance as a major sphere where women participated during the German occupation of France, this further departs from the mainstream paramilitary and sabotage narratives endorsed by the postwar de Gaulle government through a focus on internal resistance. Considering the political marginalization of the PCF before and after the war, this analysis not only reframes women's contributions to the French resistance but also includes communists in the history of World War II resistance groups. The political and intellectual resistance cells further diversify the social involvement within the resistance, extending to the intelligentsia and the working-class urban populations as well as including students and older people like Humbert and Aubrac. The political and intellectual resistance *réseaux* also shed light on the growth and development of resistance in the first place given their experience operating

¹⁶³ Schwarz, *Today Sardines Are Not for Sale*, 63.

¹⁶⁴ Weitz, *Sisters in the Resistance*, 69.

¹⁶⁵ Weitz, *Sisters in the Resistance*, 84.

underground and their organization and activity early in the occupation. Through a consideration of the significant roles that women took on in the political and intellectual circles, especially as part of the PCF, further information about the genesis of French resistance and women's political organizing in twentieth-century France explores multiple political significances of resistance participation (and the postwar political effects) for women.

Clandestine Publications and the Underground Press

The first clandestine publications responded to the imposition of stringent censorship laws by the German occupation; they began as small notes and pamphlets and grew into mass-produced and typeset newspapers, and the distribution of over 2 million copies by various networks provided key boosts to the morale of the occupied French civilians.¹⁶⁶ These papers countered German misinformation campaigns by sharing accurate military and political information and functioned as propaganda against the Germans and Vichy regimes and for various resistance groups.¹⁶⁷ These early resistance movements (political and intellectual resistance sprung up before paramilitary and espionage activity) focused on countering German misinformation campaigns; refuting misinformation could be as simple as gossiping with a neighbor or passing along a pamphlet in a book before burning it, and many of the first *résistantes* took up this role in the first years of the war.¹⁶⁸ Lucie Aubrac, a critical PCF *résistante*, remarked that their “group developed from [their] need to inform” and “tell people what was happening” in occupied France and elsewhere in Europe.¹⁶⁹

As the only prominent political organization with significant prewar women's groups, the PCF's pamphlets actively targeted Frenchwomen. Women across the PCF took on

¹⁶⁶ Weitz, *Sisters in the Resistance*, 70. Rossiter, *Women in the Resistance*, 145.

¹⁶⁷ Rossiter, *Women in the Resistance*, 145.

¹⁶⁸ Weitz, *Sisters in the Resistance*, 68.

¹⁶⁹ Weitz, *Sisters in the Resistance*, 72.

responsibilities with the clandestine press, a strategy favored by resistance cells across France. With women in charge of the publication and distribution of clandestine newsletters and pamphlets, women-specific communist newsletters proliferated; titles such as *La Voix des Femmes*, *Nous les Femmes*, *La Femme d'Eure et Loir*, *La Patriote Parisienne*, *Femmes de Provence*, *Femmes de Picardie*, *Propagande et Actions Féminines*, *Les Louise de Bettignies*, and *La Voix des Femmes de Saint-Denis* all worked to encourage women to adopt strategies of resistance into their lives to destabilize the Vichy regime and the German occupation.¹⁷⁰

Before the outbreak of World War II, women were not widely represented as newspaper editors and writers in interwar France.¹⁷¹ In the left-wing and clandestine press, however, women would become widely represented by the likes of Edith Thomas, Madeleine Braun, Louise Weiss, Jacqueline Bernard, Genevieve de Gaulle, and Agnès Humbert.¹⁷² Women took on all sorts of roles with the clandestine press, from typists and editors to authors, linotypists, and machine and press operators when the publications became more professional and mass-produced. The *Résistance* paper put out by the Musée de l'Homme often called on its readers to organize and resist, while the PCF papers encouraged people to participate in demonstrations like that on the Rue de Buci.¹⁷³ Other papers looked to the future as recruiting tools for local political, intelligence, and paramilitary cells, while others considered what postwar government would emerge from the ashes of the Third Republic and the occupied regimes.¹⁷⁴ *Défense de la France*, in January 1944, proposed a new postwar constitution that advocated for women's suffrage.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷⁰ Amy Victoria Morrison, "Communist Women's Resistance in Occupied Paris: Engagement, Activism and Continuities from the 1930s to 1945" (PhD diss., University of Adelaide, 2018), 110, 159, 161, 168, 182, 183, 185, 206, 240, Academic Search Complete.

¹⁷¹ Rossiter, *Women in the Resistance*, 147.

¹⁷² Rossiter, *Women in the Resistance*, 147.

¹⁷³ Rossiter, *Women in the Resistance*, 146.

¹⁷⁴ Rossiter, *Women in the Resistance*, 146.

¹⁷⁵ Rossiter, *Women in the Resistance*, 146.

As some of the first women involved in the earliest resistance and evasion networks in occupied France, Agnès Humbert, Yvonne Oddon, and Germaine Tillion contributed to the Musée de l'Homme papers *Résistance* and *Vérité français* in addition to their other roles within this resistance circuit of intellectuals and academics, and Countess Elisabeth de la Bourdonnaye helped distribute copies of *Résistance* while also donating her family's Chateau de Chantérac to an escape line over the Dordogne mountains.¹⁷⁶ Three key *Défense de la France* contributors were Jacqueline Marie Fleury, Hélène Roederer, and Geneviève de Gaulle (niece of the Free French general), who was later captured and imprisoned at Ravensbrück as a political prisoner and potential exchange prisoner, while Jacqueline Bernard was one of the first writers for the Parisian *Combat*.¹⁷⁷ De Gaulle, along with other young women, organized the distribution of *Défense de la France* across Paris and recruited young women for this task.

While these women may not have perceived this as active resistance work, they risked deportation to German camps if they were caught with any of the 200,00 distributed copies of *Défense*, as several distributors including de Gaulle learned upon their arrests in July 1943; de Gaulle would later serve as an editorial secretary and work on the committee of editors, even contributing articles to the paper, demonstrating women's ability to rise through the ranks of the resistance and the clandestine press.¹⁷⁸ Hélène Viannay, Génia Deschamps, Renée Cossin (who herself organized an additional 60 women to distribute copies in Amiens) and Adrienne Cazajus helped distribute 15,000 issues of *Défense* in different departments of France; courier distribution (in chains by bicycle or public transportation and suitcase) and mail distribution were the

¹⁷⁶ Musée de l'Homme, "Le Réseau de Résistance du Musée de l'Homme" [The Musée de l'Homme Resistance Circuit], Musée de l'Homme, accessed March 13, 2024, <https://www.museedelhomme.fr/fr/le-reseau-de-resistance-du-musee-de-l-homme>. Weitz, *Sisters in the Resistance*, 72. Rossiter, *Women in the Resistance*, 4, 151.

¹⁷⁷ Weitz, *Sisters in the Resistance*, 71, 90.

¹⁷⁸ Weitz, *Sisters in the Resistance*, 91. Rossiter, *Women in the Resistance*, 153.

primary forms of spreading clandestine papers to the masses.¹⁷⁹ *Défense*, after the July 1943 arrests, shifted away from a purely intellectual resistance group with a clandestine paper in early 1944 when leaders of *Défense* formed a FFI cell north of Paris.¹⁸⁰ Two women typed and distributed the *Bulletin de Presse de la France Combattante*; other women, all risking arrest at minimum and torture and death at the worst, hid printing presses, transported high numbers of pamphlets and printing plates across Paris, and concealing stock while others stole typewriters and distributed other printing supplies across their network and to other circuits.¹⁸¹ Eventually, women would help write, print, and circulate over 2 million clandestine newspapers.¹⁸²

By reaching out to female readers as both producers and consumers of underground newspapers, readership expands to a new audience (particularly when their male audience is in decline) who might feel inspired to become part of the larger movement and operate in the aboveground or underground worlds (or both, as many women went on to do). While the true numbers of underground pamphlets and clandestine publication (as well as the total readership) are unknown, several dozen specifically targeted women and women's issues (particularly the food shortages and the strict rationing) during the German occupation; women's papers often had a team of women behind the publication, reflecting the centrality of women and their concerns to the political resistance against and the living situation under the German occupation.¹⁸³ The underground press operations across occupied and Vichy France would eventually print full books (including some by women like Edith Thomas and Elsa Triolet) and represent a wide range of political views. Later, the German misinformation campaign of spreading fake

¹⁷⁹ Rossiter, *Women in the Resistance*, 152, 156.

¹⁸⁰ Rossiter, *Women in the Resistance*, 156.

¹⁸¹ Weitz, *Sisters in the Resistance*, 73-4.

¹⁸² Rossiter, *Women in the Resistance*, 17.

¹⁸³ Weitz, *Sisters in the Resistance*, 72.

Resistance papers reflected the success of the clandestine press and the significance of women's contributions to the spread of pro-resistance information during the occupation.¹⁸⁴

Through the spread of clandestine publications and the use of the underground press, women in political and intellectual *réseaux* could directly participate in subversive activity in a variety of roles. By taking on these positions and risking arrest, women involved with the clandestine press contributed to national morale and directly challenges deliberate German and Vichy misinformation all while transforming the French newspaper industry. As an act of resistance, the spread of clandestine publications further united the home front and spread resistance ideas and actions to a larger population that the cells themselves could not reach. With the PCF's active recruitment of women, women *résistantes* became critical to their operations and the success of the underground press. Given the high numbers of women involved with both the political resistance, its many activities and early beginning during the occupation, and the underground press, a survey of their activities during World War II are critical to the expansion of definitions of resistance and official narratives of the war and of women's history.

IV. Resistance on the Home Front

Being a woman during wartime, especially during a hostile occupation, was incredibly difficult when patriotism and occupation ideology were at odds. Following Nazi and Vichy policy ensured survival but were a betrayal of nationalism as defined by a distant government-in-exile that had not experienced the troubles affecting those on the home front. Women on the home front in free and occupied countries also had the burden of maintaining prewar ideals of femininity when the conditions for prewar femininity were not met; femininity in wartime was particularly unstable, as "women were expected to symbolize the continuity of home and

¹⁸⁴ Weitz, *Sisters in the Resistance*, 74-5.

domesticity whilst manpower and economic pressures demanded their presence” in spheres beyond their prewar gender roles, thus taking on the “triple burden of household chores, outside job, and clandestine activities.”¹⁸⁵ Such a dichotomy appeared on the French home front where women had to balance several contradictory roles: patriot, Vichy citizen under Nazi rule (at least in appearance), provider (often the single provider), and, possibly, *résistante*. By dealing with the challenge of maintaining and adapting prewar femininity, the home front became a place of societal resistance when women joined the resistance against the Nazis and Vichy regimes.

Under occupied conditions, support work and directly supporting active resistance against the occupiers and the Vichy regime was challenging at the best of times and risked death the rest of the time; these women were already working on limited rationing to support their own families and were still sending food to prisoners and *résistants* while also worrying about the children of prisoners or dead resisters and supporting those who lived fully underground (and thus lacked money, coupons, and employment).¹⁸⁶ The subtle nature of support work as resistance on the home front results in it being overlooked as a form of resistance and of secondary importance in comparison to other resistance organizations.¹⁸⁷ The standard definition of resistance work as a place of organized, active resistance, often with a military component, ignores ideological resistance that passes as typical social activity, thus going unnoticed by *résistants*, occupying forces, and historians. In the larger context of German and Vichy control, small actions, such as not properly measuring goods, saving flour, selling produce on the black market, and sending food into the city for friends (who do not pay the inflated price), can be reframed as home front resistance that challenge German and Vichy policies.

¹⁸⁵ Lucy Noakes, *Women in the British Army: War and the Gentle Sex, 1907-1948* (London: Routledge, 2006), 124. Weitz, *Sisters in the Resistance*, 85.

¹⁸⁶ Weitz, *Sisters of the Resistance*, 176.

¹⁸⁷ Weitz, *Sisters of the Resistance*, 183.

Support Work and the Home Front

The absence of Frenchmen on the home front and the reluctance of the *Maquis* to accept the assistance women, even of exceptional soldiers like Witherington and Wake, ultimately resulted in a lack of women in paramilitary roles; however, there were plenty of Frenchwomen on the home front running households and working (contrary to Vichy and German ideals of womanhood), and the opposition's devaluation of women's traditional duties provided many Frenchwomen and foreign female agents the perfect cover to carry out resistance work against the German occupiers and the Vichy regime. The home front was the perfect cover for women operatives across France, and various Allied organizations – from the PCF to the SOE and OSS – relied on the presentation of “normal” Frenchwomen for the success of their operations.

Many of the women *passeurs* on the escape lines used their civilian personas as farmers' wives, small business owners, or everyday travelers to disguise their more resistance activities. Women also took on various support roles for the local resistance groups and for the escape lines, including sheltering people wanted by the Gestapo and supplying the *Maquis* with food and arms; some of these roles were more dangerous than hiding from the Nazis or participating in paramilitary strikes against the Germans.¹⁸⁸ As volunteers in an improvised individual or local resistance group, these women lacked the prisoner of war protection that Allied soldiers and pilots possessed, even with violations of the international rules of war; because of the isolation, secrecy, and anonymity which was so critical to underground resistance, only six women received the *Compagnon de la Libération* (Order of the Companions of the Liberation), and many more unnamed and unknown women would not receive any postwar decorations or honors for their work for the Resistance during the occupation.¹⁸⁹ By reframing the home front as a site

¹⁸⁸ Weitz, *Sisters in the Resistance*, 10.

¹⁸⁹ Weitz, *Sisters in the Resistance*, 10.

of resistance, women and other small-scale resisters can claim participation in the resistance while redefining what resistance and spaces of resistance look like in official narratives.

The support work undertaken by French women during the occupation developed out of the arrests of other resisters and a need for external support, particularly for isolated *Maquis* groups in the French countryside, and this support work was a full job with the full risks of resistance work for women across France.¹⁹⁰ Women *résistantes* like Madame Jubault and her daughter (with ties to the Libération du Nord *Maquis* group), Madame Henri Lefevre, and Madame Desprès supplied food and goods to local *résistants*, *Maquisards*, and prisoners. They also came up with ingenious ways to operate under direct German supervision: smuggling messages in with laundry or food packages, disassembling weapons or radios and delivering pieces, leaving clues in newspapers, or gathering intelligence through simple conversation.¹⁹¹ As the occupation continued, the purchase and use of black market goods remained an act of resistance until it was approved by the Vichy regime (though the selling of goods on the black market remained illegal), and the selling and purchasing of black market goods evolved as the ideas of resistance shifted in response with the socio-economic circumstances.¹⁹²

The social support women, including Bertie Albrecht (one of the six women who received the Cross of the Liberation) and Marcelle Bidault, often worked as social workers before and during the war in major French cities, and their role was so critical that the German officials often set up raids and arrests specifically targeting these organizations; Vichy police arrested Albrecht, who previously worked at the *Commisariat de Chômage Féminin* before joining the resistance, in May 1942, and Yvette Baumann, another social worker, replaced Bertie

¹⁹⁰ Weitz, *Sisters of the Resistance*, 171.

¹⁹¹ Weitz, *Sisters of the Resistance*, 172. Rossiter, *Women in the Resistance*, 206.

¹⁹² Weitz, *Sisters of the Resistance*, 234.

as chief of their circuit.¹⁹³ Baumann later took on the position of chief of social services for the *Mouvements Unis de Résistance*, and Bernadette Ratier succeeded her upon Baumann's arrest and deportation to Auschwitz.¹⁹⁴ The social service networks continued to expand and eventually joined the other Gaullist organizations as part of the *Mouvement de Libération Nationale*.¹⁹⁵

The PCF was quick to mobilize and weaponize the home front and regular, non-communist women following the invasion of the Soviet Union (Operation Barbarossa) in 1941. Women, occupying public space and less suspicious than a military-age man in occupied territory, could work in the resistance and circulate above ground, distributing supplies and recruiting for the cause. Women were also central to public demonstrations organized by the PCF during the occupation, taking dominant roles in various food protests against state rationing and reframing their resistance as an extension of their duties as wives and mothers who could not feed their children on the current rationing system – and succeeding with small changes in the rationing system following their protests. Other bread marches in 1943 and 1944 reflect a larger trend of women's resistance going back to the French Revolution in the eighteenth century and French women's historic participation in the defense of their country from internal and external hostile forces had a basis in the traditions of the Revolution and Joan of Arc.¹⁹⁶

Chevriillon, like many other women in the first half of the occupation, did not concern herself with involvement in the resistance and instead observed it happening around her; she notes that “most of us knew nothing about any form of collective action against the Germans” until the occupation had seriously progressed, and most of the everyday citizens, while aware of the formation of resistance groups like the PCF communist underground and their paramilitary

¹⁹³ Rossiter, *Women in the Resistance*, 158.

¹⁹⁴ Rossiter, *Women in the Resistance*, 158.

¹⁹⁵ Rossiter, *Women in the Resistance*, 158.

¹⁹⁶ Weitz, *Sisters in the Resistance*, 286-7.

wing, had no idea how to resist with others and instead acted alone.¹⁹⁷ As an observer of collective resistance for two years of the occupation, Chevrillon presents a timeline which suggests that resistance and rebellion appeared suddenly, on nationally significant days like the anniversary of the Allies' victory in World War I, and that there were no indications of long-term preparation that doubtless went on behind the scenes.¹⁹⁸

While resistance grew, the “ordinary French citizens who opposed Pétain’s regime were aware of signs of rebellion and knew there were sources of information that contradicted the Vichy,” yet the notion that clandestine networks, both French and British, were growing across the occupied and Vichy zones was unthinkable for the first year of the occupation.¹⁹⁹

Chevrillon’s sister, too, also lived a life under occupation with several young children and a husband imprisoned because he was a soldier; her life was difficult as she had to act as the head of her household, raise three young children, worry for her imprisoned husband and aging parents, provide food for her family and other people in Port-Blanc, and deal with the cruelty and greed of others, and, naturally, all of these tasks became more difficult as the Occupation and its restrictions grew more limiting.²⁰⁰ Antoinette’s (Chevrillon’s sister) life resembles the lived experiences of other women on the home front; resistance was certainly a challenge for women with these duties, yet some women with the same sort of responsibilities still chose the risks of resistance work. Chevrillon could undertake work with the BCRA as part of an organized resistance because she could support herself financially, did not struggle much during the occupation, and did not have children to worry about during the occupation. Chevrillon also notes that, as it likely was for other families around the occupied territory, her “family’s

¹⁹⁷ Chevrillon, *Code Name Christiane Clouet*, 52.

¹⁹⁸ Chevrillon, *Code Name Christiane Clouet*, 36.

¹⁹⁹ Chevrillon, *Code Name Christiane Clouet*, 51.

²⁰⁰ Chevrillon, *Code Name Christiane Clouet*, 142.

experience of the war was limited and local,” that resistance cells like the Prosper and Alliance circuits would not be critical to their lives; Chevillon even says that she “had little to complain about” during the occupation as she did not “remember ever standing in line for food.”²⁰¹

Even during the height of the occupation, individual acts of resistance could be individual, simple, and within the constraints of daily activity. In parts of France where *Maquis* or resistance groups did not operate, the local residents could resist through disrespect: the removal of German posters, voluntary censorship undertaken by local writers and artists, mockery of newsreels and Radio-Paris, disengagement with German soldiers, and graffiti.²⁰² Such acts on their own might be inconveniences or annoyances, but collectively they were signs of a larger communal discontent, a symbol of silent but recognizable unity. Women on their own could do such actions, and the simplicity of individual resistance on the home front also allowed young people and students to participate in the larger national resistance.

German and Vichy Women’s Policies

Women on the home front were some of the firsthand victims of the German occupation and the Vichy regime; German rationing laws and work programs, when paired with Vichy laws about women in the workforce and family growth programs, indicates the critical position that the French home front (before and during the German occupation) played in both the legitimization of Vichy and German rule and the dismantling of free French organizations (and the removal of those in power). While there were no active military fronts within the occupied zone and the Vichy zone (if resistance was not “official” military engagement), women still occupied a position as “enemy aliens” as women of (usually) French nationality under hostile enemy occupation and rule or under a nominally free (in truth a collaborative) state in Vichy territory.

²⁰¹ Chevillon, *Code Name Christiane Clouet*, xvii, 37.

²⁰² Chevillon, *Code Name Christiane Clouet*, 51.

In 1943, Vichy and German officials began demanding a labor draft for women, no longer asking for volunteers as they had the previous year, and this time the government asked for 200,000 women workers to take on pink- and blue-collar jobs within France.²⁰³ The labor draft became a site for resistance, with posters using slogans like “not one French woman for the Reich” to encourage women to resist the labor draft and join a resistance group instead.²⁰⁴ The commencement of resistance activity across the occupied and Vichy zones and the breakout of pockets of hostile action (as described in the preceding chapters) turned the occupied and free zones into a site of active military activity, officially turning France into the home front, with many villages and cities becoming active combat zones. Now the home front was not only merely located near active fighting but also the battlefield itself, again place women’s historic positions in the domestic sphere during conflict on the front lines.

The distinct German and Vichy policies that targeted women’s roles as mothers, homemakers, and wives further made the home front a place where resistance could occur. Historically, women would take control of the family business or farm while their husbands, sons, or fathers went to war, not necessarily construed as an act of resistance. However, if women defied policies of “*travail, famille, et patrie*”²⁰⁵ and the ideals of “*kinder, küche, und kirche*” in their traditional roles as unpaid and unacknowledged workers and providers, then the home front becomes a place of ideological resistance where women work and take on different roles in response to the war and to new government policies. Vichy officials would go on to say that they had no intention of restricting women to the domestic sphere and would go so far as to establish a labor service for women aged eighteen to forty-five (and usually childless), all of

²⁰³ Rossiter, *Women in the Resistance*, 164-5.

²⁰⁴ Rossiter, *Women in the Resistance*, 165.

²⁰⁵ Andrew Orr, *Women and the French Army during the World Wars, 1914-1940* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2017), 157.

which contradicted their compulsory home management courses, women's need for the protection provided by the home, and the restrictions on women's professional opportunities, particularly in government work, professional (read: domestic) training, and the civil service.²⁰⁶

By understanding women's relationships with German and Vichy policies on the home front, acts of home front resistance become visible as women subvert or ignore these policies. Through their seeming passivity, women's resistance on the home front remains critical to the delegitimization of the hostile regimes and to community morale. A clear example of the resistance left out of the official militaristic and masculine postwar narrative, discussions of the home front as a site of resistance are especially critical in occupied territories like France. The home front *résistantes* supported the political and espionage *réseaux*; without the support services provided by women, other male and female resisters would not have the resources or support to undertake their more visible acts of resistance. The invisible labor of the home front, like the invisible domestic labor which women carried out for centuries before it became worthy of note, plays a critical part in the organization and maintenance of larger resistance efforts.

Conclusion: Postwar *Résistantes*

Women's resistance work in France not only contributed to the nation's liberation from Nazi occupation and Vichy rule but also further increased and solidified women's political presence in the nation, as their contributions to the French war effort at home and abroad (as part of the Free French, the SOE, the BCRA, or another affiliated military organization) helped Frenchwomen build a case for the extension of suffrage to women in 1945.²⁰⁷ By contributing to their national war effort and the international coalition's efforts to defeat Axis fascism, women *résistantes*, along with other women working in auxiliary or unofficial military capacities around

²⁰⁶ Weitz, *Sisters in the Resistance*, 48-50, 56.

²⁰⁷ Orr, *Women and the French Army*, 174-5, 179.

the world during the Second World War, helped pave the way for women to join national militaries as soldiers and auxiliary recruits in the latter half of the twentieth century. From the shadowy world of espionage and international escape lines to the home front and the underground political organizations, women occupied critical positions, including leadership positions, in the large national resistance against the German occupation of France in every sphere.²⁰⁸ Lacking training and support from many male resisters (in and out of France), these women adapted to the dangers of resistance work, often taking on multiple duties and working with multiple organizations over the course of the war, and life underground to serve their country in any capacity available to them while overcoming the obstacles of sexism, gender differences, norms, and stereotypes within their organizations.²⁰⁹ Risking everything and giving up a lot for the cause, the work undertaken by women, French, British, and American, across the country proved critical to the larger Allied success in liberating France in 1944.

The French, British, and American women operating in France were by no means the only women taking part in resistance work during World War II; women have always been resisters during war in both militaristic and social contexts. In other nations and other theaters of the Second World War, women joined resistance groups and took part in a variety of activities from protest to sabotage. Women partisans in Italy fought against Mussolini and Hitler while the women in the Greek *antartiko* also resisted German and Italian occupation and protected the local Jewish population from deportation.²¹⁰ In the ghettos of occupied Poland, young Jewish women like Renia and Sarah Kukiełka, Zivia Lubetkin, Frumka and Hantze Płotnicka, Chajka Klinger, Bela Hazan, Chasia Bielicka, Chaika Grossman, Faye Schulman, and Anna Heilman,

²⁰⁸ Weitz, *Sisters in the Resistance*, 287.

²⁰⁹ Weitz, *Sisters in the Resistance*, 287-8, 292. Rossiter, *Women in the Resistance*, 220.

²¹⁰ Thanks to Spiro Sun for telling me what the Greek word for “resistance” is.

joined the Polish underground to fight against the occupying Nazi forces.²¹¹ In Japanese-occupied Philippines, Filipina *bayanis* and American women (including Margaret Utinsky, Dorothy Claire Phillips and Mrs. Robert Yearsley)²¹² fought as part of the larger Filipino resistance. Closer to France, women joined the Italian partisans, and even German women resisted, whether they joined the student-led White Rose organization or were one of the many involved in the Rosenstraße protest of February and March 1943. In the United States, women joined every branch of the military from the Navy to the Air Force and various intelligence corps, as did women in Britain. Women recruited by both the British and American foreign intelligence services operated across Europe, including in neutral Spain and Switzerland. In Asia, Kawashima Yoshiko (1907-1948) worked as a Japanese spy throughout the war.²¹³

While the benefits of female operatives in occupied France often boiled down to their ability to pass unnoticed among German officers and local populations, they also functioned as critical members in resistance organizations, conducting a wide variety of tasks, many of which violated or outright rejected their prescribed gender roles and “acceptable” acts of wartime resistance. Around 18% of the roughly 50,000 intelligence *réseaux* agents were women, and they took on a wide variety of roles and dealt with the same risks as their male counterparts during the dark years of occupation and Gestapo crackdown; 64 (of 200) women operatives from the Cohors-Asturies *réseau* were arrested, and sixteen died in concentration camps.²¹⁴

Despite operating in a very patriarchal system of resistance, French women discovered agency and freedom (despite the restrictions of their organization, clandestine life, and the

²¹¹ See Judy Batalion’s *The Light of Days* (HarperCollins, 2021) for more about the Polish underground and Polish Jewish women’s resistance work.

²¹² Bruer, *War and American Women*, 56-8.

²¹³ See Phyllis Birnbaum, *Manchu Princess, Japanese Spy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017) for more about Kawashima Yoshiko.

²¹⁴ Rossiter, *Women in the Resistance*, 221.

German or Vichy policies) through their work with the resistance, and these discoveries (good and bad) changed the lives of French women during and after the war.²¹⁵ As for the numbers about the women involved in political and intellectual *réseaux* and their role in distributing millions of clandestine publications, the numbers of both are harder to track, but it is clear that women, as they did in many other facets of the French resistance, participated in droves yet were lost to history and the male- and paramilitary-centric postwar narrative because they did not register as a *combattant volontaire de la résistance* after the war.²¹⁶

War and occupation temporarily transformed women's lives, assuming that social roles would return to the prewar norms during the postwar period. French women notably took on the role of the head of the family (with so many men dead, imprisoned, or deported) and were slow to return to their prewar dependent role; however, most *résistantes* returned to their prewar roles after the war, and their wartime service and resistance ultimately changed little in their day-to-day lives with no major reversal of roles or gendered power structures, a reality verified by former *résistante* and historian Annie Kriegel.²¹⁷ Even the granting of suffrage to French women in 1945 was not, Kriegel argues, the result of women's resistance and war work during the German occupation; the two were correlational, not causal.²¹⁸ Despite the regression to prewar roles, women *résistantes* in France still played critical roles in the gradual transformation of women's roles and an increase in their rights in the second half of the twentieth century.²¹⁹

After the war, however, the lives of these women *résistantes* did not return to the prewar normal as the postwar government hoped. Attempting to return to the prewar social order and the

²¹⁵ Weitz, *Sisters in the Resistance*, 292-3.

²¹⁶ Rossiter, *Women in the Resistance*, 221.

²¹⁷ Weitz, *Sisters in the Resistance*, 301, 304.

²¹⁸ Weitz, *Sisters in the Resistance*, 304-5.

²¹⁹ Weitz, *Sisters in the Resistance*, 306-7.

maintenance of national heterosexuality through marriage and normative gender roles, these women wanted to maintain their new social, political, and economic independence through an expansion of their rights in the new postwar society; they ultimately received the extended rights they desired over the second half of the twentieth century. Whether the scale of women's resistance work during World War II played a major role in their reception of the right to vote, the French, British, Commonwealth, and American women who took on the duties and dangers of resistance work in World War II clearly demonstrate their courage, bravery, strength, and capability in the face of new threats to their safety and autonomy under the German occupation.

Reckoning with Women's Resistance

By considering the larger scope of women's resistance across occupied France, the gendered nature of resistance work becomes less clear in several categories, notably intelligence gathering, political and intellectual resistance, resistance on the home front, and subversive and evasive resistance. The gender divide is most apparent in the paramilitary wing of resistance organizations, yet there were a few notable women who participated and triumphed as saboteurs and soldiers. Resistance work often involved transgressing the divisions between various acts of resistance as the need arose, and women like Suzanne Tony Robert, Micheline Blum-Picard, and Marie Thérèse Le Calvez, did so frequently; a safe house operator might work with a local *réseau*, *Maquis* group, or underground political group by hiding people, radios, weapons, and black market supplies.²²⁰ In occupied France, the gender of the agent did not matter so long as their work was a success and their cover and cell remained intact to continue the fight. A survey of resistance activity, during and beyond World War II as well as in and outside France, further supports the argument that formal enlistment in an organized military or armed force

²²⁰ Rossiter, *Women in the Resistance*, 222.

organization is not a requirement to be a critical part of and play a major role in a military or intelligence operation, especially for women.²²¹ Indeed, not belonging to a military agency, though risky when captured, may provide some elusive benefits (a subject which warrants further study). While the numbers of known female *résistantes* indicate that hundreds of women participated in the resistance, many others disappeared from history, and the statistics of women *résistantes* even now undersell the extent of women's participation in the resistance.

Although men primarily organized and led the resistance groups (which they structured around gendered ideas of combat and resistance that eventually permeated day-to-day operations) that women fought in, the acts of resistance undertaken by Allied organizations across occupied France were not inherently gendered. Instead, acts of resistance had gendered connotations assigned to them by a primarily male leadership circle which wanted to maintain a level of power and control in one of the few places of authority they could occupy in Nazi and Vichy France, regimes which devalued and removed the agency and authority of Frenchmen. The women who participated in resistance work against the German occupation of France came from all social classes, relationship statuses, political affiliations, religious backgrounds, nationalities, occupations, regions, and ages, yet they took no notice of these differences because of the dangers of their war work and instead united in their efforts to resist the Germans and free France from occupation, a united front created by disparate groups from a seemingly isolated country.²²²

The gendering of resistance work and the marginalization of women's efforts in occupied France continues to dominate the historical narrative, as French efforts to memorialize French resistance increasingly highlight paramilitary and intelligence operations as carried out by French men through de Gaulle's decoration of several male resisters after the war and the erasure

²²¹ Orr, *Women and the French Army*, 184.

²²² Rossiter, *Women in the Resistance*, 17-8.

of women resistance fighters in official government narratives. Other nations such as the United States and United Kingdom have, through various official efforts to memorialize women's military work in World War II, have given their female agents operating across France more attention through commemorative coins, plaques, and other tangible representations of their presence and contributions to the defeat of the Axis powers. By expanding the definition of resistance and resistance work in World War II, countless unnamed women *résistantes* can now take their rightful places in the postwar narratives of occupied France and in the official and unofficial histories of the French resistance and Allied Intelligence during World War II.

Bibliography

- Andrieu, Claire. "Women in the French Resistance: Revisiting the Historical Record." *French Politics, Culture, & Society* 18, no. 1 (2000): 13-27.
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/42843092>.
- Binney, Marcus. *The Women Who Lived for Danger: Behind Enemy Lines during World War II*. New York: Perennial, 2004.
- Birnbaum, Phyllis. *Manchu Princess, Japanese Spy*. New York City: Columbia University Press, 2017.
- Breuer, William B. *War and American Women: Heroism, Deeds, and Controversy*. Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1997.
- Chevriillon, Claire. *Code Name Christiane Clouet*. Translated by Jane Kielty Scott. College Station, TX: Texas A & M University Press, 1995.
- Crown, Sarah Rose. *D-Day Girls: The Untold Story of the Female Spies Who Helped Win World War Two*. New York: Crown, 2019.
- Fry, Helen. *MI9: A History of the Secret Service for Escape and Evasion in World War II*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020.
- Helm, Sarah. *A Life in Secrets: The Story of Vera Atkins and the Lost Agents of SOE*. New York: Anchor Books, 2007.
- Humbert, Agnès, and Barbara Mellor. *Résistance: A Woman's Journal of Struggle and Defiance in Occupied France*. New York: Bloomsbury, 2008.
- Kedward, H.R. *In Search of the Maquis: Rural Resistance in Southern France, 1942-1944*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993.
- Moorehead, Caroline. *A Train in Winter: An Extraordinary Story of Women, Friendship, and Resistance in Occupied France*. New York: Harper Perennial, 2012.
- Morrison, Amy Victoria. "Communist Women's Resistance in Occupied Paris: Engagement, Activism and Continuities from the 1930s to 1945." PhD diss., University of Adelaide, 2018. Academic Search Complete.
- Musée de l'Homme. "Le Réseau de Résistance du Musée de l'Homme" [The Musée de l'Homme Resistance Circuit]. Musée de l'Homme. Accessed March 13, 2024.
<https://www.museedelhomme.fr/fr/le-reseau-de-resistance-du-musee-de-l-homme>.
- Noakes, Lucy. *Women in the British Army: War and the Gentle Sex, 1907-1948*. London: Routledge, 2006.

- O'Connor, Bernard. *SOE Heroines: The Special Operations Executive's French Section and Free French Women Agents*. Stroud: Amberley Publishing, 2021.
- Olson, Lynne. *Madame Fourcade's Secret War: The Daring Young Woman Who Led France's Largest Spy Network against Hitler*. New York: Random House, 2019.
- Orr, Andrew. *Women and the French Army during the World Wars, 1914-1940*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2017.
- Rossiter, Margaret L. *Women in the Resistance*. New York: Praeger, 1986.
- Schwartz, Paula. *Today Sardines Are Not for Sale: A Street Protest in Occupied Paris*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2020.
- Simkin, John. "French Resistance." Spartacus Educational. Accessed January 15, 2024. <https://spartacus-educational.com/FRresistance.htm>.
- Stroud, Rick. *Lonely Courage: The True Story of the SOE Heroines Who Fought to Free Nazi-occupied France*. London, UK: Simon & Schuster UK, 2017.
- Szabo, Tania. *Young, Brave and Beautiful: The Missions of Special Operations Executive Agent Lieutenant Violette Szabo, George Cross, Croix De Guerre Avec Etoile De Bronze*. Stroud, UK: History Press, 2016.
- Thomas, Gordon, and Greg Lewis. *Shadow Warriors of World War II: The Daring Women of the OSS and SOE*. Chicago, IL: Chicago Review Press, 2016.
- Walker, Robyn. *The Women Who Spied for Britain: Female Secret Agents of the Second World War*. Stroud, Glos.: Amberley, 2014.
- Weitz, Margaret Collins. *Sisters in the Resistance: How Women Fought to Free France, 1940-1945*. New York: J. Wiley, 1995.