

Edmond Proust (1894 – 1956)

Edmond Proust was born in Chenay (a town in the region of Deux-Sèvres where the school of our former French partners is situated) in 1894 and at the age of 20 became a soldier in the First World War. He was wounded in 1915 but returned to the trenches and was honoured for his bravery. The horrors of the First World War left deep impressions on him, making him a strong defender of tolerance, pacifism and humanistic values.



Working as a teacher from 1922 on, he again was called up to the army upon the beginning of the Second World War (September 2, 1939). During the Blitzkrieg, fighting the German invasion of France, Edmond Proust was taken prisoner of war in May/June 1940 but released in August 1941 (because of being a veteran of WW I).

While being back in his teaching job, his wish to participate in the fight for liberation of his country grew stronger. Therefore, in 1942, he created an autonomous group of resistance fighters, made up of friends, that operated independently of other groups.

In 1943 he joined the “Organisation Civile et Militaire” (an organisation of resistance fighters carrying out secret missions to fight the Nazi occupants) and soon became head of the local department (in August 1943).

In January 1944, when the “Organisation Civile et Militaire” unified with the forces of interior resistance in the secret army (“Armée secrète”), Edmond Proust became the leading figure of the region and contributed to giving the organization a military structure.

The allied forces (Britain, USA) and the French “shadow government” (made up of men that had fled to London and organized resistance missions from there) planned for the time after WW II, they supported the creation of the “Forces Françaises de l’Intérieur” (the military organization of partisans that was turned into the official French army after WW II). In August 1944, Edmond Proust was made regional head of the “Forces Françaises de l’Intérieur” by the allied forces.

Under Proust’s command the several resistance organizations he commanded had a big share in preparing the allied troop landing in France – D-Day (starting June 6, 1944): They located, saved and hid material and military equipment that allied planes had dropped in containers. They risked their lives when attacking roads, ruining railroads, cutting off telephone lines in order to disturb German supplies and communication. They provided intelligence for the allied troops, and upon arrival of the liberation troops, they supplied the soldiers with whatever was necessary and available – risking their own lives every day.

The Germans, of course, knew about the paramilitary resistance organizations which meant that leading figures like Edmond Proust were most endangered to be caught and imprisoned or immediately shot for high treason. But Proust, managing to stay “under the German radar”, was not caught and could instead give the resistance organization the military structure needed for active and open fighting.

As the allied troops headed eastwards, liberating France and heading for the final destruction of the Nazi regime, Proust’s resistance fighters joined in and reinforced the troops from October 1944 to the end of the war.