

## IV La Résistance

**La Résistance** – the French Resistance – was the collection of French movements that **fought against the Nazi German occupation** and the collaborationist Vichy régime. At the beginning those were **small and mostly poorly armed groups**. Slowly, networks formed which were involved in the escape of prisoners, Allied soldiers and airmen trapped behind enemy lines. They also published and disseminated underground **newspapers** and clandestine anti-Nazi and Vichy **leaflets**. Their members came from all economic levels and social strata of French society: workers, students, academics, artists, Roman Catholics, Jews, liberals, anarchists and emigrés such as Armenians, Georgians and Polish. The Communists joined the Résistance only at the start of the »*Operation Barbarossa*« when Hitler invaded the Soviet Union. When on **16 February 1943** the »*Service du Travail Obligatoire*« organisation was created, which forced young men to work in German companies, many of them escaped to the countryside to avoid conscription into Vichy France's compulsory labour service and were called »*maquisards*«.



*Résistance newspaper 1943*

Since in Hitler's eyes resistance fighters or partisans did not belong to an official army they were not subjected to the Geneva Convention and therefore could be **treated as bandits and criminals** which could be arrested, imprisoned or executed when being caught.



*German military arresting résistants*



*French milice arresting résistants*

In **May 1943** the majority of the Résistance movements were unified by Jean Moulin in the »*Conseil National de Résistance*« which was co-ordinated with the »*Free French Forces*« under the authority of French Generals Henri Giraud and Charles de Gaulle, both being in London exile at that time. Moulin, however, was betrayed to the Germans, arrested and tortured and died on his transport to Germany on **8 July 1943**.

The **Résistance co-operated with the Allied Forces** especially in providing reconnaissance and intelligence. In co-ordination with the Allies they destroyed railway lines and main roads to cut off German supplies, interrupted phone lines, and provided information for



*Résistance sabotage*

the Allies on numbers, positions and movements of the Germans. Additionally all those actions were supported by strikes of the railway workers, the police and gendarmerie. After being called to arms in coded messages broadcasted by the BBC London, they supported the Allied Forces when they landed on the beaches of Normandy on »D-Day«, 6 June 1944.



*Allied troops landing on Omaha Beach*

But on their hasty retreat SS divisions committed further atrocious massacres of French civilians:

- On 9 June 1944 soldiers of the 2nd Panzer SS division »Das Reich« hanged 99 residents of the city of Tulle on the city balconies.
- The next day the same division killed 642 people in Oradour-sur-Glane rounding up all men in a barn and shooting them there and rounding up all women and children in the church and then setting it on fire so that all inside the building were burnt alive.



*Ruins of Oradour-sur-Glane*

On 25 August 1944 Paris was liberated with the help of a French Armoured Division and earlier strikes by the Paris Métro, the gendarmerie and the police.



*Armoured Division parading in Paris 1944*

On that very day, in a measure of retaliation, 124 of the 500 residents of the village of Maillé were executed by a retreating SS division.

Finally, with the landing of the 1st French Army in Provence in August 1944 and backed by over 25,000 maquis, most of southwestern, central and southeastern France was liberated.

After the landings in Normandy and Provence, the different groups of the Résistance were organized into operational units, collectively known as »French Forces of the Interior (FFI)« and »Francs-Tireurs and Partisans (FTP)«.



*Volunteer of the FFI*



*Franc-Tireurs and Allies 1*

Estimated at 100,000 fighters in **June 1944** it reached about 400,000 by October that year.

In **September 1944** there were still German forces in France resisting the Allies' advance. In the **spring of 1945** the Résistance represented almost one third of the French troops. The last areas still occupied by the Germans were mainly the western regions.

With the withdrawal of the German army the Vichy Régime ceased to exist. Marshal Pétain was sentenced to death but then pardoned, changing the sentence to life imprisonment in which he died at the age of 95.

On **23 August 1944** the then installed *Provisional Government of the French Republic* under the leadership of General de Gaulle took residence in Paris. He had to lead a country still at war for several months and was in charge of the »legal purge« of the administration as well as the civilian population in sentencing and even executing collaborators. Many maquis enlisted in the French Army.



*General de Gaulle, Paris 1944*

On **29 April 1945** the German forces surrendered. One day later Hitler committed suicide in his bunker in besieged Berlin. He was succeeded by Grand Admiral Karl



*General Jodl signing the capitulation in Reims*

Dönitz who had signed the *total and unconditional surrender in Europe* on **7 and 8 May 1945** by General Alfred Jodl in Reims and Field Marshal Keitel in Berlin. — The bloody war was over.



*Field Marshal Keitel signing the capitulation in Berlin*