

WOMEN AT WAR

WOMEN'S ROLE IN THE FRENCH RESISTANCE DURING THE SECOND WORLD WAR

Resistance, as we are all aware, played a significant role in the Second World War's history in France but women are not really talked about.

As two historians : Fabrice Grenard and Raphaelle Bellon were there, we were lucky to be able to attend a conference on this topic at La Fondation de la Resistance in Paris on Friday 31st of march at 3pm and we visited the Ordre de la Liberation Museum in the morning as well. We learnt so many things ! You will discover about it by reading this article

"FRANCE'S VISION ON WOMEN"

In June 1940, during the Second World War after a terrible military defeat, Marshal Petain, the head of the French Vichy government, decided to cooperate with Germany to establish a truce. At that time, France had a misogynistic view of women especially the Vichy government. Women were supposed to be "L'Ange du foyer" which implies to be good housewives, good mothers. Mother's Day propaganda was widely spread during this regime.

Furthermore, compared to French women, English women spent 49% of their weekly time on housework, while French women spent 82%. They also had access to their rights before French women (vote, salary etc).

The Vichy ideology was to limit women's roles in society and be "good spouses" and stay at home; women had at least 8 to more than 9 children, abortion was illegal under penalty of death (25 000 babies are born as a result of a relationship between a French woman and a German soldier.) and adultery was severely punished.

Ration tickets were not enough, and there were issues with feeding. As a result, women begin to demonstrate.



Women under the Vichy regime, 1940



Appeal of General Charles De Gaulle, London, 18 June 1940

"A REFUSAL SITUATION"

However, General De Gaulle immediately reached out French people from London on the 18th of June and said they need to keep fighting against the Germans despite Petain's announcement of a truce.

Which led to the creation of an organization called "Free France" composed of French resisters who wanted to continue fighting for France, eventually, women joined resistance groups.

During the war, liaison agents were mostly women and would carry secret messages, weapons, or money for other resisters because they were less suspicious than men. For example, Josephine Baker a dancer, carried guns and messages in her costumes, by reading this article, you will learn more about her.

ACTIONS OF SOME SIGNIFICANT FRENCH RESISTANCE WOMEN

"THREE FRENCH WOMEN"

Many other women were nurses, writers, or press distributors, such as Helene Viannay, who told Phillippe Viannay, a student who later became her husband, to act rather than just talk about the Resistance. Later on, he wrote a newspaper about it to impress her.

Some men would be persuaded to join the resistance by women.

Berty Albrecht and Lucie Aubrac, who both had government-employed friend/husband, pushed them to resign and join the resistance. Two American women also joined the French Resistance.



Hélène Viannay



Berty Albrecht



Lucie Aubrac



Virginia Hall



Josephine Baker

"TWO AMERICAN WOMEN"

Josephine Baker as already mentioned earlier and Virginia Hall were both spies.

Virginia Hall was an American lady who lost her leg, she was an ambulance driver in France.

She decided to resist the Nazis and dressed as an old woman to trap the Nazis and pass on messages.

Gestapo was looking for her everywhere.

Josephine Baker was a Black American woman who escaped the segregation in the US and adopted 12 children.

She was involved in the French Resistance and fought against racism.

Women were an important part of the Resistance because men were soldiers fighting at the front, and without their contributions, the Resistance would not have been able to achieve the same successes.

WOMEN'S WAR EFFORT

FRANCE, UK/US WAR PROPAGANDA

Unlike France, the UK and the US women took part in the war effort. They were general majors, soldiers, mechanics, ambulance drivers or air raids warden.

For the two governments, it was important for women to help men who were fighting on the front.

We can compare the French and the US/UK government propaganda. On one hand, The French government encourages women to stay at home, have children and celebrate Mother's Day. On the other hand, the UK and the US convince and encourage women to join the war against the Germans.

The changes made during the resistance regarding women had a significant impact on our current society.

This allowed them to participate in society and detach themselves from a misogynistic view of women. Women are no longer expected to stay at home, be good mothers, good wives, have a lot of children or maintain their households clean, they can work and be independent. Women can now work in the army and do "masculine" type of jobs

The fact that women were allowed to participate in the war effort revealed that they are capable of much more than just staying at home with their children. We can expect that if a third world war unfortunately breaks out, women will finally be able to fight alongside men without discrimination. Which will prove how the women of resistance have had a significant impact on today's society.



US WOMEN WAR EFFORT PROPAGANDA



UK WOMEN WAR EFFORT PROPAGANDA



FRENCH MOTHER'S DAY'S PROPAGANDA, 1942

CREATION OF "LE CORPS FÉMININ DES VOLONTAIRES FRANÇAISES"

The women territorial service in England was composed of 25 000 English women, the Air Force of 182 000 English women and the Naval Service of 74 000 English women.

French women also wanted to take part in the war effort but was impossible in France, so they went to join the English army.

The General De Gaulle noticed that many French women were going to fight alongside the English, so he created "Le Corps Féminin des Volontaires Françaises" and French women joined it.

They learnt how to do precision work (logistic and machinery), how to march, they repaired parts of aircraft and cars but there was always a man teaching them and telling them what to do.

However, they were told to stay feminine because once the war finishes, they will have to be "good spouses" at home.



French poster inviting women to join the war, 1943



The General De Gaulle walking in front of the French volunteers women in London, July 1943

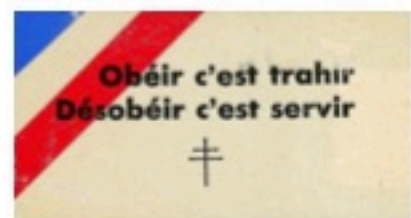
Women in the French Resistance, this is the subject on which historians Raphaëlle Bellon and Fabrice Grenard spoke during a conference in Paris at the Fondation de la Résistance on Friday 31 March 2023. The role of women during this period has been neglected for a long time, whereas it was very important during the Second World War. Through their actions, they clearly contributed to the liberation of France and to driving out the Nazi occupier.



A group of french restitants with weapons and flag in a farm in France during the summer of 1944, during the Second World War.



The French flag with the cross of Lorraine is the symbol of national unification under General De Gaulle.



"To obey is to betray; to disobey is to serve."

Raphaëlle Bellon is an associate professor of history and responsible for the pedagogical activities of the Fondation de la Résistance. She works with her colleague Fabrice Grenard, a historian specialised in the Second World War in France. He is currently in charge of the research and education department of the Fondation de la Résistance. During the conference, they talked about the French Resistance and the role of women in it during the Second World War. During the conference, we learned that the Fondation de la Résistance was created in 1993, on women, the Resistance, the Vichy regime and England. In particular the English army and the role of women in it. Whereas, for example, under the Vichy regime, women had to be at home, looking after the children, cooking and cleaning. They were said to be the angels of the house. Women were not taken seriously.

To finish this article, we have seen that during the war, women were considered not important, although they had a very important impact that helped win the war. Out of hundreds of women, only 6 received resistance medals.

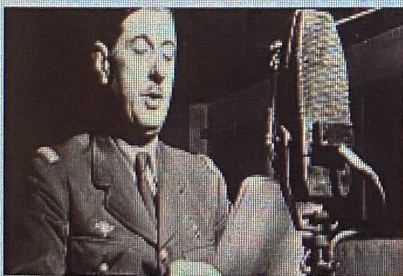
THE TIMES

THURSDAY, 13TH APRIL, 2023

Forgotten Heroines: The Untold Story of Women in War.

During the war, women played a crucial and often unrecognized role in the various countries involved, braving obstacles and showing exceptional courage.

War is a difficult time for everyone, but for women it is especially difficult. During World War II, women were forced to face deprivation, suffering and enormous sacrifice. Many have been separated from their families, lost their jobs and subjected to violence and abuse. However, despite the obstacles, many women managed to fight more actively for their country and their freedom by joining the Resistance following the appeal of June 18, 1940 pronounced by Charles de Gaulles.



In France, women played a crucial role in the Resistance by participating in sabotage operations, distributing leaflets, helping fleeing Allied soldiers, serving as couriers for secret messages as well as providing caches for arms and ammunition. Indeed, women were particularly important in the resistance because of their ability to blend in with the local population without attracting attention.

Women like Marie-Madeleine Fourcade, leader of the "Alliance" resistance network, played a crucial role in the liberation of France. The latter carried out sabotage operations, provided important information to the Allies and helped hundreds of fleeing Allied soldiers to leave France. Marie-Madeleine also led the resistance organization in France after the previous leader was arrested and executed by the Nazis. Besides, she was arrested several times by the Nazis, but managed to escape each time. Her contribution to the liberation of France should not be underestimated as she was even nicknamed "Hedgehog" due to her suspicious nature and her ability to resist interrogation. However, this role was not without consequences, some Resistance women were arrested, tortured and killed by German forces. One of these women was Lucie Aubrac, who was arrested and imprisoned with her husband Raymond. She managed to get them both to escape, but was captured again and tortured by the Gestapo. She was finally liberated by the Allies in 1945.



Therefore, the Resistance was not only French. Women in the United Kingdom and the United States also experienced unique difficulties during the war as they played a crucial role in producing the war effort. British women were forced to endure bombardment and work in dangerous conditions in arms factories. Indeed, entire factories were built for these women, who worked to produce planes, boats and ammunition. Women like Virginia Hall, a Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) agent who was nicknamed "The Limping Lady" because of her prosthetic leg, worked as spies and risked their lives to provide information to Allied forces. After being imprisoned in France, Hall managed to escape and continued to work for the French resistance. Similarly, in the United States women were involved in all aspects of the war effort, from the production of ammunition and weapons to espionage and the resistance.

Despite their essential contribution to the resistance, women have often been downplayed in historical accounts of war. But it is important to remember that women played a crucial role in the defeat of Nazi oppression and the victory of the Allies.

Today, we can expect women to continue to play an important role in the struggle for freedom and justice around the world. Their role in the Resistance during World War II shows that women are capable of facing adversity and fighting for what they believe in. The impact of women in the Resistance has been immense, but it is important to remember the sacrifices they had to endure to achieve their goal. We must honor their memory and remember their courage in difficult times.

WOMEN AT WAR: BRAVE FIGHTERS AND THEIR LEGACY

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s I reflect on my recent visit to the Ordre de la Liberation museum and the enlightening conference by Fabrice Grenard on Women in the War, I am struck by the critical role that women played in France during World War II.



At a time of occupation and oppression, women in France found themselves taking on new roles and responsibilities in the face of adversity. They played a vital part in the Resistance, using their skills and determination to fight back against the Nazi regime. Emilienne Moreau-Evrard, Berty Albrecht, and Laure Diebold were among the many women who risked their lives for the cause.

In the UK and the USA, women also played critical roles in supporting the war effort. They worked in factories, hospitals, and military operations, filling the gaps left by men fighting overseas. The iconic image of Rosie the Riveter is a symbol of the many women who stepped up during this time.

The contributions of these brave women were essential to the war effort. Their stories continue to inspire us and remind us of the importance of perseverance and determination in the face of adversity.

One striking example of their bravery is the number of French resistance women who were awarded medals after the war, including the prestigious Croix de Guerre. These medals serve as a testament to the remarkable achievements of these women and the many others who risked their lives for the cause.

As we reflect on the legacy of these brave fighters, we must remember the impact that they had on the course of history. Women in World War II were not just passive bystanders, but active participants in the fight against oppression and tyranny. Their contributions must never be forgotten.



A photograph of Emilienne Moreau-Evrard, Berty Albrecht, and Laure Diebold, three prominent French resistance women, could be included to provide a visual representation of the bravery and determination of women during World War II.



Laure Diebold



Berty Albrecht



31/03/23

The Ordre de la Libération museum