

Edmond Proust (1894 – 1956)

Edmond Proust was born in Chenay (a town in the region of Deux-Sèvres) 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.

Story on Edmond Proust's life

Composed by Josef (CZ), Panagiotis (GR), Paul (GE)

A letter to his family

June 5, 1944

Dear family,

For the past few days we have been busy making preparations for D-Day which is supposed to start tomorrow. I am pretty agitated and I hope everything will work properly and as we have planned it. But I am also afraid of the consequences in case the allied forces will fail.

We started by saving and hiding materials for the allied forces, mainly weapons. We have stored food and water for the soldiers who are going to land tomorrow. Last night we got the last delivery and were almost caught by the Nazis. It was pretty close and we almost had to leave behind the supplies, but we managed to save everything while running straight into the woods to our camp. Thank God we escaped! I don't even want to imagine what could have gone wrong if they had caught us.

I haven't slept a wink, I was anxious about today's resistance action. We were supposed to plant explosives on three bridges just south of our base camp, but there were guards on one of the bridges, so we only succeeded in preparing two bombs. I hope the explosions will slow down the Nazis anyway. The explosion is supposed to take place the moment the invasion starts. At the same time, we'll tear down the telephone poles that lead to the German headquarters. If everything goes according to plan, this will gain the Allies a lot of time.

I also hope that the Information we gathered during the past few weeks will prove helpful as well. It was pretty hard to get any information at all because we had to hide in the forest and unfortunately the Nazis had a camp nearby. So we had to be extremely careful. We were spying them with binoculars and a friend of mine was writing down what I was telling him of the things that I could hear and understand. It was pretty scary to be that close the enemy but I think it was worth it. The information we had gathered went immediately to the headquarters in England, thanks to a courier pidgeon. I hope they got the news, there's so much depending on this little pidgeon...

Wish us luck for the hours and days to come!

*I hope to see you soon,
au revoir et bisous
Edmond*