

ANOTHER FORGOTTEN ARMY:  
THE FRENCH EXPEDITIONARY CORPS IN ITALY,  
1943-1944

by

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## ABSTRACT

The French Expeditionary Corps that fought in Italy during World War II was a French army, but that description must be qualified. Therefore this thesis asks two questions: how did France manage to send the equivalent of an army to Italy if French military leadership in 1943 had no direct access to French manpower resources; and the most important question since it is unique to the historical debate, why were the troops that were sent to Italy so effective once there when compared to the 1940 French army? To answer the first question, it was a French colonial army – soldiers mainly from Africa – that enabled France to send an army to Italy. The second question was not so easily addressed and is actually composed of two parts: current scholarship finds that at the tactical level French troops of 1940 no less capable than the troops in Italy, but more importantly it was the French military leadership's willingness to expend the lives of their colonial soldiers with little regard that allowed the French Expeditionary Corps to allow the United States Fifth Army to enter Rome just days before the Allied invasion of Normandy. And in order to understand why the French military was willing to expend the lives of its African soldiers, this thesis also had to examine the French colonial system dating to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Finally, this paper explores the different components of leadership that each army, which were African (primarily from North Africa and French West Africa) and metropolitan (mostly from European France), used to lead and direct their men. Thus, this study is more than just a pure military history. It is also a cultural and social history of France in relation to its colonies.

This thesis is dedicated to my soulmate ...

I am and always shall be yours

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## INTRODUCTION

Two Allied armies fought up the Italian peninsula from September 1943 until the end of hostilities in May 1945: the United States Fifth Army and the British Eighth Army. While these two armies and their leaders were the recipients of the glory that followed the capture of the first of the major Axis capitals, Rome on 4 June 1944, they were not completely homogeneous armies of American and British soldiers. Soldiers from many other nations participated in the Italian campaign: India, New Zealand, South Africa, Canada, Brazil, Poland, Greece, a newly formed Italian military fighting for the Allies, and France. The focus of this study is on the last mentioned of these nations, the soldiers from France; and “other” is the keyword because the passage of time since World War II ended has allowed some of those “other” histories to be forgotten, while “others” have never been adequately examined or explored.

In this study both “other” scenarios – forgotten and unexamined histories – apply. Therefore, this thesis asks two questions. First, how did France manage to send the equivalent of an army to fight in Italy if French military leadership had no direct access to French manpower resources? It must be remembered that after France was defeated by Germany in 1940, the French nation was only allowed (by Germany) to field a small army to defend France and the colonies; and the remainder of France was completely occupied by Axis forces in November 1942 after troops from the United States and Great Britain invaded French North Africa. Second, and the most important question since it is unique to the historical debate, is why were the troops that France did send to Italy so effective once they were there?



There is an easy answer to the first question: France's colonial empire allowed France to reenter the fight against the Axis. However, this answer is too simplistic and ignores many of the complex political disagreements within France that occurred during and after June of 1940, i.e. General Charles de Gaulle's radio address on the 18<sup>th</sup> of June telling his fellow Frenchmen that France had lost a battle but not the war, in contrast to General Philippe Pétain's call for social stability through *Travail, Famille, Patrie* (Work, Family, Fatherland). The net result of the French defeat in 1940 was that the Vichy government had control of the bureaucratic and military apparatus in most of the France's colonies until the end of 1942, while the troops that rallied to de Gaulle numbered around 35,000 men until late 1942. It was only after the Western Allies invaded North Africa that a sizeable French military became a reality. Furthermore, this thesis argues that the French army participating in the liberation of Italy was successful despite the racial hierarchies and ethnic stereotypes that had been developed in over one hundred years of recruiting in the colonial empire. In short the military units in Italy primarily had white officers and non-commissioned officers while Africans made up the majority of the infantry, which were those men in closest proximity to the enemy – the men seen and shot at by the enemy. Thus, even though both, the army of 1940 and the army in 1943-44 were French, there was a difference in the composition of those armies. The 1940 army was mostly comprised of soldiers recruited in France, although many Africans fought in France in 1940, while the army that fought in Italy in 1943-44 was an army where the majority of the men were recruited from Africa.<sup>1</sup> In sum, this thesis is bridging the gap

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<sup>1</sup> In 1940 infantry divisions formed in Africa comprised over twenty percent – over 100,000 African men in combat positions – of the total French infantry divisions facing Germany. These numbers do not include

between France's colonial history, using, for example, Gregory Mann's *Native Sons: West African Veterans and France in the Twentieth Century*, William Cohen's *French Encounter with Africans: White Response to Blacks, 1530-1880*, Patricia Lorcin's *Imperial Identities: Stereotyping, Prejudice and Race in Colonial Algeria*, and Vichy France, Robert Paxton's groundbreaking *Vichy France: Old Guard and New Order, 1940-1944*, to link them with French military history during World War II, examining Anthony Clayton's *France, Soldiers and Africa*, Paul Gaujac's *Le Corps Expéditionnaire Français En Italie*, and Jacques Robichon's *Les Français En Italie: Le Corps Expéditionnaire Français de Naples à Sienne, 1943-1944*.<sup>2</sup> By having an understanding of France's colonial past as well as the complexities of France's political situation in 1940, the relevance of the first question can be fully understood.

The answer to the second question has two plausible scenarios. The first possibility, which is supported by scholarship over the past twenty years, is that France's military leadership during the 1940 campaign, at least at the lowest levels, was not as completely inept as some early postwar studies would have us accept. Therefore, French success in Italy should not be wholly unexpected. The second possibility is not so easily

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the large number of African auxiliary workers who performed much needed work behind the front line. In Italy, all the divisions had large numbers of Africans serving as infantry.

<sup>2</sup> Gregory Mann, *Native Sons: West African Veterans and France in the Twentieth Century* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006). William Cohen, *French Encounter with Africans: White Response to Blacks, 1530-1880* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1980). Patricia M.E. Lorcin, *Imperial Identities: Stereotyping, Prejudice and Race in Colonial Algeria* (New York: I.B. Tauris Publishers, 1995). Robert O. Paxton, *Vichy France: Old Guard and New Order, 1940-1944* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1972). Anthony Clayton, *France, Soldiers and Africa* (Washington, D.C.: Brassey's Defence Publishers, 1988). Paul Gaujac, *Le Corps Expéditionnaire Français En Italie, 1943-1944* (Paris: Histoire and Collections, 2004). Jacques Robichon, *Les Français en Italie: Le Corps Expéditionnaire Français de Naples à Sienne, 1943-1944* (Paris: Presses De La Cite, 1981).

determined; it relies on casualty figures from the 1943 and 1944 battles to determine if some of the French success was on account of the French high-level leadership willingness to guarantee success at all cost. In effect, was France more willing to guarantee success by sacrificing its soldiers in Italy since they were soldiers from the empire, i.e. they were not white Frenchmen? This question is the crux of this thesis. As with the first question, since the army drew upon widely accepted racial hierarchies at the tactical level, the second question addresses French leadership at the highest levels, where decisions and decision makers were also imbued with these beliefs that had developed over a century of French colonial conquest. General Alphonse Juin, the commander of the French Expeditionary Corps (FEC) in Italy, was born into a colonial settler family in Algeria in the late nineteenth century and had grown up in the imperial milieu. He was appointed the commander of France's Moroccan troops prior to World War I, and he therefore knew that his forces were capable of defeating the Germans because it was an army created using the colonial system – units of which had performed well in World War I and in 1940. Juin's willingness to believe in his men's abilities created a powerful military instrument in Italy during 1943-44, but there was also a negative component. Juin was not opposed to using his men for French glory or to prove to doubters among the Allies (and elsewhere) that his troops could reinvigorate French military glory.

The passing of sixty years, as I suggested earlier, does allow for different interpretations of certain events in World War II, or in the case of this thesis, an original question and unique answer to the French effort in Italy. British historian Norman Davies, *No Simple Victory: World War II in Europe, 1939-1945*, convincingly argues that

those events that transpired on the Eastern Front from 1941 through 1945 are paramount in any study of World War II if one is to truly understand the war and its ramifications after the war ended in May of 1945.<sup>3</sup> His argument is simply that many American and British authors view the Mediterranean and Western Fronts as decisive to the defeat of Germany as was the Eastern Front, which Davies argues is too simplistic. All the battles and campaigns of World War II need to be placed into a proper perspective if a true understanding of the war is ever going to be written. Things such as the Allied air campaign against Germany; Allied Lend-Lease that provided the Soviets with over 500,000 trucks (since their vehicle industry was incapable of manufacturing trucks and tanks at the same time); the Allied and Japanese battles in the Pacific, and the Soviet willingness to sacrifice millions of men in 1941 to remain at war, all need to be taken into account and placed into a proper perspective.

*No Simple Victory* is, however, more than just an Eastern Front centered argument that questions the importance of many aspects of the Western Front that have been accepted as unassailable truths by many. The title is a play upon words, by which Davies suggests that World War II was neither a simple victory for the Allies, nor an easy war to describe or sum up. Davies writes:

In other words, it is not difficult to see that powerful myths have arisen that override all accurate records or recollections of what actually happen in 1939-1945 ... As time passes, uncritical attitudes appear to multiply as later generations lose all sight of wartime complexities.<sup>4</sup>

Returning to the French military participation in Italy, while some studies have been done that illustrate the importance of the French, they have not always shown how or why this

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<sup>3</sup> Norman Davies, *No Simple Victory: World War II in Europe, 1939-1945* (New York: Viking, 2006).

<sup>4</sup> Davies, *No Simple Victory*, 482-483.

contribution to the Allied effort occurred. Why was it so successful? What was the final price of this victory?

British author John Ellis, in *Cassino, the Hollow Victory*, describes the impact of French soldiers upon the 1944 Italian battles, and specifically the leadership of General Juin by calling General Juin's concept for the May offensive, "a shining example of the science of command, capabilities of the attacking troops optimally applied, and their attacks consistently pressed home with the greatest panache."<sup>5</sup> British historians Dominick Graham and Shelford Bidwell, *Tug of War*, find the FEC so effective that they name one of the sections of their book after the French contribution: France Wins the Diadem.<sup>6</sup> These two balanced histories of the Italian Campaign illustrate the importance of France, but they do not cover the metamorphosis of the seemingly hapless French military formations fighting in 1940 to their exemplary combat performance in Italy during 1944, i.e. how did we get from there to here – the proverbial phoenix rising from the ashes.

This thesis must therefore examine some of the military histories that cover the performance of the French in the 1940 battles. By understanding how the French combat strategy at the lowest level, referred to as tactics, worked in 1940, this study can then search for another possible reason – or at least one more factor – for the success of the French in Italy during 1943-44. This examination is found in chapter one. Since some

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<sup>5</sup> John Ellis, *Cassino, the Hollow Victory: the Battle for Rome, January-June 1944* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1984), 475.

<sup>6</sup> Diadem was the codename given to the operation begun in May 1944 to finally break the German Gustav Line. The architect of the plan, British General A.F. "John" Harding, planned that Diadem would allow the Allied armies to sweep up the Italian peninsula into the Po Valley during 1944 and eliminate one of the German armies in Italy in the process. Dominick Graham and Shelford Bidwell, *Tug of War: The Battle for Italy: 1943-45* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986).

authors have just listed the exploits of the FEC, inferring that it was the same army that fought for France in 1940, this study must also examine the men who did the actual fighting and dying, those men from metropolitan France as well as the large number of soldiers from France's colonial empire. It must be understood that any examination of France's soldiers is complex. Moreover, French colonial history, with its peculiar relationship with European France, is still a relatively new historiography and still under construction. This examination is the focus of chapter two. Chapter three is the study of the combat losses suffered by the FEC, and with some extrapolating it is possible to show that the French military took large losses for its gains in Italy – losses taken primarily by the troops indigenous to Africa. Chapter four is the analysis and some of the ramifications of the soldier's successes, which have mostly been overlooked, then and to the present.

Therefore, by examining some of the battles of 1940 and 1943-44 and the men who fought them, this thesis will determine what made the FEC such an effective fighting force and a "shining example." Was it a simple military change, such as a matter of different leadership, or was it a human or social adjustment, the FEC relying on men from Africa, or a combination of the two that provided victory in Italy for the FEC?

## CHAPTER ONE: THE BATTLE FOR FRANCE, 1940

Winston Churchill proclaimed in the House of Commons on 23 March 1933, “Thank God for the French army.”<sup>7</sup> His comments were an expression of the faith that many in Great Britain, and for that matter many other citizens in Europe, placed upon the French army to defend the status quo in Europe.<sup>8</sup> The one hundred (plus) divisions of the French army of 1940 were, however, different from the army that General Henri-Philippe Pétain had rallied with the 1916 battle cry, “They shall not pass!”<sup>9</sup> These differences are many, sometimes far-reaching, and often very subtle: firepower replaced manpower, a defensive rather than offensive strategy, and an increased reliance upon troops from the empire.<sup>10</sup> Although this thesis is an examination of the French contribution to the Allied effort in Italy during 1944, the happenings of 1940 must first be examined to understand the transition from one campaign to the other.

The success or failure of French leadership in 1940 is one of the cornerstones for this thesis, the antithesis of Ellis and the FEC being “a shining example of the science of command” in 1944. One definition of leadership is described as “the process of

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<sup>7</sup> Alistair Horne, *To Lose a Battle* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1969), 22.

<sup>8</sup> Churchill’s remark was therefore not totally altruistic. The British government was one of the major beneficiaries of a strong French military. A strong French army allowed Britain to spend money, or in many cases not spend money, on the defense of faraway colonies. A large French navy guaranteed that the Italian navy had a counterbalance; Britain could focus its naval assets on Japan and the United States.

<sup>9</sup> (*Ils ne passeront pas!*) Martin Gilbert, *First World War* (New York: Henry Holt, 1994), 232.

<sup>10</sup> This does not suggest that France did not use large numbers of Africans in World War I. But unlike in World War I where it took many months for sizable numbers of African divisions to reach the front, in 1940 France was ready to quickly transport African divisions to France as soon as war was declared – not even counting the African divisions already stationed in France.

influencing others.”<sup>11</sup> Another definition expands upon the “process” and states that military leadership is “the art of direct and indirect influence and the skill of creating the conditions for organizational success to accomplish missions effectively.”<sup>12</sup> Initially the later definition seems obvious or simplistic, but upon further reflection it incorporates some subtle concepts on how a leader of men might approach war. Direct influence is the use of personal contact to move men and machines to accomplish the mission. Indirect influence is not so easy to define since it includes things such as: issuing orders down the chain of command (and how they are received and understood), regulations, or standing operating procedures. In the issuing of orders, for example, does the commander send his subordinate orders in great detail, or does he trust that a simple command statement, even just one written sentence, will suffice? The German tradition of *Auftragstaktik* (mission-oriented tactics) is an example of issuing very terse orders; the German commander relies upon the subordinate commanders to understand the intent – and intent is the key – of the orders received and achieving that goal even if it required ignoring parts of the orders they had just received.<sup>13</sup> Standard operating procedures included ways to command as well as tactics used to attack or defend. All these different means of trying to obtain the same goal, to accomplish the mission effectively, explain

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<sup>11</sup> Trevor N. Dupuy, ed., *International Military & Defense Encyclopedia* (McLean, Virginia: Brassey’s Inc., 1993), 1460.

<sup>12</sup> HQ, Department of the Army, *Field Manual 22-100: Leadership and Command at Senior Levels* (Washington, D.C.: June 1987), 3.

<sup>13</sup> The German commander did not care how his subordinates accomplished a mission, “to take that hill,” as long as the hill was taken. The French and British military tradition, in contrast, had subordinate commanders normally receiving more detailed orders, such as how to deploy their men to take the hill, from their commanding officers. The American tradition of command was somewhere in the middle of these two systems.



why no two armies are ever the same. And that same army, fighting at two separate times, even if separated by only a few years, is also a different organization. The role of French leadership has become the final answer for many authors who have examined the 1940 campaign.

A balanced analysis that examines French leadership in 1940 is by Ernest May, *Strange Victory: Hitler's Conquest of France*, which traces its title directly to Marc Bloch and his *Strange Defeat*.<sup>14</sup> Bloch, unlike May who has had over fifty years of scholarship to build upon, was never in possession of all of the facts of the campaign since he was executed by Germany before the war ended.<sup>15</sup> Bloch's final conclusion though, that most of the blame could be placed upon the French High Command, has withstood the test of time. May, in full possession of much of the economic and military data, can only conclude that Hitler was very lucky, and Germany's victory was indeed strange. May states:

France capitulated in 1940 because its armies were defeated in battles. Many writers on the fall of France do not accept this simple-seeming assertion, for they portray France's defeats on the battlefield as the last gasps by a nation already doomed.<sup>16</sup>

Furthermore:

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<sup>14</sup> Ernest R. May, *Strange Victory: Hitler's Conquest of France* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2000). Marc Bloch, *Strange Defeat: A Statement of Evidence Written in 1940*, trans. Gerard Hopkins (New York: Octagon Books, Inc., 1968).

<sup>15</sup> Bloch, for example, did not know that France fielded more tanks than Germany in 1940. An article by R.H.S. Stolfi then went one step further and illustrated that not only did France have a material advantage, at least in regards to tanks, over Germany, but also that many of the vehicles France possessed were impervious to the guns mounted on the German tanks while their cannons had no difficulty penetrating the German armor. France also had more artillery than Germany. The one area where Germany had a major materiel advantage was in aircraft and anti-aircraft weapons. R.H.S. Stolfi, "Equipment for Victory in France 1940," *History* 55 (1970), 11.

<sup>16</sup> May, *Strange Victory*, 448.

More than anything else, this happened because France and its allies misjudged what Germany planned to do. If leaders in the Allied governments had anticipated the German offensive through the Ardennes, even as a worrisome contingency, it is almost inconceivable that France would have been defeated when and as it was. It is more than conceivable that the outcome would have been not France's defeat by Germany's and, possibly, a French victory parade on the Unter den Linden in Berlin.<sup>17</sup>

Simply, if many of the other excuses for a French defeat have been stripped away, such as the *bourgeoisie*, elements of a supposed "fifth column," or that the whole of French society and the Third Republic was decadent and therefore unworthy of being saved, then the cause of defeat was because the French army was defeated in battles that were directed by its High Command.<sup>18</sup> Bloch states it more eloquently: "Whatever the deep-seated causes of the disaster may have been, the immediate occasion was the utter incompetence of the High Command."<sup>19</sup> French leadership had prepared for one type of battle, *la bataille conduite* (the methodical battle), which would have taken years to defeat Germany, while the German's High Command tweaked their concept of *Bewegungskrieg* (war of movement) and eventually crafted a very different type of warfare, known by many as the blitzkrieg, which is a type of warfare designed to avoid a long war.<sup>20</sup> Economically, Germany's leadership realized that Germany could not hope

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<sup>17</sup> May, *Strange Victory*, 5.

<sup>18</sup> Marshall Joseph Jacques Joffre, the commanding French general from 1914 to December 1916, wisely stated that, "Whether I was responsible for the winning of the Battle of the Marne I do not know, but of this I feel pretty certain, that, had it been lost, the failure would have been laid at my door." Bloch, *Strange Defeat*, 25.

<sup>19</sup> Bloch, *Strange Defeat*, 25.

<sup>20</sup> The word blitzkrieg is used in many studies of World War II, and it is also often used incorrectly since it was not a new type of warfare. One definition states: "It combined air power, tanks, and subversive warfare actuated by dynamic command and control through radio and rapidly laid line communications ... aimed at the opposing side's morale as concentrated land forces, supported by bombing, either broke through or outflanked their defenses." The use of airplanes and tanks just created a faster

to win a long war since France and Britain had more access to resources from around the globe – material and manpower.

The ability to use the blitzkrieg requires one type of leadership, which fully embraces the German tradition of *Auftragstaktik* – the intent. Eugenia C. Kiesling, *Arming Against Hitler: France and the Limits of Military Planning*, argues that the French High Command, with many limitations imposed by the civilian government, designed an army that fought a different type of warfare when compared to Germany.<sup>21</sup> The French High Command's doctrine was not created for an ideal army, a small, professional army that could quickly take the war to the enemy, but for the army that France actually possessed. French officers designed the methodical doctrine so any reserve officer could implement an attack regardless of the troops at hand since the soldiers at the lowest level would have all had the same training using it.

The methodical battle, as the name suggests, was very ordered and could have been successful in 1940 if Germany had given the France the opportunity to use it, but it did have some glaring limitations when compared to the blitzkrieg. Before a French attack could commence, the commander of the operation had to be sure that everything was in place for the attack to proceed: men, armor, and artillery (and possibly airpower). The infantry were assigned limited objectives, and the momentum of the attack was dictated by their quickness. Tanks were supposed to get the infantry to their targets by providing fire support as well as cover. After the infantry advanced one to two thousand

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Bewegungskrieg, but the goal had always been – going back to Kingdom of Prussia – the creation of a Kesselschlacht (cauldron battle) where the enemy's army is destroyed, thereby keeping wars short. I.C.B. Dear, editor, *Oxford Companion to World War II* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 140.

<sup>21</sup> Eugenia C. Kiesling, *Arming against Hitler: France and the Limits of Military Planning* (Lawrence, Kan: University Press of Kansas, 1996).

meters, the attack halted to allow the artillery to adjust its fire. Another advance of one to two thousand meters could then proceed. After the second advance, there was a lengthy pause to allow the artillery to move forward, which allowed the whole process to begin anew. While this type of advance was stingy in manpower and judicious in firepower, it was very predictable and very slow. Since the French had over 1000 tanks available to support the infantry divisions, not counting the 2000 tanks in the armor and cavalry divisions, the French High Command knew that most attacks in 1940 would have at least some armor support. But as Kiesling explains, Germany allowed few French attacks to ever occur.

Kiesling states, “Both sides had to adapt to unexpected circumstances, but improvisation was encouraged among German soldiers and anathema among French ones.”<sup>22</sup> In the end, it was the unexpected that spelled defeat for France. Whereas in the German army that wanted the soldiers at the front to make decisions, again returning to the concept of *Auftragstaktik*, which is guiding the attack from below, the French army led attacks from the top. Even though French officers knew as early as the 13<sup>th</sup> of May that significant German forces were moving through the Ardennes, it was up to General Maurice Gamelin, commander of the Allied forces in France, to change the plan then in effect. Gamelin’s hesitation proved disastrous. In sum, “The campaign took the turn it did, at such enormous cost, because, in spite of two decades of effort, neither the French army nor the nation it defended was ready for war.”<sup>23</sup> In this instance the French High Command crafted a way of war, following a formula so reserve officers just had to follow

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<sup>22</sup> Kiesling, *Arming against Hitler*, 174.

<sup>23</sup> Kiesling, *Arming against Hitler*, 173.

a prescribed plan, to gain battlefield objectives with its citizen army. Events, however, moved too quickly for the French High Command to use its strengths on the battlefield.

Robert Doughty, in *Seeds of Disaster: the Development of French Army Doctrine, 1919-1939*, like Kiesling, also supports the idea leadership played a large role in 1940.<sup>24</sup>

Defeat could have been avoided but, “The French Army, in short, had formulated a doctrine, organized and equipped its units, and trained its soldiers for the wrong type of war.”<sup>25</sup> Doughty states that if the French army, i.e. its leadership, had developed an operational strategy to take advantage of the German military involvement in Poland, or organized its military units according to need, the outcome must have been different. Doughty finds that equipment and organizational changes had modified the appearance of the 1940 army from the 1918 army, but in a relative sense there had been a regression. Modern weapons without a modern doctrine mean very little. The French army did have the proper weapons on hand in 1940 to defend France, but it lacked the proper doctrine to use those weapons. When a failed doctrine, *la bataille conduite*, is coupled with a failed strategy, which was the rush of France’s best units into Belgium to keep the battles out of France, the military disaster that befell France is easy to explain.

The studies examined so far have focused primarily on the role of leadership, but the campaign in 1940 was also a battle of manpower. A later study by Robert Doughty, *Breaking Point: Sedan and the Fall of France, 1940*, examines one French division to determine if the panic and subsequent collapse of this division is representative of the

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<sup>24</sup> Robert A. Doughty, *The Seeds of Disaster: the Development of French Army Doctrine, 1919-1939* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1985).

<sup>25</sup> Doughty, *The Seeds of Disaster*, 3.

whole of the 1940 French army.<sup>26</sup> His study concluded that it was, and it was not. Many of the men in this division were reservists who had completed their military service many years previously.<sup>27</sup> That this division held a defensive line for as long as it did against the elite units of the Germany army, the panzer troops, illustrates the determination of the French to defend their country. That these men eventually broke and ran after trying to repel three panzer divisions – and constant attacks by German aircraft – for two days was understandable. Doughty’s main point is that the weapons in use were important, and from *Seeds of Disaster* they were “proper weapons,” but an even more significant factor was the cohesion and leadership at the lowest levels of the military, which are those men who are actually shooting and being shot at. Since the French strategy for the beginning of the conflict was not to lose the war, many of the France’s soldiers were burdened with digging trenches and strengthening bunkers during the “Phoney War,” rather than

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<sup>26</sup> Robert A. Doughty, *Breaking Point: Sedan and the Fall of France, 1940* (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1990).

<sup>27</sup> During peacetime, France had fewer than forty divisions for defense. During mobilization, each French “Active” infantry division became three. The three siblings were not, however, equal. The now “Active” division had fifty-five percent of its enlisted men come from the “Active” prewar division. The “Series A” division, which was the next step down, had only two percent of its enlisted men from “Active” division. In the “Series B” divisions, the situation is dire since they contained no “Active” enlisted men. In all three types, the remainder of the enlisted men were reservists of varying quality - the youngest of the reservists went to the “Active” and “A” divisions. Some of the reservists with the “B” divisions had never even served as infantry since they had spent their active duty time as sailors or airmen. After mobilization, thirty-three percent of the officers and thirty-two percent of the noncommissioned officers in an “active” infantry regiment were active-duty soldiers. “A” divisions had twenty-three and seventeen percent respectively. “B” divisions had no “active” officers except the regimental commanders – maybe – and the divisional commander and his closest deputies. The equipment used by the men was also not equal. “Active” units used the latest equipment, while “A” divisions used older, but comparable equipment to the “active” divisions. “B” divisions, in contrast, used older weapons, and, in many cases, less than the official “tables of equipment” authorized. Doughty, *The Seeds of Disaster*, 23.

training for combat.<sup>28</sup> Doughty argues that these men should have been training to defeat the style of war that Germany was practicing, a very rapid and deep drive into the French rear areas, rather than hoping that their doctrine of defense, *colmater* (filling), would work.<sup>29</sup> Doughty concludes:

The French expected to fight a carefully controlled, highly centralized battle, their soldiers and units were not prepared for hasty counterattacks or audacious maneuvers ... the methodical battle may have succeeded against an enemy who was the mirror image of the French, but it was completely inadequate against the much more mobile and aggressive Germans.<sup>30</sup>

What France needed was the ability of the lowest soldier to react – counterattack and defend – to the German attack without an umbrella of artillery fire overhead, which the methodical battle promised but could not always provide. Both of Doughty’s books

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<sup>28</sup> It is easy to view the Polish Campaign in September 1939 as a complete (and stunning) success for the German army. While the Polish campaign did confirm German operational and tactical principles, weaknesses were found that needed to be corrected. First, effective combat leadership must be from the front rather than from the rear. Second, front-line commanders needed to work on sending accurate, terse combat information. Third, troops proved inadequately prepared to carry out reconnaissance or security missions. In addition, cooperation between infantry and armor had not always been completely successful nor had those battalions formed from reservists done well, many suffering numerous casualties from exhaustion during extended marches. Polish infantry had even bettered the Germans in night fighting since that is something their doctrine had stressed during training. It is clear why the German High Command opposed Hitler in his desire for an offensive in the West in 1939 – the men needed more training. Therefore, training programs were established for divisions aimed at first building up the capabilities of the soldier and then moving up to platoon and company levels; once the small-unit training reached adequate levels, larger battalion and regimental exercises were conducted on a large scale. In effect, the majority of the German success against the French was the direct result of training and preparation. Williamson Murray, *German Military Effectiveness* (Baltimore, Md.: Nautical & Aviation Publication Company of America, 1992), 231-239.

<sup>29</sup> *Colmater* is based on the French emphasis on a defense of depth. A commander will always keep a reserve available to slide troops over to seal up a penetration of his line, or at least keep troops in front of the enemy breakthrough. Doughty, *Breaking Point*, 29.

<sup>30</sup> Doughty, *Breaking Point*, 325.

argue that the troops at the front, the men who had to utilize the *la bataille conduite* and *colmater*, were not ready.

*Breaking Point* is also very good about showing the link between strategy and tactics, and on the importance of *Auftragstaktik* to the overall German victory.<sup>31</sup> The German emphasis, in direct contrast to the French doctrine of having leaders in the rear and attempting to manage the battle away from the fighting, was to have leaders in forward positions and making instantaneous decisions that could have immediate consequences on the battlefield.<sup>32</sup> Since German officers were closer to the shooting than their French counterparts, their casualties were greater than those of their French rivals.<sup>33</sup> One example, using Doughty's study of the 55<sup>th</sup> Division at Sedan, nicely illustrates the French attitude on the placement of leadership:

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<sup>31</sup> There are three distinct levels of command during wartime. The highest level is strategy, usually crafted by the country's high command, which should emphasize their country's combat abilities while trying minimizing their opponent's strengths. The "Europe First" United States plan for World War II or the French and Russian plan to jointly begin attacking Germany within a few weeks of the outbreak of war in 1914 are examples of strategy. The middle level is operational, providing the link between strategy and battlefield tactics. It covers the deployment of forces within a theater of operations, such as Western Europe or Mediterranean theaters in World War II, to attain the strategic objectives of the war. An example of operational plans would be France's Plan XVII against Germany in World War I or the Allied decision to invade Normandy instead of the Pas de Calais in 1944. The lowest level is tactics, which is the actual business of fighting battles. It covers the deployment of forces before battle is joined as well as the maneuvering of troops before the enemy.

<sup>32</sup> Doughty, *Seeds of Disaster*, 326-331.

<sup>33</sup> The standard German style of leadership in 1940 placed their commanders in the front lines, near the enemy, so they could make decisions that instantly could alter the conditions on the battlefield. Taking the example from footnote thirteen one step further, the German commander wants the hill taken, but the commander at the front sees that bypassing the hill, and taking the town behind it, would accomplish the same mission when the enemy has to retreat from the hill since it was no longer receiving supplies. France preferred to have its commanders in their headquarters, receiving information from many different sources, so they could then make the best decision with the information available. Therefore the hill will be



The most important difference between the casualties of France and Germany concerns the loss of key leaders. Of the four French battalions in the area between Donchery and Pont Maugis, none lost its commander. Of the four regiments involved in the fighting at Sedan, none lost its commander. Only one, Lieutenant Colonel Labarthe of the 213<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, was wounded, but his wound came from German forces' having broken through French defenses between Chehéry and Chémery, not from his being forward.<sup>34</sup>

Few casualties among French leadership is logical if they are the “handle of a fan” to control the movement of their men – the officers were encouraged to remain in their command posts.<sup>35</sup>

May, Kiesling, and Doughty all find that the French army of 1940 possessed strengths over Germany that just never had an opportunity to come into play. The High Command had a plan for 1940 and the men to make the plan work, which was a defensive strategy giving France time to bring more weapons and men to the battlefield, and tactics (*la bataille conduite* and *colmater*) that the men could use. One of the questions of this thesis is why were the troops that France sent to Italy so effective once there? These authors find that France's pre-war planning failed at the highest levels, and this failure of leadership proved impossible to overcome even with capable men to follow the orders, but they also suggest that at the lowest levels, especially Doughty in *Breaking Point*, that the men were willing and able to fight German's finest, even if those men were not in France's pre-war regular divisions. Furthermore, as a precursor to the next chapter, some of the men from the African divisions felt betrayed, by their generals or their own officers, at the spectacular collapse of 1940. As Gregory Mann states in *Native Sons*:

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attacked. Both procedures had strengths and weaknesses, and depending upon the battlefield, success on one occasion could lead to terrible casualties the next.

<sup>34</sup> Doughty, *Breaking Point*, 330.

<sup>35</sup> Doughty, *Breaking Point*, 30.

Some veterans of the Fall of France expected another round of fighting – one that would give them a chance to redeem themselves. As a group of them reportedly told the commandant of Kayes, ... We were not beaten, but totally crushed .... Contrary to what we had been told, our equipment was ridiculously insufficient. We are brave, but a loser – whatever you say – is always a slave (*captif*). We are a warrior race (*une race de guerriers*) and we will never accept captivity. At any rate, the war will resume in the spring of 1941, and we will win it.<sup>36</sup>

Therefore, some successes in Italy should be expected by the FEC as the men were willing to fight. Even though much of France was occupied by Germany in 1940, Winston Churchill's expression of faith in 1933 does not seem so quite misplaced. And like Britain, France had one asset that allowed it effectively continue the war even if it was decisively defeated in Europe and half the country occupied by the invader: the empire.

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<sup>36</sup> Mann, *Native Sons*, 111.

## CHAPTER TWO: A NEW FRENCH ARMY?

The peace terms that France signed on 22 June 1940 stipulated that the *Armée Métropolitaine* (metropolitan army), those men usually recruited and stationed in metropolitan France, would be limited to 100,000 men.<sup>37</sup> This was an effort on the part of Germany to humiliate France since this number was the limit of the German army after World War I. The majority of these men would eventually be disbanded when German troops occupied the rest of France after the Allies invaded North Africa – even though the Vichy government continued to exist after the Allied invasion. But what of the empire and the soldiers still stationed in the colonies?

Robert O. Paxton, in *Vichy France*, states that the empire had a nightmarish quality to Hitler. The very fact that France had colonies, and an ability to carry on the war in North Africa if Germany's terms were too onerous, meant that Hitler's terms were lenient towards his thoroughly defeated enemy; and Hitler told Mussolini on 17 June 1940 that, "the situation in which the French government might reject the German proposals, then flee abroad to London to continue the war from there" would have to be forestalled.<sup>38</sup> The empire was, however, more than just bargaining chip to Vichy.

Paxton states:

In a world in which Germany seemed to be rising and Britain declining, France might be compensated overseas for what she was losing on the continent. Fertile minds at Vichy, drawing bold geopolitical conclusions from the wave of

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<sup>37</sup> Since Germany occupied the land in the north and northwest of France, bordering the English Channel and the Atlantic, France only needed troops to defend European France from a British invasion or an attack from Spain.

<sup>38</sup> Paxton, *Vichy France*, 7.

Anglophobia that swept France after Mers-el-Kebir, even glimpsed opportunities for expanding overseas at British expense.<sup>39</sup>

Thus, France's colonies gave Vichy a sense of hope and purpose considering its uncertain future, but they also gave it the possibility for later expansion since it seemed to many within the Vichy government that Germany had already won the war.<sup>40</sup> Therefore, Vichy set about remaking France and the colonies, rejecting *Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité* (Liberty, Equality, Fraternity), the ideals of the French Revolution, and replacing them with Pétain's *Travail, Famille, Patrie* to guarantee this control.

Paxton makes it clear that Pétain's Vichy government was not just the Third Republic in hiding, a "repair job" in Paxton's words, but a completely new government where Marshal Pétain would draft the new constitution.<sup>41</sup> In alternating sections of chapter two, which Paxton entitled the National Revolution, he describes how:

The history of the National Revolution is, therefore, a history of the gradual gathering around one set of poles: integral Catholicism, Napoleonic centralism, more concentrated capitalism, and coercion.<sup>42</sup>

Paxton's major argument is that this National Revolution was not forced upon Vichy by Germany, it was not "Hitler's project," but welcomed by many in France who wanted stability from their government, even if that meant a curtailment of civil liberties.<sup>43</sup> The National Revolution quickly found its way to France's colonies because they were France's future.

Eric Jennings, *Vichy in the Tropics*, and Martin Thomas, *French Empire at War, 1940-1945*, build upon Paxton's work and illustrate not only the importance of the

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<sup>39</sup> Paxton, *Vichy France*, 57.

<sup>40</sup> Paxton, *Vichy France*, 11.

<sup>41</sup> Paxton, *Vichy France*, 20.

<sup>42</sup> Paxton, *Vichy France*, 142.

<sup>43</sup> Paxton, *Vichy France*, 142.

France's empire in regards to France, but also the changing relationship between the indigenous people of the colonies and the French, colonists as well as government officials in France and the colonies.<sup>44</sup> Echoing Paxton, Thomas states, "Vichy ideology and that regime's acute instinct for self-preservation certainly made their impact upon France's colonial rulers ... the war did lasting harm both to French imperial prestige and the credibility of France's distinctive philosophy of colonial assimilationism whereby certain colonial subjects were expected to identify with French cultural values."<sup>45</sup> The National Revolution required Vichy to keep control of the colonies, "the empire was the physical embodiment of what limited independence remained to the Vichy regime," so the colonial civilian and military governors had no difficulty relying more on decree than before the war.<sup>46</sup> Jennings calls Vichy's National Revolution introduction into the colonies as, "a form of colonialism steeped in social-Darwinist determinism and rooted in a reductionist, organic understanding of other, usually "primitive," societies and "races."<sup>47</sup> As Thomas suggests, Jennings also finds that Vichy's harsher brand of colonialism had lasting implications for France after the war, which is mostly outside the scope of this thesis. However, *Vichy in the Tropics* does offer two important points for this study.

First, Jennings clearly explains that the three colonies examined in his book, Madagascar, Guadeloupe, and Indochina, although far away from Germany's direct

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<sup>44</sup> Eric Jennings, *Vichy in the Tropics: Pétain's National Revolution in Madagascar, Guadeloupe, and Indochina, 1940-1944* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001). Martin Thomas, *French Empire at War, 1940-1945* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998).

<sup>45</sup> Thomas, *French Empire*, 2.

<sup>46</sup> Thomas, *French Empire*, 5.

<sup>47</sup> Jennings, *Vichy in the Tropics*, 1. Cohen, *French Encounter with Africans*, 248.

influence, still experienced Vichy's National Revolution, which Jennings states as, “anti-democratic, ultraconservative, xenophobic,” and with a large group of state enemies such as, “Jews, Freemasons, Communists, and democrats.”<sup>48</sup> In effect, the components of the National Revolution could have been loosely enforced in these colonies because of their distance from Vichy, but they were not, which strengthens Paxton’s argument that the National Revolution was a Vichy construct. Vichy was, in effect, giving its *colons* (colonial settlers), through the colonial administrators, the authority to ignore the “false ideals” of Liberty, Equality, Fraternity and just exploit and dominate the indigenous peoples of the colony.<sup>49</sup> Another example of Vichy’s marginalization of local governments states:

In 1940, substantial numbers of nonwhite Martinicans remained committed to some form of republicanism, long associated on the island with movements against slavery and for racial equality. When Pétain’s signing of the armistice agreement with Germany in June 1940 prompted Charles de Gaulle to demand continued resistance, the island’s mayors and *conseillers généraux* – most of whom were mixed-race or black – responded within days, pledging to assume “the ultimate sacrifices in order to achieve the final victory by continuing the struggle alongside the Allies and the French Overseas Empire.” But by then, Martinique had fallen under the authority of the senior white naval officer in the Caribbean, Admiral Georges Robert ... Overruling the locals, Robert aligned Martinique with Vichy and set about installing an authoritarian regime that drew strongly on the island’s small white Creole population, much of which sympathized with Vichy. Although some mixed-race and black Martinicans initially supported Robert’s effort, the regime quickly lost any type of broad support as nonwhite islanders began to see that the new order favored whites. In particular, Robert’s replacements of elected mayors, most of whom were of mixed-race background, with appointees drawn from the white minority undermined the popularity of his cause.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Jennings, *Vichy in the Tropics*, 17-23.

<sup>49</sup> Jennings, *Vichy in the Tropics*, 11.

<sup>50</sup> Sue Peabody and Tyler Stovall, eds, *Color of Liberty: Histories of Race in France* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2003), 260.

Furthermore, this latest wave of native marginalization had started even earlier than 1940.

According to Jennings:

By the 1930s Antillean and other colonial voices of assimilationism were being drowned out by a growing essentialist current that would culminate in Vichy's brand of colonialism. Building on the associationist theories of Louis Vignon, in the 1930s a new generation of colonial experts like Jean Paillard plainly encouraged "natives just to be natives."<sup>51</sup>

Vichy, in effect, cared little about the aspirations of the indigenous peoples, especially the burgeoning anti-colonial movements. But what Vichy could not ignore was the need of indigenous military manpower for control of the colonies.

Thus, Jennings second point is that Vichy had to impose even more onerous restrictions throughout the empire on the native soldiers who kept the colony under Vichy control. When Vietnamese auxiliary troops deserted their French officers in 1940 or local Guadeloupeans risked their lives to join the Free French (proportionately more than in metropolitan France), Vichy officials had to do more to guarantee that Vichy's longevity.<sup>52</sup> Colonial officials used their unchecked power for such things as forced labor in Madagascar and the abrogation of universal male suffrage in Guadeloupe.<sup>53</sup> The colonies had to remain under Vichy control, for as Thomas suggests in *French Empire*, "limited independence" was all that was left for the Vichy government in France.

Ironically, Paxton found that the real threat to Vichy during 1940 came not from a completely dissatisfied France, a people unwilling to accept a defeated France, but the men who commanded France's overseas empire. Spared from seeing the blitzkrieg

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<sup>51</sup> Eric Jennings, "Monuments to Frenchness? The Memory of the Great War and the Politics of Guadeloupe's Identity, 1914-1945," *French Historical Studies* vol. 21, no. 4 (Autumn, 1998), 563-64.

<sup>52</sup> Jennings, *Vichy in the Tropics*, 126 & 139.

<sup>53</sup> Jennings, *Vichy in the Tropics*, 226.

firsthand, men such as General Auguste Noguè in North Africa and General Eugène Mittelhauser in the Near East raised objections before the June armistice took effect – they wanted the battle to continue. The British attack on the French naval base at Mers-el-Kebir on 3 July 1940, as well as the seizure of other French ships throughout the world and other military actions by British armed forces, eventually help persuade both men to accept the firm orders of General Maxime Weygand, their commander in chief, who later toured much of French Africa in person during the fall of 1940 to keep the empire intact for Vichy.<sup>54</sup> The importance of these commanders was that they not only followed the orders of Vichy, but they brought the colonies they commanded with them into the Vichy realm. The only overseas military commanders and governors to join de Gaulle were Generals Paul Le Gentilhomme in Djibouti, Georges Catroux in Indochina, and governor Félix Éboué of Chad. Both generals, however, did so as individuals. They did not bring their men over to de Gaulle, for as Jennings states, “indigenous populations had no say whatsoever in determining loyalty or resistance in 1940, as they were never consulted.”<sup>55</sup> Governor Éboué, who was black, gave de Gaulle complete control of Chad. At the end of 1940, de Gaulle controlled a few parts of French Equatorial Africa and a few Pacific islands. Control of the empire remained with Vichy, which was personified in Pétain.

Therefore, Vichy negotiated with the Germans to keep additional soldiers for the colonies, i.e. troops in addition to the 100,000 men needed for the defense of France. The original number of troops allowed in North Africa was 30,000 men, and smaller numbers in the other colonies, but the number in North Africa was increased to 125,000 soldiers after German authorities realized that all of Vichy’s colonies were threatened by

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<sup>54</sup> Paxton, *Vichy France*, 42.

<sup>55</sup> Jennings, *Vichy in the Tropics*, 10.



Britain.<sup>56</sup> After the Western Allies invaded North Africa, these 125,000 men, who previously had followed Vichy orders, were now fighting for the Allies since their officers had changed their allegiance from Vichy to Free French, and when they were agglomerated with the small number of soldiers who rallied to de Gaulle's call in June 1940, which still numbered little more than around 35,000 men in late 1942, France was then ready to wage war against Germany in Italy.<sup>57</sup> This answers part of the first question of this thesis, how did France manage to send troops to Italy so soon after November of 1942? The largest component of the FEC can trace its origins to the leaders who stayed loyal to Vichy France; the soldiers these governors and military leaders led had little, if any, ability to alter this relationship, for as Jennings stated earlier, they were never asked. But as was asked in the introduction, were these 125,000 colonial soldiers the same soldiers who fought in 1940? The answer, as many things are concerning the study of history, was neither a yes or no.

Unlike World War I when it took some time before sizable numbers of troops from the empire were available to help the *Armée Métropolitaine* defend France, by 1940 there were many soldiers from colonies stationed in France for its defense. Most of the colonial formations were raised in Africa since the continent was seen as a huge reservoir of French manpower. Those formations raised in French North Africa (Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia) were part of the *Armée d'Afrique* (African army); the men who

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<sup>56</sup> The British naval attack on Mers-el-Kebir, the Anglo-Gaullist operation against Dakar, and the Vichy air attacks on Gibraltar convinced Hitler that Britain and France were in a state of war. Paxton, *Vichy France*, 82

<sup>57</sup> Paxton makes one interesting point about the soldiers that rallied to de Gaulle: the bulk of these numbers came from the "automatic" Gaullists that came from governors in Equatorial Africa supporting him. The majority of the French troops that eventually helped liberate Italy and France were loyal to Vichy from the summer of 1940 until November of 1942. Paxton, *Vichy France*, 44.

were from any other French colony were part of *La Coloniale* (colonial), and most of the *Coloniale* formations were raised in French West Africa. These two forces, *Afrique* and *Coloniale*, amounted to over twenty percent of the infantry formations facing Germany in 1940 – over 250,000 men.<sup>58</sup> Although the individual units of these three different formations had one goal in 1940, the defense of France, among the white officers – who numbered nearly one hundred percent in all the units – leading the soldiers there was a difference of opinion on how to accomplish it.

In Anthony Clayton's study of French military system in Africa from its foundation in the 1830s to the end of the empire around 1962, he found that *Métropolitaine* officers tended to look down on *Coloniale*, and sometimes *Afrique*, officers as professionally unskilled.<sup>59</sup> In return *Coloniale* and *Afrique* officers saw the whole of the *Armée Métropolitaine* as formalist and hidebound, focusing on the *bataille conduite*, while they saw themselves as men of action, schooled in colonial wars that required the use in concepts of flexibility and resource. In effect, there was a prejudice between the two sets of officers, *Métropolitaine* on the one side and *Coloniale* and *Afrique* on the other. Furthermore, the French commanders of African formations, including the generals, tended to direct their troops into action from the front.<sup>60</sup> *Métropolitaine* officers criticized this practice since they would be out of contact with their own superiors, but this practice reflected colonial values where the commanders

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<sup>58</sup> Dominique Lormier, *C'est Nous Les Africains: L'épopée de l'armée française d'Afrique, 1940-1945* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 2006), 25.

<sup>59</sup> Clayton was Senior Lecturer at the Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst for 29 years (1965-94). One of Britain's leading military historians, he was made a Chevalier dans l'Ordre des Palmes Academiques in 1988 in recognition of his expertise in French military history. Clayton, *France, Soldiers and Africa*, 9.

<sup>60</sup> Clayton, *France, Soldiers and Africa*, 13.

understood that they had to be seen as superior, as a man, to the men in order to lead them.<sup>61</sup>

Therefore, the FEC did share one trait with the 1940 French army: its soldiers were a mixture of metropolitan soldiers and men from the empire. However, as opposed to the 1940 army, in 1944 most of the soldiers who were visible to the enemy – often called the ‘sharp end’ in military literature – were men who were not from metropolitan France. And in regards to high-level leadership, there was a large difference. Without a High Command to dictate *bataille conduite* tactics, the commander of the FEC, General Juin, used the tactics that better suited his men: officers making decisions at the front, without delay, to capitalize upon the enemy’s weaknesses since this was a colonial army – officers must be seen by the men. In a recent book authored by John S. D. Eisenhower, *They Fought at Anzio*, he states that the FEC, “were superb troops, especially for fighting in the mountains ... They were all Moroccans or Algerians, native troops with French officers.”<sup>62</sup> Returning to the theme of forgotten histories mentioned in the introduction, John Ellis or Graham/Bidwell would not argue with Eisenhower about the soldiers being superb troops, but the very fact that the composition of the FEC is still not known sixty years after the war ended – the FEC also included Tunisians and men from French West Africa – is troubling since Eisenhower is a well-known American military author. Why then were these men, unknown to many historians, who had such a complex and often uneasy relationship to France, so effective when fighting for France in Italy? To begin to

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<sup>61</sup> Clayton, *France, Soldiers and Africa*, 13.

<sup>62</sup> John S.D. Eisenhower, *They Fought at Anzio* (Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 2007), 225.

answer this question, it is first necessary to understand how France created its colonial empire.

The use of indigenous manpower by the colonial leadership began shortly after French started establishing colonies around the globe. William Cohen, in *French Encounter with Africans*, argues that the *Ancien Régime* (old regime) had two schools of thought for overseas expansion, population and mercantilist.<sup>63</sup> Colonies were an outlet for France's population growth, but also a market for French goods. However, even though France was one of Europe's most populous nations in the eighteenth century, there were very few emigrants.<sup>64</sup> And since mercantilist requirements demanded manpower, men to provide the goods to send to France or other colonies, as well as to provide protection to the settlers/colonists and their growing economy, slaves were eventually used for both purposes. The end of the *Ancien Régime* could have ended the use of slavery in the empire, and it actually was abolished in 1794, but it was reinstated by Napoleon in 1802 since it was the only way the colonial endeavors, including sugar production, would remain lucrative.<sup>65</sup>

Alice Conklin, in her studies of the French colonial system at the turn of the twentieth century, found that the rhetoric of 1789, the rights of all people to basic freedoms, was used as a justification by the French to rid Africa from the forms of oppression that the French believed existed in Africa, "including African slavery,

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<sup>63</sup> Cohen, *French Encounter with Africans*, 155.

<sup>64</sup> Between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, Spain sent two million emigrants overseas, England nearly two million, Central Europe between 300,000 and 500,000, while France sent fewer than 200,000 emigrants. Cohen, *French Encounter with Africans*, 156.

<sup>65</sup> Cohen, *French Encounter with Africans*, 181.

‘feudalism’, ignorance, and disease.’<sup>66</sup> The *mission civilisatrice* (civilizing mission) was the justification used to uplift the “inferior races.”<sup>67</sup> The problem with the *mission civilisatrice*, as Cohen and Conklin both make clear, was that in the end the *mission civilisatrice* did not even attempt to uplift – the assumption that others needed uplifting was itself very racist since it assumes that Western culture was somehow better than all the native cultures. Initially, efforts were made in some of France’s colonies in an attempt to assimilate the native populations with French culture. In Senegal the idea was that:

Schooling was provided, in order, it was hoped, to create a young elite “with the taste for our goods and industry,” who would be faithful to France and who would spread European civilization. Furthermore, there were practical aspects to this education: it would produce clerks for French commerce and administration.<sup>68</sup>

However, the notion of assimilation eventually ended:

Only after the mid-nineteenth century, when French expansion started in earnest and when the French had acquired a preponderance of power in their relationship with Africans, did this racially relatively egalitarian society dissolve. The French, becoming wary of the rising colored elite, restricted education and employment opportunities and tried to take away political rights that previously had been extended. With the advance of French imperialism, especially after the 1880s, France dependence on the assimilated populations of Saint-Louis ceased, and a new relationship between white and black, which was more rigid and racially exclusive, was established in West Africa.<sup>69</sup>

This “new relationship” was the concept of association.

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<sup>66</sup> Alice Conklin, “Colonialism and Human Rights, A Contradiction in Terms? The Case of France and West Africa, 1895-1914,” *American Historical Review* vol. 103, no. 2 (April 1998), 420.

<sup>67</sup> Conklin, “Colonialism and Human Rights,” 420.

<sup>68</sup> Cohen, *French Encounter with Africans*, 122.

<sup>69</sup> Cohen, *French Encounter with Africans*, 124.

In Patricia M.E. Lorcin's study, *Imperial Identities: Stereotyping, Prejudice and Race in Colonial Algeria*, she explains the concepts of assimilation and association very succinctly:

Nineteenth-century French colonial theory encompassed two doctrines ... Assimilation and Association. In the former, the traditional colonial doctrine of France, the theory was that the political, economic, and judicial institutions and structures of the colony were to be assimilated into that of the mother country and that the colonized peoples would eventually become Frenchmen ... In practice assimilation was never fully achieved. By the end of the nineteenth century total assimilation was considered to be a pipe-dream and the doctrine, deemed inadequate and unscientific, was replaced by that of association whereby the colonizing power associated with the colonized, respecting their diverse institutions and progressing in tandem rather than as one.<sup>70</sup>

The problem with association was that it was no more based on science than was assimilation, and the French military and civilian leadership did not always respect the indigenous institutions.

Returning to Cohen and the notion of assimilation, he states that at the end of the eighteenth century there were two trends of thought toward non-European peoples: evolutionism and biological racism.<sup>71</sup> The evolutionary view posited that Africans would evolve like Europeans, and that Africans were living in an era similar to that of the European Middle Ages. Thus, Africans were not doomed to inferiority, but they were also not the equals of Europeans. Their blackness would lessen as they evolved. Regarding biology, although Africans were considered inferior, "they were still thought to be capable of evolving physically and, hence, of rising in their social and intellectual accomplishments as well."<sup>72</sup> Thus, the concept of assimilation would have been logical to the men trying to colonize Africa and other parts of the world if, returning to Lorcin's

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<sup>70</sup> Lorcin, *Imperial Identities*, 7.

<sup>71</sup> Cohen, *French Encounter with Africans*, 210.

<sup>72</sup> Cohen, *French Encounter with Africans*, 212

definition, “an initial process of civilizing the indigenous populations,” eventually led to all the native peoples of that colony embracing French culture and traditions.

However, the triumph of scientific racism – origins found in physiognomics, physical anthropology, Darwinism, and some other pseudosciences – in the nineteenth century meant that association eventually triumphed over assimilation. Cohen states that the findings of nineteenth century biologists and geologists made it clear that the world was much older than 6,000 years; and if blacks had descended from whites, it had taken millions of years for them to become black, so it would take that long for them to return to white: “One could no longer predict that within a generation or two blacks would turn white and would also change socially and intellectually.”<sup>73</sup> Furthermore, as Cohen found in the literature of the time:

The spread of European power around the globe was a sign of the superiority of the white race: “everywhere it has shown itself to be most intellectual and industrious ... The enslavement of blacks was a sign of their stupidity, for they allowed themselves to “be duped, enchained and sold even by men less strong.”<sup>74</sup>

Lorcin explains that it was military officers in Algeria, especially medical officers, which played an important role in the “science of race.”<sup>75</sup> As she states, “It was their ‘scientific’ approach, a necessary ingredient in creating the illusory ‘science of race’, that led to their scholarship being so well received in those academic circles exploring this dubious new science.”<sup>76</sup> The problem with these officers and their scientific approach was:

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<sup>73</sup> Cohen, *French Encounter with Africans*, 212.

<sup>74</sup> Cohen, *French Encounter with Africans*, 214.

<sup>75</sup> Lorcin, *Imperial Identities*, 118.

<sup>76</sup> Lorcin, *Imperial Identities*, 118.

Military personnel came to their research with certain presuppositions and prejudices ... [which] were modified to suit modern circumstances, and together with progressive concepts were woven into the fabric of nineteenth-century racial thought. Then too there was the military as an institution ... paternalism and the conditioning to hierarchical allegiances that military training produced, encouraged patterns of thought well suited to racial dialogue.<sup>77</sup>

In effect, at least regarding the French medical corps in Algeria, “Disease became a tool with which to condemn indigenous society and medicine a symbol of racial and technological superiority.”<sup>78</sup> Furthermore, French military officers found the indigenous population of Algeria at the time of the French conquest was primarily Arab and Berber, and due to the circumstances of the French conquest, Arabs occupying the coast (attacked and conquered first) and Berbers living primarily in the mountains (taking longer to pacify), they came to view that the Kabyles – the largest group of Berbers in Algeria – “were superior to the Arabs ... not that they were different, which they were.”<sup>79</sup> This elevation of the Kabyles above the Arabs, the ‘Kabyle Myth’, was an assimilationist notion since the Kabyles possessed traits – such as not fleeing when confronted with combat (unlike the nomadic Arabs), sedentary nature, and tenacity – that could be likened to the European peasant.<sup>80</sup> The problems confronting the Kabyles was that the French, returning to Lorcin’s definition of association of “respecting their diverse institutions,” never passed any pro-Kabyle colonial legislation, much less respecting their religious convictions (“Muslims were required to repudiate their statutory right to Islamic law in order to become French citizens”) or their property rights (almost 600,000 hectares of

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<sup>77</sup> Lorcin, *Imperial Identities*, 119.

<sup>78</sup> Lorcin, *Imperial Identities*, 120.

<sup>79</sup> Lorcin, *Imperial Identities*, 2.

<sup>80</sup> Lorcin, *Imperial Identities*, 29-31.



land were confiscated from the native population after the 1871 Kabylia insurrection).<sup>81</sup> Lorcin states that the land sequestration proved catastrophic to the Kabyle society since the land taken, and given to French colonists, was the most fertile. In effect, “For all their alleged superiority to the Arabs, when it came to land the Kabyles were *indigènes* in the same light as the Arabs.”<sup>82</sup> In sum, during the nineteenth century assimilation was eventually found to be flawed, but the benefits of association, extending into the twentieth century, were little better. Ironically, it was the very traits that placed the Kabyles above the Arabs (cultivated properties, well-built villages, and even factories and production centers), which made them desirable as soldiers within the French colonial system.

Once the French decided that the Kabyles could not be an independent entity within a French territory, the end of their autonomy was soon to end. However, the French were quick to realize that the Kabyles could be an important part of the French military mission in Algeria: their days of fighting the French had ended but they were not going to completely lay down their arms. French officers, General de Rumigny in this instance, suggested that they would make perfect infantry to safeguard the frontiers of Algeria as they were, “faithful, sober and industrious with responsible habits and remarkable courage.”<sup>83</sup> The use of Berber soldiers for colonial defense extended later to Tunisia (1881) and Morocco (1912) at their inclusion into the French colonial realm. This does not, however, suggest that Arabs were not used as French colonial soldiers – they were. France, however, needed more than colonial defense from its native soldiers.

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<sup>81</sup> Lorcin, *Imperial Identities*, 172-174.

<sup>82</sup> Lorcin, *Imperial Identities*, 193.

<sup>83</sup> Lorcin, *Imperial Identities*, 28.

The idea of the use of black Africans in a European conflict had only originated in 1909 when a young French officer named Charles Mangin, who had served in Africa, suggested that extensive recruitment of black Africans was possible. Mangin proposed only using black volunteers, eliminating many of the problems that occurred with conscription.<sup>84</sup> He believed that Africans possessed “warrior instincts that remained extremely powerful in primitive races.”<sup>85</sup> Other traits included: the ability to live in harsher climates than other races; the ability to carry large loads great distances; a less developed nervous system (when compared to whites) so they could resist pain; patriarchal hierarchy that endowed them with a sense of discipline; and a European belief that Africa had been a battlefield for centuries so they were naturally suited to be excellent soldiers. Mangin’s beliefs are a concrete example of the influence of scientific racism in military writing; he based his arguments on the science of the day, drawing from physical anthropology in this case. Mangin, a man of the times, then borrowed a page from the British use of “martial race” theory in India and ranked the various black African tribes according to their various martial qualities.<sup>86</sup> Their perceived warlike qualities guaranteed that Africans were going to be used as little more than fodder.

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<sup>84</sup> Myron J. Echenberg, *Colonial Conscripts: The Tirailleurs Sénégalais in French West Africa, 1857-1960* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1991), 30.

<sup>85</sup> Joe Lunn, “‘Les Races Guerrières’: Racial Preconceptions in the French Military about West African Soldiers during the First World War,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 34:4 (1996), 521.

<sup>86</sup> Thus various ethnic groups in North Africa were also ranked according to their abilities. Algeria, as was explained earlier, was a multi-ethnic society, the two largest being Arabs and Kabyles. French officers stationed in there found that the Arab was, “like his ancestors, a pillager and a thief. This trait, an inherently physical and moral characteristic resulting from social organization, had developed over the generations until it had become the dominating passion of the Arab race.” In contrast, “the Kabyles, on the other hand, were a pure, primitive race ... were hard working, and, although vulgar and ignorant, had an intrinsic sense of honor and honesty unknown in other African peoples.” Simply, as General de Rumigny

By 1917, Mangin had obtained a position in the French High Command that guaranteed that black African units were concentrated in order to maximize their “shock” power, a policy he favored.<sup>87</sup> This policy governing their use was codified in *Notice sur les Sénégalais et leur emploi au combat* (Directions on the Senegalese and their employment in combat), issued in the last year of the war.<sup>88</sup> This does not suggest, however, that black Africans were not used in mass before 1918. General Pierre Berdoulat, commanding the 1<sup>st</sup> Corps of the Colonial Army during the Somme battles in 1916, found that their “limited intellectual faculties” diminished their effectiveness in combat, but they were primarily useful “for sparing a certain number of European lives at the moment of assaults.”<sup>89</sup> General Robert Nivelle, the commander of the French army in early 1917, insisted on the maximum deployment of black troops prior to his Aisne offensive since:

It is imperative that the number of [African] units put at my disposition should be increased as much as possible. [This will] increase the power of our projected strength and permit the sparing – to the extent possible – of French blood.<sup>90</sup>

Their use as shock troops explains their high combat losses. Nearly seven million white Frenchmen served in combat roles during World War I, and of this total almost 1,256,000 died – a loss ratio of eighteen percent. Algeria had almost 159,000 men in combat positions, of which 36,000 died. That number represents twenty-three percent. The numbers for Tunisia are 54,000, 10,000, and nineteen percent respectively.

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found, they would make good soldiers. Patricia Lorcin, “Imperialism, Colonial Identity, and Race in Algeria, 1830-1870: The Role of the French Medical Corps,” *Isis* vol. 90, no. 4 (December 1999), 667-668.

<sup>87</sup> Lunn, *Memoirs of the Maelstrom: A Senegalese Oral History of the First World War* (Portsmouth, New Hampshire: Heinemann, 1999), 122.

<sup>88</sup> Lunn, *Memoirs of the Maelstrom*, 125.

<sup>89</sup> Lunn, *Memoirs of the Maelstrom*, 139.

<sup>90</sup> Lunn, *Memoirs of the Maelstrom*, 139.

Approximately 140,000 West Africans served, of whom 31,000 were killed – over twenty-two percent. Morocco had 37,000 serve, but no records were kept regarding those killed in action.<sup>91</sup> Considering that France had incurred nearly 400,000 killed by November 1914, before African soldiers started reaching France in meaningful numbers (North Africans started entering the conflict in large numbers by October 1914 and black Africans by early 1916), the contribution – and loss – of the Africans in the trenches is staggering.<sup>92</sup> But why did these African soldiers take higher casualties than those of metropolitan Frenchmen? Georges Clemenceau, who became Prime Minister of France on 16 November 1917, explains part of the African wastage of manpower when he told a group of senators in February 1918 that:

Although I have infinite respect for these brave blacks, I would much prefer to have ten blacks killed than a single Frenchman, because I think that enough Frenchmen have been killed and that it is necessary to sacrifice them as little as possible.<sup>93</sup>

It is clear that Clemenceau, a committed imperialist and republican, was influenced by the scientific racism of the era, and that the government and its military leaders were of the same mind regarding the use of Africans in Europe.

While large numbers of African units were not ready to engage in battle at the beginning of World War I, if only because all the nations involved thought that the war would be over quickly, by 1939 the French High Command was relying on African soldiers to replace white Frenchmen, replacing the men who were voting citizens with

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<sup>91</sup> Lunn, *Memoirs of the Maelstrom*, 154. Anthony Clayton, *France, Soldiers and Africa*, 98.

<sup>92</sup> The introduction date of black Africans does not even take into account that they were normally pulled out of the trenches during the winter months to reorganize. Taking few casualties during that time, the winter months of 1916/17 and 1917/18, their loss percentage is even more pronounced when compared to the loss that France sustained.

<sup>93</sup> Lunn, *Memoirs of the Maelstrom*, 140.

those who most often had no political voice. Furthermore, the High Command realized that its empire had allowed France to continue the fight in World War I with additional soldiers, workers, and goods. As mentioned earlier, Africa added nearly twenty divisions to the French order of battle in 1940. As one French officer commented on France's colonial soldiers in 1940:

Thrown into battle like the division of 1918, without means of transport, obliged to make long forced marches, these North African divisions were sacrificed to no gain whatever. They were, however, composed of excellent troops, almost all were fully armed and equipped. Better deployed, concentrating on the major defensive position, they would have been able to withstand longer the assaults of an enemy they could not destroy.<sup>94</sup>

To this officer, colonial soldiers were “excellent troops” in 1940; Eisenhower stated that they were “superb troops” in 1944. In chapter one, this thesis suggested that part of the FEC's effectiveness in Italy might be because the French troops in 1940 were not so completely outclassed by their Germany adversaries, i.e. that the units of the FEC did not begin from scratch in learning how to defeat German troops. Another possible answer, building upon Lunn, is that the same willingness to expend African lives that existed in French military circles during World War I also existed in World War II, and that the perceived effectiveness of the FEC in Italy was its leadership being willing to guarantee success at the expense of its soldiers. Returning to Ellis, how were “their attacks consistently pressed home with the greatest panache” if the soldiers had believed that they were little more and cannon fodder? What were some factors that might have motivated the troops to fight for a county that often denied them rights that were given to the white settlers of the colonies?

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<sup>94</sup> Clayton, *France, Soldiers and Africa*, 126.

Gregory Mann, in his *Native Sons*, answers this motivational question by examining one region of Mali. He states that Mangin wanted African men to enlist, before and during World War I, rather than be conscripted because of the types of benefits, both symbolic and material, they would receive when they left the military. These benefits included: future access to a colonial job, a military pension, or some level of authority in their village upon their return.<sup>95</sup> In some instances, Mangin did get black Africans to enlist – often with the help of black leaders. For example, Blaise Diagne, who was the first black African elected to the French National Assembly, was able to get some of his constituents to enlist for the duration of the war by gaining firm recognition from the Third Republic that Senegalese born in the four communes were entitled to French citizenship.<sup>96</sup> However, in other villages and towns – without the offer of citizenship – the potential gain of serving was not enough. Some towns had their population shrink in both World Wars as men fled the demands of the colonial state:

young men resisted it by fleeing, feigning illness, or passing the burden along to less powerful neighbors, particularly strangers, migrants, and people of slave descent ... The commandant attributed the success of the drive – even in areas that had risen in revolt in 1916 – largely to the fact that chiefs, rather than administrators, would designate the men to be conscripted.<sup>97</sup>

In other instances, rather than just fleeing long enough to avoid colonial officials, the men would leave the region controlled by France for a land governed by another European power.<sup>98</sup> Without enough Africans volunteering, France had to rely upon the 1912

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<sup>95</sup> Mann, *Native Sons*, 16 & 69.

<sup>96</sup> Myron Echenberg, “‘Morts Pour La France’; The African Soldier in France During the Second World War,” *Journal of African History* vol. 26, no. 4 (1985), 365.

<sup>97</sup> Mann, *Native Sons*, 68-69.

<sup>98</sup> Echenberg, *Colonial Conscripts*, 44.

Conscription Law. Mann sums up the reasoning behind French conscription very succinctly:

Writers in the Third Republic claimed that France did not owe the colonies, but that the people of the colonies were indebted to France for having saved them from slavery and brought them civilization. In the years immediately before the First World War, the idea of debt was used to justify African conscription ... “Africa cost us piles of gold, thousands of soldiers, and rivers of blood. We would never dream of reclaiming the gold, but the men and the blood she should repay to us with interest.”<sup>99</sup>

Thus, for France the conscription of soldiers was the only means “that African colonies could reimburse France for the humanist enterprise of colonialism.”<sup>100</sup> As for the Africans, Mann states that the military veteran had a “moral claim to assistance,” which was as old as the Revolution – “veterans’ recompense [was] declared a ‘sacred debt’ by the republic of 1792 and every subsequent regime” – but for the twentieth century, as stated earlier, could be a job, his pension, and often a place of authority within his village or town since he might be one of the few people allowed to vote.<sup>101</sup> Furthermore, after the soldiers either volunteered or were conscripted, the European officers entered into another form of debt to his African soldiers – Mann calls it “reminders of the dependence.”<sup>102</sup> The officers were obligated to perform specific duties or military effectiveness suffered since “no one knew better than the soldiers what their officers owed them.”<sup>103</sup> French officers prided themselves on becoming “Africains,” or “old Africa hands” by learning the soldier’s language and culture. If the officer did his part, “making sure the soldiers were well fed, well lead, and properly housed,” the soldiers

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<sup>99</sup> Mann, *Native Sons*, 187.

<sup>100</sup> Mann, *Native Sons*, 188.

<sup>101</sup> Mann, *Native Sons*, 188.

<sup>102</sup> Mann, *Native Sons*, 188.

<sup>103</sup> Mann, *Native Sons*, 188.

would follow his orders.<sup>104</sup> If the soldiers did not know their officer, or did not believe that their officer was sharing their risks, the result might be military failure.<sup>105</sup>

Another factor that might explain African motivation was the sheer brutality of the French military in the colonies. Clayton explains:

the colonial self-assurance on occasion led to a feature of behaviour dreadfully familiar to all historians but perhaps especially so to historians of colonial rule; the gaps of self-delusion between proclaimed and often lofty ideals and reality ... Generals ... with the loftiest ideals and genuine respect for indigenous culture, would fight pacification campaigns of the greatest severity, not flinching from the wholesale destruction of the resisters' peasant economies and the calculated use of terror, all in the belief that such methods were entirely justifiable.<sup>106</sup>

As late as the 1920s, during the Rif War of 1920-26, the French were still trying to secure their empire and used whatever methods were needed, including the burning of whole villages, to secure the land in Morocco that they deemed part of the French empire from Abd el-krim, the leader of the Rif tribes. This use of extreme violence was, as Clayton suggests, the norm for much of France's success in pacifying Africa.

One final motivating element for African soldiers, at least in World War II, is explained in Nancy E. Lawler's study, *Soldiers of Misfortune: Ivoirien Tirailleurs of World War II*.<sup>107</sup> Lawler states that there were over 100,000 black *Tirailleurs* (riflemen) in France by May 1940 awaiting the German attack, which is one of the reasons for the public optimism before the German attack since black *Tirailleurs*, based on the colonial rhetoric, were considered invincible warriors. She explains that some of their battlefield

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<sup>104</sup> Mann, *Native Sons*, 188.

<sup>105</sup> Mann, *Native Sons*, 67.

<sup>106</sup> Clayton, *France, Soldiers and Africa*, 12.

<sup>107</sup> Black soldiers conscripted from the area called French West Africa included: the Soudan (modern-day Mali), Guinea, Côte d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast), Upper Volta (Burkina Faso), Dahomey (Benin) and Senegal. Regardless of their origin, they troops were collectively called *Tirailleurs Sénégalais*. Nancy E. Lawler, *Soldiers of Misfortune: Ivoirien Tirailleurs of World War II* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1992).



tenacity (they often fanatically resisted German attacks), was because they were told that the Germans would be extremely brutal to them if they were taken prisoner. General Walter Nehring, General Heinz Guderian's Chief of Staff in 1940 (who was the corps commander of the German troops at Sedan), states in one paragraph concerning African colonial soldiers that, "French colonial soldiers have mutilated in bestial fashion our German wounded ... all kindness would be an error ... They are to be treated with the greatest rigour."<sup>108</sup> It did not seem to matter that there was little, if any, proof of African soldiers mutilating German wounded or dead. Furthermore, German soldiers, in an effort to prove that they were better fighters than any soldier Africa could produce (the benefits of their Aryan heritage), went to great lengths to overcome *Tirailleur* resistance, rather than bypass the *Tirailleur* positions, which is one of the tenets of the blitzkrieg – avoiding combat to disrupt the enemy's rear areas. It became a self-fulfilling prophecy since the black Africans had to resist, because of their fear of being captured, and the German soldiers, on account of their Aryan superiority, had to defeat them on the battlefield. As one German put it:

The French fought tenaciously; the blacks especially used every resource to the bitter end, defending every house. To break them we had to use flame throwers, and to overcome the last Senegalese, we had to kill them one by one."<sup>109</sup>

Similar to their experiences in World War I, black *Tirailleurs* took large losses before the armistice was signed in July 1940 – ten percent were killed during the two-month campaign.<sup>110</sup> Therefore, the potential French brutality in the colonies might have gotten

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<sup>108</sup> Echenberg, "Morts Pour la France," 369.

<sup>109</sup> Echenberg, *Colonial Conscripts*, 95.

<sup>110</sup> Not all their losses, however, were directly from combat. On more than one occasion *Tirailleurs* were massacred after surrendering. In one horrific example on 10 June 1940, approximately 450 black Africans were marched into a wood and executed. This was done because many of the Germans believed that

the soldiers to France, but the threat of German brutality only strengthened the motivation to fight. The losses taken by African soldiers, while often exceeding that of the *Métropolitaine*, is however, only part of the story.

Returning to Doughty's study, *Breaking Point*, he nicely illustrates one of the key differences between the placement of leaders among the various formations – *Métropolitaine*, *Coloniale* and *Afrique* – of the Third Republic. At the battle of La Horgne, it was the 3<sup>rd</sup> *Spahis* Brigade, composed of Moroccan and Algerian troops, led by French officers, that fought German panzer troops to a draw for much of the day.

At 0430 hours ... elements of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade arrived at La Horgne. Of all the battles fought during the 1940 campaign, none subsequently was as revered or commemorated by the French as the valiant struggle by the two Moroccan and Algerian regiments at La Horgne. Using barricades and trenches ... the cavalymen fiercely resisted the German attacks ... Though the 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade did not fulfill its mission of holding La Horgne for twenty-four hours, it significantly delayed the advance of the 1<sup>st</sup> Panzer Division. But this was not accomplished without significant losses. More than half of the Algerians and Moroccans who fought at La Horgne died there. And among the dead were twelve of the thirty-seven French officers who fought there, including the commander of one of the regiments and his successor.<sup>111</sup>

While an examination of this one battle cannot possibly be interpolated to represent all the battles fought by imperial soldiers in 1940, it does appear to highlight the differences between the methodical battle doctrine, which required officers to remain in the rear, and the traits that *Afrique* and *Coloniale* leaders saw in themselves, that they were men of action.<sup>112</sup> As mentioned earlier, Clayton states that officers leading African soldiers had to be seen to be effective, “the commander had to be seen to be superior, as a man, to

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African soldiers fought like savages; that they had mistreated (or massacred) German prisoners and also removed body parts from the German corpses as trophies of war. Lawler, *Soldiers of Misfortune*, 96.

<sup>111</sup> Doughty, *Breaking Point*, 305.

<sup>112</sup> Clayton, *France, Soldiers and Africa*, 12.

his men.”<sup>113</sup> The differences in style, examined by counting the number of officers killed, finds the 3<sup>rd</sup> *Spahis* Brigade losing over thirty-two percent of the officers during in one day. The 55<sup>th</sup> Division, following the safer doctrine, lost none of its key leaders during the 13<sup>th</sup> of May, the day that German panzer troops crossed the Meuse River at Sedan in strength. When comparing the German losses among its officers to these two French units, the finding should not be surprising when the German casualties were similar to those of the 3<sup>rd</sup> *Spahis*, rather than the 55<sup>th</sup>. Out of the 55,000 men in the XIX<sup>th</sup> Panzer Korps, who fought from Luxembourg to Dunkirk, 3,845 (almost seven percent) became casualties during the two weeks it took them to reach the coast – 640 killed (slightly over one percent) and 3,205 wounded (almost six percent). Officers numbered about 1,500 men in the XIX<sup>th</sup>, almost three percent of the manpower within the corps, but their total losses were fifty-three killed (close to four percent) and 241 wounded (a little more than sixteen percent).<sup>114</sup> German officers, who were also trained to lead their men at the front, paid a steep price for their success, but in the long run their willingness for sacrifice kept the 1940 campaign short.

In 1940 the French High Command had a French army in Europe, but an army composed of three different elements: *Armée Métropolitaine*, *Armée d’Afrique* and *La Coloniale*. Their primary responsibilities were to protect metropolitan France.<sup>115</sup> Their adherence to the methodical battle would suggest that they did, in fact, have only one

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<sup>113</sup> Clayton, *France, Soldiers and Africa*, 13.

<sup>114</sup> Doughty, *Breaking Point*, 330.

<sup>115</sup> Clayton, *France, Soldiers and Africa*, 8.

doctrine.<sup>116</sup> However, the notion that the officers from these different elements (*Métropolitaine*, *Afrique* and *Coloniale*) viewed the other differently, *Métropolitaine* were formalist and hidebound, while the *Afrique* and *Coloniale* were careerist and professionally unskilled, does hint that there might be two styles of leadership in place at the tactical level in 1940. This may, in part, explain the success of the FEC in Italy since the *Métropolitaine* officers were no longer directing the campaign. In Italy an officer with origins from the *Armée d'Afrique*, imbued with a colonial mindset and most likely familiar with General Mangin's military beliefs regarding colonial troops, was in charge.

General Alphonse Juin was born in Algeria in 1888. A classmate of de Gaulle at the French military academy at St. Cyr, he was wounded fighting in France in 1915 where he lost the use of this right arm. During 1940 he commanded a *métropolitaine* division in France and eventually surrendered with his men to the Germans. By June of 1941 the Vichy government persuaded the Germans to release him so he could command all the French troops in Morocco; in November of that same year he became the commander of all the land forces in North Africa. After the Allies invaded North Africa in November of 1942, he joined the Allied effort and led the French forces against German and Italian troops in Tunisia in 1942 and 1943. He eventually joined the Free French movement in mid-1943, but the fact that he had served Vichy made his job in Italy more difficult. Juin had to prove that he was genuinely loyal to France – not Vichy – since one of his divisions was a Free French division, led by men who had followed de Gaulle since 1940. Eisenhower states:

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<sup>116</sup> Military doctrine is the uniform application of tactics; doctrine is the glue that holds everything together, and training is the instrument through which it is imparted. Timothy H. Place, *Military Training in the British Army, 1940-1944: From Dunkirk to D-Day* (Portland, Oregon: Frank Cass, 2000), vii.

Juin, was a remarkable man, though easy to underestimate. He was small in stature, and the fact was unfortunately emphasized when he was photographed beside the towering Clark ... The British seem prone to sniff at Juin's military knowledge and his sharp brain, overlooking the fact that he graduated first in his class at the French Military Academy, St. Cyr. Born and raised in North Africa, he understood his troops thoroughly.<sup>117</sup>

Ellis, Graham, and Bidwell would not argue with Eisenhower's assessment of Juin, but for purposes of this study it must be understood that Juin most likely understood how to motivate his African troops, rather than actually understanding them. Juin was, in fact, a product of the colonial mentality that would not pause for a moment to use force against the native peoples of Africa, a tradition that praised the strengths of colonial troops while simultaneously needing to maintain a strict racial hierarchy. But who were these troops that he would command, soldiers who had been spilling blood for France since the French conquest of their land?

The military formations in the colonies would be a mixture of white Frenchmen, from either France or settlers in the colonies, who were the officers as well as the noncommissioned officers (NCOs), and a large number of indigenous soldiers, volunteer or conscripts, who were the riflemen – the *Armée d'Afrique* and *La Coloniale*.<sup>118</sup> The term “volunteer,” as Mann argues in *Native Sons*, has special meaning for many of France's indigenous soldiers since very few actually ever volunteered. To fulfill the

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<sup>117</sup> Eisenhower, *They Fought at Anzio*, 239.

<sup>118</sup> By examining the number of divisions France had in place by May 1940, over 100 divisions, it would seem that France could have easily provided enough soldiers from the *Armée* to provide a defense of France and the colonies without having to rely upon indigenous soldiers. It must be understood though that Germany kept over 1.5 million *Armée Métropolitaine* prisoners after June 1940 as collateral – not counting 25,516 colonial prisoners. These men insured that France would pay war reparations and provide economic support to Germany until the war ended with England. Martin C. Thomas, “The Vichy Government and French Colonial Prisoners of War, 1940-1944,” *French Historical Studies* 25.4 (2002), 659.

colonial government's requirement, local chiefs consistently sent the sons of *wolosow* (children of female slaves) off to be soldiers, even after conscription was introduced. Although the men of the *Armée d'Afrique* and *La Coloniale* have been so far lumped together, for simplicity when comparing them to the *Armée Métropolitaine*, they were, in fact, two military formations of very different men.

The *Armée d'Afrique* was composed of men who were organized into seven different combat formations.<sup>119</sup> The combat formations were then broken down into European units and those units largely made up of *indigènes* (indigenous) soldiers. The European formations were the *Zouave* (infantry), *Infanterie Légère d'Afrique* (light infantry), *Chasseurs d'Afrique* (cavalry), and the *Légion Etrangère* (Foreign Legion). These formations, although they were white units, were always stationed outside of France, and unlike the *Armée Métropolitaine* formations, were often used outside of North Africa when France had to use force elsewhere in the world, such as the Crimea and Mexico in the nineteenth century.

The first *Zouaves* were formed around 1830 as a strictly volunteer formation of riflemen, both European and indigenous soldiers, when France began the conquest of Algeria. Since French colonists needed protection from the native peoples, returning to Clayton's study where he explains how French efforts to pacify the indigenous people often took an extreme form so many native peoples would not hesitate at retribution, in all three North African colonies (Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia) the *Zouaves* eventually became a white formation. The battles that the *Zouaves* fought during the nineteenth century, and their military success (as well as their colorful uniforms), ensured that

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<sup>119</sup> There would also be non-combat formations, such as transport, medical, veterinary, supply, and a whole list of others. These fall outside the scope of this thesis.

metropolitan Frenchmen were always willing to volunteer for this unit, but the number of volunteers was never high enough to fill every position within the various battalions so settlers from the colonies were eventually conscripted to fill the ranks. *Zouaves* fought in France in 1940, and in the campaign to liberate France during 1944, but they did not see employment as a unit in the FEC. Many of the colonists were used as officers and NCOs in the FEC and other units that needed Frenchmen since they at least had some knowledge of the North African people, language, and customs.<sup>120</sup>

The *Infanterie Légère d'Afrique* was originally formed as a penal unit in 1832, a direct response to the French Revolution of 1830, since the need for European manpower was in such high demand for Africa. It eventually became, like the *Zouaves*, a mostly all-volunteer formation of metropolitan Frenchmen and European colonials. Like the *Zouaves*, men from this unit did not serve in the FEC as a unit but as a provider of Europeans soldiers within the North African divisions.<sup>121</sup>

The *Chasseurs d'Afrique* fit the need for a light cavalry unit in Africa to reconnoiter and pursue enemies on horseback. Initially composed of soldiers from France, mostly volunteers but a few conscripts, it eventually became, like the *Zouaves* and *Infanterie Légère*, a mixed unit of volunteers and conscripts from France and North African settlers, but also some North African Jews, non-French Europeans, and a few indigenous men. Trading in their horses for trucks, tanks, and armored cars, the *Chasseurs* provided reconnaissance units for the North African divisions in the 1940

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<sup>120</sup> Clayton, *France, Soldiers and Africa*, 199-211.

<sup>121</sup> Clayton, *France, Soldiers and Africa*, 211-216.

campaign, and by 1943-44 the formations were performing tank-destroyer (TD) duties for the FEC.<sup>122</sup>

The *Légion Etrangère* (Foreign Legion) is one of best-known military formations of the *Armée d'Afrique*. Formed in 1831, it formed a unit for many of the foreign mercenary soldiers who had previously served with the French army and were no longer needed – or wanted – in France. This was an all-volunteer formation, which reflected European upheavals, unemployment, and deteriorating social conditions throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The indigenous formations included: *Tirailleurs* (riflemen or sharpshooters), *Spahis* (cavalry), and *Goums* (irregular infantry). These units were generally a mixture of white officers and NCOs, and African volunteers and/or conscripts who occupied the lowest military positions, along with some native soldiers who were also NCOs. The one colony that seemed primarily to provide volunteers was Morocco, “since Morocco’s protectorate status did not permit any formalized quota/conscription system (although the issue was debated in France in 1920).”<sup>123</sup> However, it is difficult to believe that all the soldiers were volunteers since the Moroccan government could have been pressured by the French to produce volunteers.

The initial *Tirailleurs* units were raised in the 1840s in Algeria, followed by Tunisia in the 1880s and Morocco after 1912.<sup>124</sup> These units often comprised over half of a colony’s military power. By 1939 a regiment of *Tirailleurs* contained approximately

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<sup>122</sup> The TDs were United States M-10s, an open topped tank with a seventy-six millimeter anti-tank gun and a machine-gun for anti-aircraft defense. Each TD unit also contained a light (as in weight) tank company for reconnaissance duties. Clayton, *France, Soldiers and Africa*, 216-223.

<sup>123</sup> Clayton, *France, Soldiers and Africa*, 264.

<sup>124</sup> Tunisia became a protectorate in 1881, and Morocco became a protectorate in 1912.



2,500 men in which twenty percent were French; most of the officers were French and many of the NCOs were Arabic-speaking North African *colons* (colonists or settlers). Unlike *Armée Métropolitaine* soldiers, *Tirailleur* soldiers did not receive training at formalized centers, with programs or manuals to follow. The men were taken out into remote locations and trained by the French officers and NCOs. The strong paternalism of the French cadre, reflected by the use of *tu*, rather than *vous* (helping to maintain the strict racial hierarchies of the time), by French officers and NCOs when speaking to indigenous NCOs and soldiers, as well as the longer military service of the volunteers and conscripts helped create some very effective African combat units.<sup>125</sup> Mann defines this particular kind of military paternalism:

In the decades before the war, during the conquest and the consolidation of colonial rule, French officers had developed a protean version, which some used constantly and other used haltingly in recounting their relationships with African soldiers. While they frequently portrayed the men they commanded as childlike and simple, references to the loyalty of the African soldiers were all but obligatory in the self-congratulating memoirs of colonial officers .... This supposed loyalty was the source of much pride, and officer often saw it as evidence of the salutary effects of colonial military culture, if not of their own good character.<sup>126</sup>

And when the relationship between white Frenchman and African worked, it often worked very well, such as at the battle of La Horgne mentioned earlier in this chapter. However, when it didn't work, the result was disastrous for the African formation. For example, some North African soldiers during the Battle of Verdun in World War I were even shot by their own machine guns since:

A section of the *Tirailleurs* had lost its nerve; then a platoon, a company, and finally a whole battalion wavered and broke ... the 3<sup>rd</sup> *Zouaves* had, it seems, dissolved ... a captain, thrust into a position of command and frustrated at the

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<sup>125</sup> Clayton, *France, Soldiers and Africa*, 244-271.

<sup>126</sup> Mann, *Native Sons*, 66.

retreat, ordered guns to fire on his own troops: “a section of machine guns fired at the backs of the fleeing men, who fell like flies.”<sup>127</sup>

A post-war investigation determined that these soldiers had recently received new officers, destroying the bond of camaraderie that is needed to forge successful combat units at the lowest levels, and had been successfully shelled by artillery, as well as suffering in the bitter cold in exposed positions. They finally broke at the sight of advancing Germans.<sup>128</sup> It is difficult to believe that the captain would have ordered his weapons to fire at his “own troops” of white Frenchmen – actual French citizens. The fact that these soldiers, who were often deemed very capable soldiers, started panicking after being fed into the line with little thought given to unit cohesion, and nothing in the way of prepared positions, seemed not to have been an issue.

The *Spahis* were first formed in the early 1830s in Algeria. The *Régiment de Spahis Tunisiens* was created in 1911-12, and the *Régiment de Spahis Marocains* was formed in 1914. Like the *Tirailleurs*, Algerian and Tunisian formations were a mixture of volunteer and conscripts, while all the Moroccan units were supposedly all volunteers. But unlike the European *Chasseurs* that were motorized by the 1940 campaign, the *Spahis* were still cavalry units. In terms of manpower, a two-regiment brigade contained eighty French officers and 2,200 other ranks, of which 930 were French (or approximately forty-five percent was French). By 1943-44 the *Spahis* had also traded in their horses, but unlike the *Chasseurs*, which was armed with open-topped tank destroyers and light tanks, the *Spahis* were organized for motorized reconnaissance roles. Reconnaissance required that all the troops rode in light tanks, armored cars, halftracks,

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<sup>127</sup> Laura Rice, “African Conscripts/European Conflicts: Race, Memory, and the Lessons of War.” *Cultural Critique*, no. 45 (Spring 2000): 136-137.

<sup>128</sup> Echenberg, *Colonial Conscripts*, 36.

trucks, and jeeps, which were all manufactured in the United States.<sup>129</sup> Since these new formations, found in all the FEC divisions, required a large number of specialized duties, the number of indigenous soldiers fell dramatically. For example, each cavalry formation, *Chasseurs* or *Spahis*, contained thirty-three French and one indigenous officer and approximately 120 French and four indigenous senior NCOs in the 1943-44 regiments (that had the manpower of a standard United States, French, or German battalion). The real difference was found in the number of junior NCOs and soldiers, with the *Spahis* having 813 European and 127 indigenous versus 583 European and 143 indigenous in the *Chasseurs*.<sup>130</sup> It would have been logical to think that the *Spahis* would have more indigenous soldiers, since it was an African unit, but since this unit was highly motorized, there were more Europeans.

The last major indigenous combat formation from the *Armée d'Afrique* used in the Italian battles was comprised of Berbers from Morocco. Initially formed in 1908, this all-volunteer formation – since it was from Morocco – was called a *Goums*, and when sent to Italy they were the equivalent of one infantry division.<sup>131</sup> They were originally created to provide French formations operating in Morocco with patrolling and reconnaissance assistance, maintaining order in regions that had been pacified, gathering intelligence, and providing a “stiffening” to other irregular units. They were so effective in performing security duties that the French army eventually succeeded in having them

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<sup>129</sup> The light tanks used were United States' M3s or M5s, often called “Stuarts” by the British. Armed with a thirty-seven millimeter anti-tank gun, along with numerous machine-guns, M3s or M5s were quick on the battlefield but could easily be damaged by even the smallest enemy gun.

<sup>130</sup> Clayton, *France, Soldiers and Africa*, 271-281.

<sup>131</sup> Again, the word “volunteer” should be read for what it most likely represents: some true volunteers and others who were pressured to volunteer.

form auxiliary units that could be used outside of Morocco. Their use of mules, which formed a support section in each *Goum*, allowed these men to succeed in Italy where the truck-bound United States army could not. The German military, when they sent inspectors to Vichy North Africa and when facing *Goums* in Italy, placed little value in these forces. A *Goum*, the equivalent of a standard company, had approximately 120 infantry, fifty cavalymen, the above mentioned mule section, and a small heavy weapon section (machine-guns and mortars). By 1943-44 a *Tabor*, which was the equivalent of a battalion, contained a group of three *Goums* and one heavy weapon *Goum*. Total manpower in a *Tabor* was slightly over 1,500, and the majority was comprised of indigenous soldiers. Three *Groupements de Tabors Marocains*, the equivalent of a standard regiment, eventually saw combat in Italy.<sup>132</sup> In effect, these three *Groupements* gave Juin the equivalent of another infantry division.

The major combat units of *La Coloniale* were the *Colonial Blanche* (white Europeans) and the *Tirailleurs Sénégalais* (a generic term given to all units recruited from France's West African colonies).<sup>133</sup> The *Colonial Blanche* did not provide any large combat formations in Italy, except to provide officers and NCOs for the *Tirailleurs Sénégalais*.

The *Tirailleurs Sénégalais* was created in 1857. Although at its creation it was hoped that this would be an all-volunteer force, as Mann illustrated, many of the original soldiers were previous slaves or were provided to the French by village chiefs who often

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<sup>132</sup> Clayton, *France, Soldiers and Africa*, 281-305.

<sup>133</sup> This by itself illustrates the idea of race in France's colonial system, i.e. that French colonial administrators could not see – or did not care to see – any differences in culture or peoples in all of West Africa.

had their own agenda – and most likely some were under pressure by the local French government official.<sup>134</sup> Conscription, since there were not enough volunteers to generate all the units that France needed, was instituted right before World War I and was continued until the end of World War II.

Morocco, as stated earlier, did not allow for a formalized conscription system of its indigenous people. Frenchmen, as well as those white settlers in Africa, were required to accept conscription since that was what was necessary to defend metropolitan France and the colonies from French enemies.<sup>135</sup> The remainder of North Africa and those lands defended by *La Coloniale* did allow France to use indigenous conscripts according to the 1912 Conscription Law, which meant that all indigenous 18-year-olds were liable for three (or more) years of military service. The requirement for three years became even more important as a means to secure additional soldiers to man France's military formations when there was a reduction of *Armée Métropolitaine* conscription that started in 1905. Actual requirements by the French military from Africa, however, meant that only a small percentage of Africans were ever selected. Algeria, for example, only had five percent of its eligible men selected.<sup>136</sup> In many of the regions where *Sénégalais* soldiers were selected, only one or two percent of its eligible men were ever needed (at

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<sup>134</sup> Mann, *Native Sons*, 15-18.

<sup>135</sup> Excess European volunteers could easily find a military home in one of the *Armée d'Afrique* or *Coloniale* formations. While France might have had larger numbers of Frenchmen in the *Armée Métropolitaine*, the French government did not want that. Conscription ensured that a professional – read as volunteer – army would not do the bidding of any one element of society. The conservative elements of the French Republic wanted a professional army that could insure domestic order, which is what the left feared, and stability. Elizabeth Kier, “Culture and Military Doctrine: France between the Wars,” *International Security*. 19.4 (Spring 1995), 71.

<sup>136</sup> Clayton, *France, Soldiers and Africa*, 248.

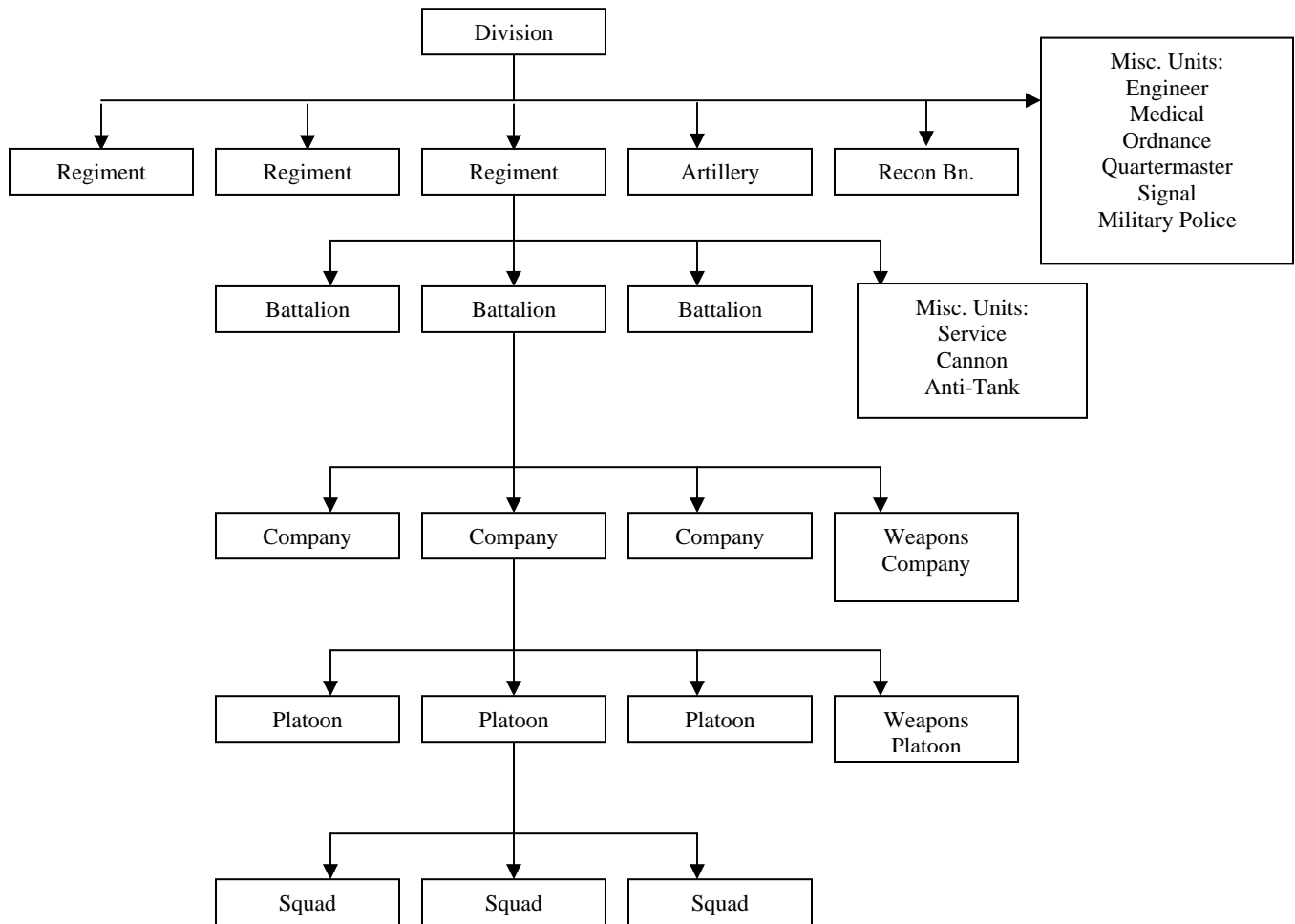
least before either of the World Wars).<sup>137</sup> Ideally, conscripts were only to be used after there were no additional volunteers available.

These were the soldiers, European and African, which France was sending against Germany's panzer, panzer grenadier, parachute and infantry divisions in Italy. There were a total of four French infantry divisions, and the equivalent of another division with the inclusion of the *Goums*. And aside from the *Goums*, the four infantry divisions had a standard organization (with some minor variations by Free French division that had been created by the British), which was very similar to a American infantry division since the United States was providing much of the equipment the French were using.

By the beginning of World War II, most countries had a very similar combat formation for infantry formations. Most often when countries are comparing military strengths, the units counted are divisions. A typical infantry division is displayed in Figure 1.

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<sup>137</sup> Clayton, *France, Soldiers and Africa*, 337.



**Figure 1 Typical Divisional Organization In World War II**

At the lowest level was the rifle squad, which could contain from eight to twenty soldiers (depending upon the nation), but in the French/American organization it contained twelve men. The next level was the rifle platoon, which usually contained three rifle squads and a small headquarters unit, and contained approximately forty-two soldiers in the French/American organization (some minor variations were found here). The rifle company was comprised of three rifle platoons and a heavy-weapon platoon that contained a few mortars (normally fifty to sixty millimeters in diameter) and machine-guns, along with a headquarters unit. Total manpower would be nearly 200 soldiers. The next formation was the rifle battalion that had three rifle companies, one heavy-weapon company (similar to the previous heavy-weapon platoon but with more of the “heavy” weapons), and a headquarters formation. Total manpower was slightly more than 900 men; and for this paper, the focus will be on the battalion and the units below it, down to the squad level where most of the colonial soldiers were located. Three rifle battalions comprised a regiment, for the United States, France, and Germany, but a brigade for the British. The use of the term regiment or brigade, however, does not mean that they are interchangeable; they are not equal in firepower or capability.

For example, the British used the brigade formation as a holding unit for three rifle battalions; Germany and France used regiments as combat formations. A British rifle brigade added a small anti-tank unit in the 1940 campaign to the firepower of its three battalions, not counting a forty-man defense platoon. A German rifle regiment supported its three battalions with a howitzer company (six seventy-five millimeter and two 150 millimeter infantry guns), an AT company (twelve anti-tank guns), as well as a hefty pioneer (engineer) platoon. The French, who placed great value upon the need to



know where the enemy was and what they were capable of doing, decided to have a reconnaissance battalion, *Chasseurs* and *Spahis*, support each division in Italy instead of a reconnaissance troop (equal to a company) found in an American infantry division.<sup>138</sup> Therefore, divisions could range in size from six to eight thousand men for a standard for Soviet rifle division, which followed the same basic structure as outlined above but with fewer men at each level (and therefore less capabilities), to the 15,000 men in a United States division or 16,000 (plus) men in the French rifle divisions – up to 18,000 men in a British division.<sup>139</sup> A division is a division, but they were not all equal, and as much as leadership had a role in their ability, what doctrine were they using, the ability and number of men found at the lowest levels, squad and platoon levels, often determined the outcomes of battles.

The most unusual and diverse of the French divisions, aside from the *Goums*, was the *1<sup>re</sup> Division de Marche d'Infanterie* (D.M.I. or 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division), which was previously the *1<sup>re</sup> Division Française Libre* (D.F.L. or 1<sup>st</sup> Free French Division).<sup>140</sup> It had its origins as a *Coloniale* unit, in which units were often *mixte* (integrated), a

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<sup>138</sup> The French also stated that their divisions would need four Quartermaster truck companies instead of one (they could not count on the support of truck companies provided at the corps or army level), which was standard in an American division, as well as one forty millimeter anti-aircraft battalion, which was not standard in a American division, since they could also not count on the support from a corps or army. Marcel Vigneras, *United States Army in World War II, Special Studies: Rearming the French* (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, United States Army, 1986), 70.

<sup>139</sup> The three rifle regiments of a division were supported by various, not all of which were combat, formations. These included: an artillery regiment, engineer battalion, a medical battalion, a quartermaster company, signal company, police platoon, chaplains, and even a band for some countries.

<sup>140</sup> During the research for this paper, I have also seen D.M.I. used to represent *division d'infanterie motorisée* (motorized infantry division). While it was a motorized unit when fighting for the British, it had to be in order to be successful in the desert, since it was going to be armed by the United States after the African campaign had ended; it became a standard French (American) infantry division.

combination of *blanche* (white) and *Sénégalais* battalions. Since it had fought with the British 8<sup>th</sup> Army, it used – and retained until the end of the war – the brigade designation instead of the regiment. The 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade was a composite unit: the 13<sup>e</sup> *Légion Etrangère* demi-brigade, a confusing term for two battalions of *Légions* and a battalion of infantry recruited in Algeria. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade contained three battalions of *Tirailleurs Sénégalais*, who had been recruited in French West Africa. The 4<sup>th</sup> Brigade had two *Coloniale* battalions that had been recruited in Djibouti, then French Somaliland, and one battalion of infantry made up of a French marine unit from the Pacific. Its reconnaissance unit, which was a battalion instead of the standard American troop (or company), was also a marine unit.<sup>141</sup> This unit was the last to arrive in Italy, April 1944, although it had been ready in Africa since February. Its delayed entrance can be attributed to the fact that General Juin, as mentioned earlier, had served under the Vichy government and the officers of the 1<sup>st</sup> Division did not want to be included as part of Juin's FEC.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> Clayton, 144. Lieutenant-Colonel Georges Boule, *Le Corps Expéditionnaire Français En Italie, 1943-1944, La Campagne De Printemps* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1971), 35.

<sup>142</sup> The 1<sup>st</sup> D.M.I. retained the brigade organization for more than just historical purposes. Its commanders wanted the French people to know that this division was the true *Française Libre*, and that they were not like the *Armée d'Afrique* units that had served under Vichy France. Parts of the division had crossed the Sahara and fought the Italians for two years after the defeat of France in 1940. Edward L. Bimberg, *Tricolor Over the Sahara: The Desert Battles of the Free French, 1940-1942* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2002). Other units had helped invade and secure Syria from the Vichy French in 1941, defended the position at Bir Hakeim from German and Italian armored units until they had to withdraw or surrender (1942), and defend part of the line during the Alamein battles in October/November 1942. The animosity of these men toward the *Armée d'Afrique* divisions can be best exemplified by their unwillingness to participate in the victory march after the Allied victory in North Africa unless it was as part of the British 8<sup>th</sup> Army, not as a member of the French XIX Corps – a unit that eventually numbered 40,000 men and had casualties numbering nearly 10,000 men! If the 1<sup>st</sup> D.M.I. had been forced to become a member of the new French army in North Africa right after the Allied victory, exchanging most their British weapons for

The *4<sup>e</sup> Division de Montagne Marocaine* (D.M.M. or 4<sup>th</sup> Moroccan Mountain Division) had three regiments (1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>) of Moroccan *Tirailleurs*. The reconnaissance battalion was also from Morocco, *Spahis* in this instance. The division eventually reached Italy in February 1944.<sup>143</sup>

The *2<sup>e</sup> Division d'Infanterie Marocaine* (D.I.M. or 2<sup>nd</sup> Moroccan Infantry Division), like the 4<sup>th</sup> Moroccan, also contained three regiments (4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>) of Moroccan *Tirailleurs*. Its reconnaissance unit was a Moroccan *Spahis* regiment, which in this instance was the equivalent of a battalion. The division arrived in Italy during November 1943.<sup>144</sup>

The final division in the FEC was the *3<sup>e</sup> Division d'Infanterie Algérienne* (D.I.A. or 3<sup>rd</sup> Algerian Infantry Division). It was composed of two regiments of Algerian *Tirailleurs* and one regiment of Tunisian *Tirailleurs*. The reconnaissance unit was regiment of Algerian *Spahis*, also the size of a battalion. It also arrived in November 1943.<sup>145</sup>

The last major combat unit was the three *Groupe de Tabors Marocains* – 1<sup>st</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, and 4<sup>th</sup>. Each *Groupe* was the equivalent of a French/American regiment. While not as powerful as the standard *Tirailleur* regiment, since they did not have a regimental cannon company (six 105 millimeter cannons), they were very capable light infantry who often

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American ones, they would have ready much sooner. Ironically, those units that had fought with the French XIX Corps in Tunisia became the first divisions to fight the Germans in Italy.

<sup>143</sup> Clayton, 144. Boule, *La Campagne De Printemps*, 30.

<sup>144</sup> Clayton, 144. Lieutenant-Colonel Georges Boule, *Le Corps Expéditionnaire Français En Italie, 1943-1944, La Campagne D'Hiver* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1971), 30.

<sup>145</sup> Clayton, 144. Boule, *La Campagne D'Hiver*, 71.

preferred to use the knife rather than the rifle. The 3<sup>e</sup> and 4<sup>e</sup> *Groupement* arrived during December 1943 and the 1<sup>er</sup> *Groupe* in February 1944.<sup>146</sup>

General Juin was cocksure about the abilities of his men, especially considering the terrain in which they would be fighting. His corps was an infantry heavy formation, but his soldiers could call upon great amounts of firepower since the divisions had the standard American artillery component of thirty-six 105 millimeter and twelve 150 millimeter artillery howitzers. However, that firepower could not always be used in the hills and mountains of Italy. It was up to the men, and their will to get at the enemy that would eventually redeem the French military in World War II. As one historian found, “the Algerian Division’s gaining of Monte Belvedere and Monte Abate is an example of a battle won by sheer strength of will as much as by weapons and tactical skill.”<sup>147</sup> That “sheer strength of will” could not, however, alleviate the large blood debt that France demanded from its colonies.

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<sup>146</sup> Clayton, 144. Boule, *La Campagne De Printemps*, 38.

<sup>147</sup> Ian Gooderson, *Cassino* (London: Brassey’s, 2003), 65.

## CHAPTER THREE: ITALY AND THE FRENCH EXPEDITIONARY CORPS

From the moment that the Allies landed in Italy, they faced a determined and capable enemy. Furthermore, they were confronted by difficult terrain (mountains divided by chasms and gorges), problems with transportation (bad and damaged roads, or none at all), and terrible weather (rain, snow, sudden floods, and fog). Italy “was an infantryman’s battle, in which the quality of leadership among junior officers and NCOs was decisive, and it was this, perhaps more than any other factor, that secured the eventual French success.”<sup>148</sup> The question then becomes: was it French leadership (and the institution of a new doctrine?), the composition of the soldiers, or a combination of all these factors that made French soldiers so successful in Italy?

Major Claude R. Hinson, who served in an American tank battalion supporting the 3<sup>rd</sup> D.I.A., found that, in this instance, the white, “non-commissioned officers, as well as the commissioned, were determined, aggressive and most courageous.”<sup>149</sup> These were the qualities that brought the French battlefield success in Italy, as they had the 3<sup>rd</sup> *Spahis* Brigade at La Horgne. It was up to the officers of the FEC to ensure that the men were motivated, to make them believe that they could still win the battle with their fellow

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<sup>148</sup> Gooderson, *Cassino*, 46.

<sup>149</sup> Claude R. Hinson, *755th Tank Battalion supporting the 3d Algerian Infantry Division of the French Expeditionary Corps during the advance on Rome, 11 - 20 May 1944 (Rome - Arno campaign)/ personal experience of a tank battalion operations officer* (Fort Benning, Georgia: General Subjects Section, Academic Department, the Infantry School, 1948-1949?), 9.

soldiers falling around them.<sup>150</sup> An examination of officer casualties in Italy does seem to suggest that divisions were following a different doctrine than the 1940 methodical battle, that French losses in Italy were going to be more similar to the 3<sup>rd</sup> *Spahis* Brigade losses rather than the losses of the 55<sup>th</sup> Division at Sedan.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> D.I.M., in twenty-one days of combat during the last days of 1943, incurred 923 casualties: 211 dead (nineteen officers); 656 wounded (forty-two officers); fifty-six missing (one officer) – summarized in Table 1. Officers were nearly seven percent of the casualties, but this number is only half the equation.<sup>151</sup> At the end of

**Table 1 French Divisional Casualties During Specific Battles In Italy, 1943-44**

Division:	Dead:	Wounded:	Missing:	Total Casualties:
2 <sup>nd</sup> D.I.M (7/43)	211 (19)	656 (42)	56 (1)	923 (62)
2 <sup>nd</sup> D.I.M (1/44)	578 (19)	2,329 (29)	114 (0)	3,021 (48)
3 <sup>rd</sup> D.I.A (2/44)	264 (22)	1,280 (37)	547 (5)	2,091 (64)
1 <sup>st</sup> D.M.I. (5-6/44)	673 (49)	2,066 (117)	- (-)	2,066 (166)

(Note: Officer casualties are in parentheses)

chapter three there was a basic description of a division given, which normally contained three rifle regiments, an artillery regiment, and a few battalions of troops such as engineers, medical, or reconnaissance. For a regiment of North African *Tirailleurs*, the total number of officers was ninety-two under ideal – when all officers are present – conditions; and it was at the regimental level that most of the casualties of a division were

<sup>150</sup> The importance of a unit carrying out its mission regardless of casualties is called unit cohesion. It was imparted by the commander of a unit to the soldiers that fought for him. For example, American General Terry Allen, commander of the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division in African and Sicily and the 104<sup>th</sup> Division in Europe, later thanked his men for following four objective of their training: discipline, training, physical fitness, and belief in their unit. Allen wrote, “In this last item particularly, our division has been most outstanding as we all feel completely assured that we are second to none as an American combat unit.” Peter R. Mansoor, *GI Offensive in Europe: The Triumph of American Infantry Division, 1941-1945* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1999), 80.

<sup>151</sup> Nineteen officers killed, forty-two wounded, and one missing equals sixty-two total officers casualties. Sixty-two divided by 923 equals the nearly seven percent. Boule, *La Campagne D’Hiver*, 65.

taken. Multiplying ninety-two by three, the number of regiments within a division, and using the sixty-two officers who were casualties in the 2<sup>nd</sup> D.I.M. in 1943, then slightly more than twenty-two percent of the officers within the regiments became casualties.<sup>152</sup> The casualty toll for this same division in January 1944 was 3,021 men: 578 dead (nineteen officers); 2,329 wounded (twenty-nine officers); 114 missing (Table 1). Officer losses for the total amount of men was not even two percent, but using the same factors to find officer losses, forty-eight officers killed or wounded out of a total of 276 officers in the three regiments, losses among officers now amounted to over seventeen percent.<sup>153</sup> The 3<sup>rd</sup> D.I.A., in ten days of combat during February 1944, took 2,091 casualties: 264 dead (twenty-two officers); 1280 wounded (thirty-seven officers); 547 missing (five officers), and officers were slightly more than three percent of the total losses (Table 1).<sup>154</sup> Among officers the numbers were over twenty-three percent. The 1<sup>st</sup> D.M.I., from 11 May to 20 June 1944, lost 2066 men: 673 dead (forty-nine officers), 2066 wounded (117 officers), and officer losses were over eight percent (Table 1).<sup>155</sup> The losses among officers, though, was staggering since that number was over sixty percent! Obviously officers were no longer willing to remain in the rear, hoping that the battles were following their plans. One example illustrates this point succinctly:

The force was under the command of General Monsabert, the commander of 3 Algerian Division, and, given Sevez's disappointing progress, he would have been quite justified in holding it back throughout the 12<sup>th</sup>. But he of all people was fully aware of just how desperate Juin was for some sort of early success ...

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<sup>152</sup> Sixty-two divided by 276 equals slightly more than twenty-two percent. Paul Gaujac, *Le Corps Expéditionnaire Français En Italie, 1943-1944* (Paris: Histoire and Collections, 2004), 33.

<sup>153</sup> Boule, *La Campagne D'Hiver*, 112.

<sup>154</sup> Boule, *La Campagne D'Hiver*, 128.

<sup>155</sup> Lieutenant-Colonel Georges Boule, *Le Corps Expéditionnaire Français En Italie, 1943-1944, La Campagne D'Été* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1971), 189.

he decided to commit his task for in a full-scale attack. Instead of waiting for Castelforte to fall off the vine, he resolved to pluck it. ... But the fighting has been dour, and at moments of crisis only the remarkable leadership of certain officers had kept the attack going – men such as Capitaine Louisot, who lost patience when one group of tanks and infantry hung back in the face of a well-placed anti-tank gun. ‘Louisot went to walk ahead of the tanks. He went to advance unprotected against that 88mm gun.’<sup>156</sup>

The question then becomes what plan were they following?

General Juin issued many battle plans for the eight months that his FEC fought in Italy, beginning in December 1943. The lessons that he shared with his unit commanders after the winter battles were simple:

In order to allow the attacker to exploit, he should not be restrained. He should not be tied to plans or to rigid schedules. Nor to the objective that he cannot exceed without order, nor the subordination of an advance to another advance under the pretext that it depends on the principal effort. In war all efforts contribute to the success of a unit, which will bring success to another.

This manner of attacking implies decentralization in order to make it possible for the commander, who sees and feels, to exploit ...

The commanders of regiments or tactical groupings must have, within the framework of their mission, a broad initiative ...<sup>157</sup>

While these thoughts were not replicas of the German approach to World War II warfare, they were the antithesis of the *la bataille conduite*. No longer following a rigid timetable, an attack can proceed past a stated objective and targets of opportunities taken if the possibility exists for success. And if the main attack falters, success anywhere on the

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<sup>156</sup> Ellis, *Cassino*, 346.

<sup>157</sup> (Pour permettre aux exécutants d’exploiter, il ne faut pas les brider. Il ne faut pas les lier à des plans ou à des horaires rigides. Pas d’objectif qu’on ne peut dépasser sans ordre, pas de subordination d’une avance à une autre même sous prétexte qu’elle dépend de l’effort principal. A la guerre tous les efforts concourent et le succès d’une unité entraînera le succès d’une autre.) (Cette manière de procéder implique la décentralization afin de permettre au chef, qui voit et qui sent, d’exploiter.) (Les commandants de régiment ou de groupement tactique doivent avoir, dans le cadre de leur mission, une large initiative.) Boule, *La Campagne D’Hiver*, 154.



battlefield will be supported since the commander on the spot can make the decision to alter the plan, because he is at or near the front line and sees the attack progressing, knowing he has the tacit approval of his commander as well as General Juin. This is not a return to the “cult of the offensive,” a reference to the French approach to World War I (influenced by the French defeat in 1870-71), but an understanding that Sun Tzu was correct about war being an art, and not a science; one can train for war, but the intelligent commander understands that the “fog of war” prevents any plan from continuing until some changes are made that reflect the current battlefield realities.<sup>158</sup> Juin understood that the local commanders needed to “feel” the progression of the battle, requiring them to be at or near the front, to take advantage of opportunities that will quickly disappear if they are not there and ready to react. Furthermore, the willingness to take chances, such as those by General Monsabert at Castelforte, might also have been the need for Juin and his commanders to prove that *Afrique* officers were the equal of their metropolitan counterparts – as well as loyal to de Gaulle in wanting to give the French a victory. Regardless, the examination of leadership losses does suggest that Juin did not follow the methodical battle doctrine, but do these large losses among the officers also suggest that there was a return to “cult of the offensive” in Italy – sending his men against prepared German positions?

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<sup>158</sup> France entered World War I with Plan XVII, which was an almost spiritual belief in the power of the offensive, the *offensive à outrance*, as its standard operating procedure – or doctrine. This could be loosely translated as “offensive to the limit” or “all-out offensive.” Robert Doughty, *Pyrrhic Victory: French Strategy and Operations in the Great War* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005), 28-29.

The evidence seems to suggest that Juin did not, and like the German army in 1940, Juin was seeking a war of movement – *Bewegungskrieg*. Graham and Bidwell, in their classic study of the Italian campaign, found that:

Jun's plan in outline was to break through, capture the pass at Esperia on the run and advancing on as wide a front as possible and seize control of the second lateral, Highway No, 82; but it must be understood that though that was his *objective*, possession of a piece of useful ground was not his *object*: that was the vulnerable right-rear of the German Tenth Army. He intended to lever apart the Gustav Line and so free the 2<sup>nd</sup> Corps, the (FEC) and the Eighth Army to form a mass of manoeuvre for the break-out and the march on Rome. This was a bold operation concept, but it is perhaps understandable that both Alexander and Clark and their respective staffs looked at it rather doubtfully. Neither man possessed the strategical insight that distinguished Juin from "les bons chefs ordinaires", but they could at least see that it did not detract from the DIADEM plan ...<sup>159</sup>

John Ellis, one of England's leading military historians in the 1980s, found that in addition to the French attacks being, "shining example of the science of command ... (and) attacks consistently pressed home with the greatest panache," Juin's officers also understood how to defeat a German defensive position:

Admittedly the Germans rarely actually pushed Eighth Army units back but they almost always caused them to halt and methodically regroup for a renewed attack, during which time the Germans could also reorganize and fall back without undue interference to the next defensible line. But this was not the French style. Once they had fought off a counter-attack they pressed forward on the heels of the retreating Germans, often infiltrating round their flanks along seemingly impossible mountain tracks, and gave them no opportunity to halt and regroup. Various German sources testified to the remarkable abilities of the French and their success in keeping their adversaries continually on the hop.<sup>160</sup>

Ellis, Graham/Bidwell, and Major Hinson all find that French officers were operating in a very aggressive maner in 1944, that they were following the guidelines that Juin had established for the operations; and the losses among the white officers, found in French official histories of the campaign, do corroborate what these authors describe. This

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<sup>159</sup> Graham and Bidwell, *Tug of War*, 304.

<sup>160</sup> Ellis, *Cassino*, 369.

chapter began by asking if part of the FEC's effectiveness was on account of French leadership, and the evidence suggests that it was. The FEC was not following a methodical plan, but a plan that evolved so officers could take advantage of German tactical procedures: after a German counterattack, the French were quick to follow and not allow the Germans to establish another strong, defensive position. And if the expectations of the troops required white Frenchmen to lead by example, and take casualties in the process, then Juin was willing to accept the losses for the military gain. He was, however, no less demanding on his riflemen, who in this case were primarily the indigenous soldiers from Africa.

Although the losses among the officers, described above, were high, it must be understood that the remainder of the losses, the greatest in sheer numbers of lives, were primarily among the combat troops recruited in Africa. Each French division ideally – again, before the unit engages the enemy – entered combat with over 16,000 men: the 1<sup>st</sup> D.M.I. with 17,250 men; the 2<sup>nd</sup> D.I.M. with 16,840; the 3<sup>rd</sup> D.I.A. also with 16,840 men, and the 4<sup>th</sup> D.M.M. with 20,450 men.<sup>161</sup> But of these 16,000+ men, only 3,250 were in the combat squads and platoons: three squads plus a small headquarters unit equals one platoon (forty men); three platoons equal one company (120 men); three companies equal one battalion (360 men); three battalions equal one regiment (1080 men), and three regiments equal one division (3240 men). In effect, there are 243 squads in a division, multiplied by twelve men, which equals 2916 men. The difference between 2916 and 3250 is on account of the inclusion of eight men in the headquarters unit at the platoon

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<sup>161</sup> The differences are attributed to the mountain division having mule companies attached to every unit, while the 1<sup>st</sup> did have a slightly different organization due to the influence of being organized by, and fighting for, the British for almost two years. Gaujac, *Le Corps Expeditionnaire Francais En Italie*, 31.

level – these men were usually right on the front line helping to direct the squads. The rest of men in the division – at least over 13,000 men – were there to support these men who were killing the enemy with the rifle and bayonet. And while technically every man within a division was a target of the enemy, historically it has been the men in the rifle squads who incur the majority of a division's casualties when combat was joined since they were called upon to move within eyesight of the enemy.

To illustrate this point about the vulnerability of the infantry, both the American and British armies severely underestimated the number of infantry casualties that their rifle battalions would suffer in Normandy during the summer of 1944 since both countries were basing their projections on the combat losses from North Africa, where losses among the service troops was higher since the desert does not shield troops located a few thousand meters behind the front line. The type of terrain in Normandy, the *bocage*, favored the defender since he was impossible to see until only a few meters separated the troops. That being the case:

Of the British forces in Normandy by August 1944, 56 per cent were classified as fighting troops rather than service elements ... Even within an infantry battalion, a man serving heavy weapons with the support company possessed a markedly greater chance of survival than his counterpart in a rifle company. It was here that the losses, the turnover of officers and men, became appalling, for more serious than the planners had allowed for, and eventually reached crisis proportion in Normandy for the American, German and British armies. Before D-Day, the American logisticians had expected 70.3 per cent of their casualties to be among infantry. Yet in the event, of 100,000 American casualties in June and July, 85 per cent were infantry, 63 per cent riflemen.<sup>162</sup>

The terrain in Italy was no better for the attacker than the *bocage* in Normandy since the defender could bring down artillery fire upon him, and the attacker could do little more than try to close and kill (or rout) the men who were spotting and directing the artillery,

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<sup>162</sup> Max Hastings, *Overlord: D-Day, June 6, 1944* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984), 210.

and artillery accounted for over half the battle casualties incurred by all the combatants during the World War II (and in some campaigns, such as Normandy, artillery inflicted over seventy percent of the Allied casualties).<sup>163</sup>

Therefore, in an attempt not to overstate the casualties in the rifle platoons, and to bring it more in line with the eighty-five percent casualty figure (used by Hastings) for the overall infantry figure listed above, an additional 1,450 soldiers, those men located in the heavy weapon platoons and heavy weapon company within each battalion (who are also in close proximity to enemy), are added to the 3,250 riflemen in the rifle platoons. The number of men at greatest risk per division is now approximately 4,700.<sup>164</sup>

Returning to the casualty list (Table 1), in twenty-one days of combat during December 1943 the 2<sup>nd</sup> D.I.M. took 923 casualties: 211 dead, 656 wounded, and fifty-six missing. If eighty-five percent of those casualties are in the rifle squads and heavy weapon units in the attacking battalions, or approximately 785 men, then nearly seventeen percent of the 4,700 have become casualties. The losses for this same division in January 1944 were 3,021 men: 578 dead, 2,329 wounded, and 114 missing. If eighty-five percent of those men are considered, equaling 2,568 men, now the percentage of those 4,700 men becoming casualties is nearly fifty-five percent. A realistic assumption would be that in slightly less than two months the 2<sup>nd</sup> D.I.M. has had over seventy percent of the men at the sharp end, those men in the rifle platoons and heavy weapon units, becoming casualties! The 3<sup>rd</sup> D.I.A., in ten days of combat during February 1944,

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<sup>163</sup> I.C.B. Dear, editor, *Oxford Companion to World War II* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 57. Hastings, *Overlord*, 188.

<sup>164</sup> Three heavy weapon platoons per battalion (twenty-nine men) among nine battalions adds an additional 783 men; and one heavy weapon company per battalion (seventy-four men in the machine-gun platoons) among nine battalions adds an additional 666 men. These men total approximately 1449.

took 2,091 casualties: 264 dead, 1280 wounded, and 547 missing. In this case almost thirty-eight percent of the 4,700 men became casualties. The 1<sup>st</sup> D.M.I., from 11 May to 20 June 1944, lost 2066 men: 673 dead and 2066 wounded. Like the 3<sup>rd</sup> D.I.A., losses were slightly more than thirty-seven percent. After a few battles, these divisions would be completely new units at the squad level.

To put these numbers into perspective, Paul Gaujac, *Le Corps Expeditionnaire Français En Italie, 1943-1944*, broke down the number of men who were killed (per 1,000 men) or who became casualties, not missing or captured: “Taking for a base of 1,000 men in one year, it is possible to compare the proportion of killed and those lost for health reasons in Italy and the 1<sup>st</sup> French Army.”<sup>165</sup> For the FEC, the number of killed per 1,000 was 150 men, and those men who were wounded added another 570 men. In a comparison with the United States 5<sup>th</sup> Army, which the FEC served under, the American army lost eighty-nine killed per 1000 with another 280 wounded.<sup>166</sup> In effect, a soldier in the FEC stood a sixty percent greater chance of being killed than if he was in the 5<sup>th</sup> Army, and more than twice as likely to be wounded.

Using the statistics provided by these two authors, Boulle and Gaujac, the FEC did suffer large casualties at the sharp end, among both officers and the infantry. A final question is could France have done more with its white manpower? As was stated earlier, the total manpower of the divisions at full-strength was nearly 17,000. The very nature of World War II combat guaranteed that there was a huge organization within and

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<sup>165</sup> (Prenant pour base 1000 hommes en un an, il est possible de comparer la proportion de tués et des pertes “santé” en Italie et à la 1<sup>re</sup> armée française.) The other categories included: wounded, sick, frostbite, and accidents. Gaujac, *Le Corps Expeditionnaire Français En Italie*, 31.

<sup>166</sup> Sickness added another 810 men to the American total – the FEC had 310 sick. These numbers do, in fact, exceed 1,000, but must be understood that some men might be sick and wounded at the same time.

behind each division making sure that needed supplies were available when required, that the soldiers were well taken care of when injured, or that they had a place to relax when not on the front line. These troops were normally called service troops, and they were just as important as the men at the front, but they were normally never called upon to fight. Prime Minister Churchill called these men the “tail” and he was in a constant battle with the military in trying to get the tail shortened and the number of “teeth” – combat troops – increased. The French military that existed in North Africa after November 1942 would surely echo Churchill’s remarks: de Gaulle knew that if France was to regain some of the military prestige it had lost in 1940, the surest way was on the battlefields of Italy (and eventually France), and not by creating service units. Therefore, the French military was in a constant struggle with the United States in trying to get the maximum number of divisions formed with the fewest number of the service troops. To the French officers making these decisions, either more combat or service troops, the reasoning was very simple: they did not have enough white Frenchmen since millions of men were still in Germany as prisoners of war from 1940, many tens of thousands were forced to work in Germany, or they were just still in occupied France. Regardless, they could not help de Gaulle and his new army. But why were white Frenchmen so important?

Mann explains this by illustrating what he refers to as the “cultural education,” a central part of their training, which made the men *Tirailleurs*. Mann writes:

Raw recruits arriving at Kati had no knowledge of military practices of rank and discipline ... Especially in the first decades of the twentieth century, hardly any conscripts spoke or understood French, and many spoke little or no Bamanankan, the lingua franca of the corps. Nothing came easily. Modern rifles were often new to them, but so were shoes, trucks, inoculations, clocks, and virtually every other aspect of French military culture.<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>167</sup> Mann, *Native Sons*, 163.

Now this description is for the *Sénégalais*, but most likely this could apply to the recruits from North Africa. These men could only learn so much in a training cycle, and the French military would most likely focus on training the men to be soldiers, rather than spending time on education. White Frenchmen had an advantage since they most likely had some education, it was assumed that they could at least read and write in French (an African recruit might be literate in Arabic, but that did not make him literate to the white Frenchmen), and were therefore given the positions within the army that required the use of education. But as Mann states, even if an African had an education, he still faced problems in a French military where most Africans were just considered illiterate, a prejudiced belief imbedded in the colonial ideology:

Conscripted as a medical student in 1942, Josphey Issoufou Conombo confronted a different set of problems: a mud bench where he had anticipated a bed with a mosquito net; soup in which worms swam; and NCOs shouting orders in a French that was far less correct than his own.<sup>168</sup>

This one example illustrates the complex issues of French colonialism: a medical student being used as a common foot soldier because he is black.

After the Allies invaded North Africa in November 1942, the *Armée d'Afrique* quickly swelled from 137,000 men, which the Germans had eventually allowed for North African defense, to over 315,000 men.<sup>169</sup> This is a large number of available men, but it was not enough when contrasted with French military ambitions. General Henri Giraud,

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<sup>168</sup> Mann, *Native Sons*, 163.

<sup>169</sup> The army quickly added 60,000 men who had been hiding in the mountains – a large number of them were *Goums*. Another 68,000 men were added, out of 109,000 men called upon, after the French army instituted its mobilization program for North Africa. French West Africa, *La Coloniale*, added an additional 50,000 men. Furthermore, an additional 20,000 men would be added once the units serving with the British Eighth Army were incorporated. Marcel Vigneras, *Rearming the French*, 17.



commander of the *Armée d’Afrique*, wanted an army of eight divisions from these 315,000 men, and not including the Free French division serving with the British. Eight divisions multiplied by 17,000 men, the average number of men in a division, only equals 136,000 men, which was far less than 315,000. The problem lies in what the military calls the divisional slice.

The divisional slice is comprised of the total number men within the division plus the number of troops involved in maintaining that division in the field, i.e. those men in the corps, army, army group, and communications zone troops. The normal divisional slice for an American division in Europe was 40,000 men: 15,000 in the division, 15,000 in the corps and army troops, and 10,000 communications zone troops. This is very complicated for a French division because not only must forty percent of the men inside the division be white, placed in positions of leadership as well as specialists in a variety of positions, but a large number of the men in the remaining slice – those additional 25,000 men (15,000 corps plus the 10,000 communications zone troops) – would also need to be white, and for that reason de Gaulle’s military command was constantly trying to lower the number of those service units that required so many white Frenchmen. Marcel Vigneras, in *Rearming the French*, therefore entitles on the sections of his book “*La Bataille des Services*.” It was a battle the French could not win since the number of white Frenchman (eventually numbering 250,000 men from all over the empire), men who were trusted to be leaders, cadres, technicians, and specialists, was finite.<sup>170</sup>

Multiplying the nine divisions Giraud wanted by the number of men needed in the divisional slice, then the number of men required is 360,000 men, and of this number

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<sup>170</sup> Vigneras, *Rearming the French*, 115.

60,000 men were required to be white Frenchmen.<sup>171</sup> The French military was constantly being reminded by Washington to create more service units since the United States only had enough service troops in the Mediterranean for the divisions it had shipped there, but France did not have the manpower to create large numbers of service units unless it had been willing to place more Africans in positions that were reserved for white Frenchmen, something the French military hesitated to do for a number of reasons, including the ramifications it would have for maintaining the racial hierarchies in the colonial system after the war. Eventually for Italy, the United States military permitted France to primarily just send combat troops.<sup>172</sup> Africans would therefore have to provide most of the manpower at the squad level in the FEC.

In a typical *Tirailleur* regiment in 1943-44, there was a total of ninety-two officers, 406 NCOs and 2,612 soldiers – total manpower is 3,110 men. Of that total manpower, sixty-nine percent was African. While white officers and NCOs were found at every level, the majority of the Africans were found at the battalion, seventy-four percent, and company level, seventy-nine percent.<sup>173</sup> For the mountain regiments of the 4<sup>th</sup> D.M.M., the total number of men in the regiment is 3,943. Overall, Africans made up seventy-seven percent of the regiment. The numbers for the battalion and company are

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<sup>171</sup> It must be remembered that these 250,000 white Frenchmen were not only needed in Giraud's nine divisions, but they were also required in the air force, navy, as well as men involved in internal security within the colonies.

<sup>172</sup> The number of men in the FEC fluctuated, but a reasonable number at peak strength is 110,000 men. Of those men, 80,000 were in the four divisions and the *Goum* groups. That only leaves 30,000 men in Italy for service work, but in this instance that 30,000 still included a few combat units (artillery and tank-destroy battalions). There were an additional 100,000 men in North Africa whose duty was to supply the FEC with manpower and take care of any other needs. That only leaves a little more than 25,000 men for the divisional slice.

<sup>173</sup> Gaujac, *Le Corps Expeditionnaire Français*, 33.

seventy-nine and eighty-two percent respectively. The *Goum* regiment, or *Groupe*, contained approximately 2,865 men, and of that total nearly seventy-eight percent were Moroccan.<sup>174</sup> At the squad level, Africans would provide over ninety percent of the manpower for all the units listed, *Tirailleur*, mountain, or *Goum*. These units just could not function without Africans.

Returning to the thesis question, why was the FEC so effective in Italy, a few historians, especially Ellis and Graham/Bidwell, found the FEC's contribution to the Allies invaluable; and as mentioned in the introduction, Graham/Bidwell even named a section of their book "France Wins the Diadem." The heavy losses suffered by the individual divisions (Table 1), indicate that the FEC was involved in very intense combat. Is there evidence, similar to Lunn's study of World War I, which could link these losses to a systematic indifference on the part of the FEC's leadership?

In his study, Clayton mentioned that French officers were required to lead by example if an attack was going to succeed, and from the statistics generated earlier in this chapter, white French officers did incur casualties. What did it mean if a unit lost white officers and NCOs? When Ellis was examining the French war diaries of the divisions involved, *Journaux de Marches et Opérations*, that loss is made very clear.<sup>175</sup> Ellis states that the divisional officers were all too ready to blame their black troops, and in this instance it was *11 Bataillon de Marche* (taken from a *Journaux de Marches et Opérations*):

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<sup>174</sup> Gaujac, *Le Corps Expeditionnaire Français*, 33.

<sup>175</sup> Ellis states that the "French War Diaries (*Journaux de Marches et Opérations*) offer a much more fruitful source than their British equivalents. In most of the cartons ... there are included numerous reports and combat narratives as well as memoranda to and from the units and formations." Ellis, *Cassino*, 517.

movements towards the rear as soon as the European cadres were hit or didn't handle a difficult situation with sufficient vigour. In the 6<sup>th</sup> Company, the incapacitation of the Captain and the longest-serving officer had a serious effect on the men's morale. The necessity for a strong leavening of European officers ... was confirmed once more.<sup>176</sup>

Furthermore (written by a colonel in the 1DMI – also in the *Journaux de Marches et Opérations*):

Black troops obviously do not represent the ideal solution and the fact that the officers and senior NCOs are always obliged to lead from the front, standing up, explains the severe losses suffered by these cadres.<sup>177</sup>

Ellis, in a footnote, goes to great lengths to make sure that the reader understands that such remarks were not peculiar to 1DMI, with its large contingent of Senegalese troops.

Ellis states, “though relations between native and Europeans in the Moroccan and Algerian Divisions were generally good, it would not do to idealize the situation.”<sup>178</sup>

Thus a report by the 2<sup>e</sup> Bureau of 2 DIM, from the *Journaux* at the end of the fourth battle of Cassino, noted:

We must never forget what experience has taught, that with the mediocre native troops now at our disposal, night attacks, even limited ones, exact a terrible price from our French cadres.<sup>179</sup>

It is very clear from these war diaries that some French officers thought very little of the African troops they were commanding. Africans it seemed, in the words of these French officers, would just suffice since they were “mediocre” troops, but that very dependence upon these African soldiers caused larger losses among the white Frenchmen leading them. Most likely some of these French officers resented the fact that the main reason

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<sup>176</sup> Ellis, *Cassino*, 365.

<sup>177</sup> Ellis, *Cassino*, 365.

<sup>178</sup> Ellis, *Cassino*, 365.

<sup>179</sup> The 2<sup>e</sup> Bureau is equal to the intelligence section in either a corps, division, or regiment – 1<sup>st</sup> is personnel, 2<sup>nd</sup> is intelligence, 3<sup>rd</sup> is operations, and 4<sup>th</sup> is administration/logistics. Ellis, *Cassino*, 365.

they were fighting Germans in Italy was on account of the Africans they were leading, even if these white officers were forced to “lead from the front, standing up.” In effect, these reports describe all that was wrong with the French colonial military system. From General de Rumigny wanting the Kabyles for security duty, General Mangin wanting as many *Senegalese* as Africa could send to France in World War I, and that over twenty percent of the of the French division in 1940 had their origins in Africa, there was a tradition of making a case for African soldiers in the French military, but when there were failures, such as the troops being routed at Verdun, the troops were at fault and not the system that put them in combat.

Earlier, this paper made use of some statistics generated by Gaujac to compare the casualties found among every 1,000 men. This was used to compare the FEC to the United States 5<sup>th</sup> Army. Gaujac, however, also did a comparison made between the FEC and the 1<sup>st</sup> French Army that fought in France and Germany. Gaujac found that among the 1,000 men who became casualties, 150 men killed in the FEC was twice that of the 1<sup>st</sup> Army (sixty-nine men killed), and the same was true for being wounded. The question is, what changed from the FEC to the 1<sup>st</sup> Army? The general at the top had changed, General Jean de Lattre de Tassigny replaced General Alphonse Juin, but had his ability to lead? Douglas Porch, in *Path to Victory*, stated, “France undoubtedly produced three of war’s best commanders in Alphonse Juin, Philippe Leclerc de Hautclocque, and Jean de Lattre de Tassigny.”<sup>180</sup> Of the divisions that fought in the FEC, all were in France as soon as they could be withdrawn from Italy, as well as the other *Afrique* divisions that

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<sup>180</sup> General Leclerc commanded the 2<sup>nd</sup> French Armored Division, which liberated Paris in August 1944. It had landed with the Western Allies in Normandy. Douglas Porch, *Path to Victory* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2004), 565.

had been organized and trained in North Africa. The largest single factor that therefore seems relevant in comparing the FEC and 1<sup>st</sup> Army was the “whitening” of the 1<sup>st</sup> Army as soon as metropolitan French manpower became available.<sup>181</sup> As de Tassigny commented on the “whitening” process in his history of the 1<sup>st</sup> Army:

It was no slight affair. With the D.F.L. (1<sup>st</sup> D.M.I.) this ‘whitening’ involved five infantry battalions from the Cameroon, French Equatorial Africa, and Djibouti, as well as numerous artillery, transport and medical elements, a total of over 6,000 men ... with the 9<sup>th</sup> D.I.C. it was greater still, since it was advisable that 9,200 Senegalese should be relieved and sent without delay to the Midi.<sup>182</sup>

The reasoning behind their replacement is:

Finally, the very nature of the land was against us. Accustomed to the rocky djebels of the Atlas mountains or to the peaks of the Abruzzi, our African soldiers felt lost in the dark forests, where they found their way with much difficulty and where death came treacherously when shells bursts in the tops of pine trees.<sup>183</sup>

It was materially necessary because our army needed to increase its strength and, to begin with, to maintain it by making good its losses, by replacing the black troops unsuited to the winter climate of the east of France and by relieving North Africa, which had reached the extreme limit of its capabilities.<sup>184</sup>

De Tassigny’s arguments are circumspect since he knew the troops he was commanding; he had served as a cavalry officer during the Moroccan Rif campaigns in the 1920s and was the commander of the Vichy forces in Tunisia in 1941 so he knew his African soldiers were capable. The statement about African troops being unsuited for the winter climate is quite absurd since France sent the equivalent of three divisions to fight in Italy during November and December of 1943. The one thing that did change from Italy to

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<sup>181</sup> This does not mean that all of the African soldiers were replaced. Thousand of African soldiers remained in the divisions until the war ended in Europe in May 1945.

<sup>182</sup> Marshal Jean de Lattre de Tassigny, *History of the French First Army* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1952), 177.

<sup>183</sup> Lattre de Tassigny, *History of the French First Army*, 167.

<sup>184</sup> Lattre de Tassigny, *History of the French First Army*, 171.

France was the composition of the two formations, and the composition was the number of Africans and Europeans after the initial Allied landings and the military had regained access to white Frenchmen. To further stress this point, de Tassigny writes in his conclusion that:

For the French alone the number of dead represents about 7.25 per 1000 of the total number engaged (295,000) and wounded 2.5 percent. Taking into consideration the results obtained and the battle conditions, these figures are quite light. They even remain clearly less than those which the statistics of losses since 1943, relating to breakthrough operations, show.<sup>185</sup>

De Tassigny clearly states that the losses of the French 1<sup>st</sup> Army were not equal to those of the FEC – “losses since 1943.” The United States stressed that what the French army needed was an increase in service troops, but no more combat troops. France did increase the number of service troops, but it also replaced many of the African soldiers with white Frenchmen. And when it did so, the losses it suffered lessened accordingly.

From the information provided by Ellis, taken from the *Journaux de Marches et Opérations*, a French colonial military mindset did exist in the French army during World War II. De Tassigny was using aspects of scientific racism for his history of the French 1<sup>st</sup> Army, but his selection of criteria is suspect since General Mangin found that African soldiers had the ability to live in harsher climates since they had a less developed nervous system (when compared to whites) – they could resist pain. De Tassigny states the opposite: African soldiers were not only unsuited to cooler climates, and Africa had reached the limit of its resources. These seem to only be excuses to remove African soldiers from having any further participation in France’s liberation. While the “mediocre native troops” – and mediocre only for the French military since these native troops had performed very well – had served their part in Italy, since France had no other

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<sup>185</sup> Lattre de Tassigny, *History of the French First Army*, 398.

choice for its divisions in Italy, in France they had another choice. White soldiers could be used to liberate France – “young Frenchmen [needed to] be given a taste of victory.”<sup>186</sup> As Myron Echenberg states, “Now, when the spoils of victory were about to be theirs, they were suddenly being told that their services were no longer required, and in a manner which, to a fighting soldier, must have seen greatly humiliating.”<sup>187</sup> These men were unceremoniously pulled out of the front-line, forced to give up their arms (and sometimes their uniforms) and given little, if any, recognition for all they had done for France. France could not have been player, even a minor one at that, at the end of the war without African soldiers.<sup>188</sup>

Using the statistics generated by Boulle, and adjusted for this study, Africans took huge losses in the battles for Italy. Gaujac shows the relationship between the United States 5<sup>th</sup> Army, the FEC, and the 1<sup>st</sup> French Army; the FEC took very large losses when compared to the United States 5<sup>th</sup> but the 1<sup>st</sup> French took far fewer than FEC. Therefore, the only logical conclusion to be reached is that French leadership in Italy was willing to use African soldiers aggressively, and accepted the losses that came from their aggressive tactics since they were Africans, not white Frenchmen, who were taking the losses.

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<sup>186</sup> Echenberg, “Morts Pour la France,” 374.

<sup>187</sup> Echenberg, “Morts Pour la France,” 374.

<sup>188</sup> Echenberg, “Morts Pour la France,” 363.



## CHAPTER FOUR: A FRENCH VICTORY?

The previous chapters have contained few descriptions about the actual battles that occurred in the nine months that the FEC was in Italy. While Cassino, Salerno, and Anzio are the battles that most historians remember, even if they just have a cursory knowledge of the Allied campaign in Italy, the battles at Belvedere, Castelforte, and Monte Faito should also be known but are generally just footnotes in most of the English language history books on the Italian campaign. Monte Faito, in particular, should be better known since its capture forced the Germans to completely abandon the Gustav Line, which then allowed the Allies to enter Rome just two days before the Western Allies invaded France at Normandy. Monte Faito was in some ways the German Sedan in Italy, but in this instance it was men, rather than the machines, that won the battle.<sup>189</sup>

When General Juin first entered Italy on 25 November 1943, his reception amounted to the crew at the airfield and his closest staff members who made the flight with him: “While waiting until a telephone call alerted the French mission at the U.S. 5<sup>th</sup> Army, General Juin patiently remained on the chilly aircraft.”<sup>190</sup> His exit from Italy on 21 July 1944 could not have been more different. British General Harold Alexander, commander of all forces in the Mediterranean, personally drove Juin to the airport: “General Alexander then steps toward his jeep, requesting the general (Juin) and his chief

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<sup>189</sup> Some historians, as well as some of the commanders in the Mediterranean, have argued that the withdrawal of French forces for the invasion of Southern France allowed Germany to reform a defensive line in Italy.

<sup>190</sup> (En attendant qu’un coup de telephone ait alerté la Mission française auprès de la V<sup>e</sup> Armée U.S., le général Juin reste frileusement – et patiemment aussi – dans l’avion.) Général Marcel Carpentier, *Les Forces Alliées en Italie: La campagne d’Italie* (Paris: Éditions Berger-Levrault, 1949), 53.

of staff (Carpentier) to sit there.”<sup>191</sup> In Juin’s hand were letters of praise and thanks from General Alexander and General Clark.<sup>192</sup> The FEC had proved much to the other Allies, particularly General Montgomery since he suggested that all the French military was good for was guarding airports.<sup>193</sup> But to achieve that success, the FEC paid a frightful cost in men – primarily African men – killed in action.

No existing historical account provides a complete breakdown of overall casualties, regarding white Frenchmen and Africans, so this thesis will have to interpolate.<sup>194</sup> Of the 3,250 men (see page 68) in the combat squads and platoons, those men who were closest to the enemy, only 405 of these men would be French officers or NCOs, which is only slightly more than twelve percent.<sup>195</sup> The remainder of the white Frenchmen would be found in all the specialist positions of the company. Regarding the additional 1,450 men in the heavy weapon platoons and companies, another 279 white Frenchmen were added, which is almost twenty percent.<sup>196</sup> Overall, approximately 684

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<sup>191</sup> (Le général Alexander fait alors avancer sa jeep, prie le général et son chef d’état-major d’y prendre place.) Carpentier, *Les Forces Alliées en Italie*, 240.

<sup>192</sup> Carpentier, *Les Forces Alliées en Italie*, 238-240.

<sup>193</sup> Both General Alexander and General Montgomery had served in France during 1940, as a corps commander and divisional commander respectively. They had witnessed firsthand the rout of the French division on their flanks as they retreated toward Dunkirk. Although both men had also fought in World War I, and understood the horrific casualties that France incurred and still kept fighting, it was the memory of 1940 that was foremost in their minds, which General Juin’s FEC had to compensate for.

<sup>194</sup> There are overall numbers for each country’s losses, for those of France and the individual French colonies, which historians have stated, but there has not been a breakdown between units, such as the losses of those units in Italy compared to those in France.

<sup>195</sup> This number is found by having one white French NCO per squad, of which there are 243 squads per division, and two white Frenchmen per platoon headquarter, a platoon leader and his second in command, and there are eighty-one per division. 243 plus 162 equals 405.

<sup>196</sup> There would be fifteen white Frenchmen in the heavy weapon platoons of the battalion, there are nine of them, so the total is 135 men. There were sixteen white Frenchmen per heavy weapon company, and there

men out of the 4,700 were white Frenchmen, which was fifteen percent. Returning to the casualty percentages described by Hastings, if eighty-five percent of the casualties within a division were in the rifle squads, and of those men eighty-five percent were African, overall over seventy-two percent of the divisions casualties in the rifle squads were among the Africans.<sup>197</sup> And of the men that become casualties throughout the rest of the division, the remaining fifteen percent, white Frenchmen would still be only a fraction since Africans averaged sixty percent of the total manpower within the divisions of the FEC.<sup>198</sup> Since African soldiers still occupied many of the positions that would be exposed to the enemy, those other positions within the regiment closest to the enemy but not on the front line (delivering supplies, removing wounded, etc.), it is assumed that they incurred over half of the remaining fifteen percent. While this figure is only an educated guess, if it is accurate then over eighty percent of the casualties taken by a division would be African soldiers, when at most they represented only sixty percent of a divisions total manpower.

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are nine battalions, so that total is 144 men. Combined, the overall total is 279 men. Again, these are the men closest to the enemy. These figures do omit the headquarter units for the heavy weapon platoons and companies. These men would be close to the enemy, but not directly firing upon the enemy with weapons, which is then reciprocated with enemy fire. These men were omitted when deriving the 1,450 and there is no reason to include them here.

<sup>197</sup> Eighty-five percent multiplied by eighty-five percent equals seventy-two percent.

<sup>198</sup> The 1<sup>st</sup> D.M.I. actually had the highest percentage of Europeans of any unit at fifty-seven percent. The primary reason behind this large number was the two battalions from the Foreign Legion and the one battalion of naval marines. The 2<sup>nd</sup> D.I.M. and 3<sup>rd</sup> D.I.A. each had approximately forty-one percent. The 4<sup>th</sup> D.M.M. had the lowest numbers of Europeans at thirty-three percent. Being organized as a mountain division, it required a larger number of Africans (and the mules they handled) to transport all the matériel needed by modern unit to fight an enemy without easy access to re-supply. The remainder of the corps was only thirty-five percent European. Overall, the FEC was sixty percent African. Gaujac, *Le Corps Expeditionnaire Français En Italie*, 31.

Between November 1943 and August 1944, over 32,500 men of the FEC became casualties (Table 2). These casualties amount to almost two complete divisions worth of

**Table 2 Casualties Of The FEC In Italy Compared To 1940**

Campaign:	Dead:	Wounded:	Missing:	Total Casualties:
FEC in Italy	6,500	24,000	2,000	32,500
1940	90-100,000	210,000	All POWs	N.A.
FEC (adjusted)	130,000	480,000	N.A.	N.A.

men – two divisions entered the campaign with 16,840 men. If the killed and missing are combined, a total of 8,500 men, and then compared to the 4,700 men that do most of the dying in any division, again there are two divisions worth of the manpower that France needed to replace.<sup>199</sup> To put these losses into perspective, total French casualties for the six-week 1940 campaign are between 90-100,000 men killed and approximately 210,000 wounded, but out of a total of 2,200,000 men – organized into over one hundred divisions – defending the north of France facing Germany. The FEC, at its greatest strength in manpower, amounted to approximately 110,000 men, or 1/20<sup>th</sup> of the total manpower of the 1940 army. By multiplying the actual casualties in Italy by twenty, this paper arrives at the adjusted casualty figures that are shown in Table 2 - line 3. To analyze the casualties another way, Table 3 compares the two campaigns as a simple percentage.

**Table 3 French Casualties As A Percentage Of Total Men Involved**

Campaign:	Dead:	Percentage:	Wounded:	Percentage:
FEC in Italy (110,000)	6,500	5.9 %	24,000	21.8%
1940 (2,200,000)	90-100,000	4.5 %	210,000	9.5%

Note: As the percentage of dead in 1940, 100,000 is used. If the number was closer to 90,000, then the percentage drops to 4.1 %.

Furthermore, not all of the FEC divisions in the campaign were there for ten months, so for many months the strength of the FEC was approximately 60,000 men. Initially only two divisions were in battle during November, along with two regiments of *Goums* that

<sup>199</sup> Gaujac, *Le Corps Expeditionnaire Français*, 31.

reached the front in December. A third division entered Italy in February, as well as the third Goum regiment, and the fourth division arrived in April. The 2<sup>nd</sup> D.I.M. and 3<sup>rd</sup> D.I.A., as would be expected since they were engaged the longest, received the largest share of the casualties since they were in Italy the longest. One of the *Goum* regiments, the 4<sup>th</sup>, suffered so heavily, over fifty percent casualties, it was sent back to Morocco to recover.<sup>200</sup> The preceding paragraph figures that Africans took over eighty percent of the casualties in Italy, while this paragraph illustrates that the fighting in Italy was very intense with a large percentage of casualties for the divisions in comparison to 1940. But no matter how willingly General Juin might accept manpower losses, he knew that he could not just throw his men at the enemy and expect to win the battles. He had to find another way.

As Ellis and Graham/Bidwell both stated, the biggest impact of the FEC was its reliance upon speed, surprise, and never giving the Germans a chance to regroup and counterattack, which was what the German defensive doctrine was built upon:

The essential point is to travel as fast as possible. ... Once the breakthrough phase is completed ... it will be necessary ... to be as aggressive as possible, to tie down only the minimum of forces to guard the most important points, and not ... to hold on to captured positions, but to manoeuvre within the defined zone of action and seek out the enemy and attack him, making further resistance pointless in the shortest possible time.<sup>201</sup>

Moving, however, does not mean that that the French just avoided the German defensive positions. Some positions had to be taken, and it was those battles that cost the FEC over 30,000 casualties.

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<sup>200</sup> Clayton, *France, Soldiers and Africa*, 299.

<sup>201</sup> Ellis, *Cassino*, 338.

To return to the theme of “other” histories introduced on the introduction, both forgotten or analyzed improperly, Douglas Porch, *Path to Victory*, provides the perfect example of this. Porch, like this thesis, also used the numbers provided by Boule in his chapter on the French, but then confused the German prisoners taken by the FEC – over 8,000 captured by the French – as French prisoners and the actual number of French captured and missing as just the FEC missing.<sup>202</sup> In effect Porch added 8,000 more casualties to the FEC, which were already high.<sup>203</sup> To further confuse any study of the FEC in Italy, at least an English language examination, Clayton uses the numbers of 587 European and 1307 indigenous, a total of 1,894, for the casualty figures for the 3<sup>rd</sup> D.I.A. in Italy.<sup>204</sup> But what do these numbers mean? Are these numbers killed and missing, those being a complete loss to the division, or is it some other combination of numbers? Total numbers from Boule, for the 3<sup>rd</sup> D.I.A., are 1,068 killed, 4,529 wounded, and 679 missing for a total of 6,276. Adding the number of killed and missing from Boule, the number is 1,747. This is close to Clayton’s number, but do they represent the same number? If Clayton does not explain what these numbers represent, they mean nothing. Likewise, Boule’s numbers are more exact, but they only tell a part of the history. Boule tells the reader a history of the Italian campaign, but it is a French history, not a history of the African involvement in Italy on behalf of France. The losses Boule states are more than just French losses because they are mostly African losses. In effect, Boule was marginalizing the role of African soldiers in Italy. Much like the comments made by French officers in the *Journaux de Marches et Opérations*, when there were failures on

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<sup>202</sup> Porch, *Path to Victory*, 591. Boule, 348.

<sup>203</sup> Eight thousand captured would be the equivalent of one complete division’s infantry.

<sup>204</sup> Clayton’s footnote does nothing to clarify this. Clayton, *France, Soldiers and Africa*, 148.

the battlefield – or excessive officer losses – it was on account of the soldiers being African, but success, such as the taking of Castelforte by *Capitaine* Louisot, were on account of the excellent leadership provided by white Frenchmen. Mark Twain’s comment on statistics, “There are three kinds of lies: lies, damned lies, and statistics,” seem particularly relevant in trying to determine the supreme effort put forth by Africans of the FEC in Italy.<sup>205</sup>

Taking statistics one step further, Ellis states that the numbers of French casualties during 11 May to 5 June 1944, the beginning of Operation Diadem to the capture of Rome, are 1,751 killed, 7,912 wounded, and 972 missing; these numbers are consistent in all the studies. When divided by the number of combat battalions available to the French, Ellis uses forty-five, which is accurate if using the *Goum* equivalent battalions (but ignoring the French tank and tank-destroyer battalions that did incur combat losses), the percentage of casualties among the French combat companies is slightly over thirty-two percent. Interestingly, the United States numbers are 20,024 total casualties (which is actually 1,000 less than it should be – Ellis must have added wrong) among sixty-six battalions (again, no additions for the American tank and tank-destroyer battalions), for a casualty rate of over forty-one percent. There are two problems with this number. First, does Ellis consider that the United States kept feeding replacements into the combat divisions as the battle continued? This practice allowed the United States to keep fighting with its very limited amount of combat divisions formed during the war. The other major combatants in the war, Great Britain (and its empire troops), Germany, and the Soviet Union, pulled divisions out of the front line to absorb replacements. If

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<sup>205</sup> Twain, who is best known for this quote, attributes it to Benjamin Disraeli, who may have gotten it from Lord Leonard Henry Courtney. Regardless of whom it was, it often was appropriate for this study.

not, then the two are not equal comparisons. In the study by Ernest Fisher, *Cassino to the Alps* (1977), which is part of the United States Army Green Series, Fisher states that:

Yet on 4 June, thanks to a well-functioning replacement system, the Fifth Army's strength was at a peak that it had not reached before, nor would again – an effective strength of 369,356, which included 231,306 Americans, 95,142 French (mostly Algerians and Moroccans), and 42,908 British.<sup>206</sup>

This peak, which Boule also quotes, only counts those men who are listed as “effective,” meaning combat ready or able to do their job. And this peak was reached after the United States had lost over 21,000 men. Therefore, the American percentage – according to Ellis – can not be as high as the French, which would then only be bested by Polish percentage loss of forty-two.<sup>207</sup> Second, both Boule and Ellis were using inflated Fifth Army casualties – the 21,024 – when generating some of their tables and charts. From the Fisher study, the number is closer to 18,000 men: 3,145 killed, 13,704 wounded, and 1,082 missing; Boule and Ellis are using numbers of 3,667 killed, 16,153 wounded, and 1,204 missing – as stated a few sentences ago, Ellis added wrong since he was only using 20,024. Determining these overall American losses is only done for this paper as a comparison to show the tenacity of the French in trying to close with the enemy, and their willingness to be killed, wounded, or captured in the process; with only forty-one percent of the American effectives (95,142 to 231,306), the French took nearly sixty percent of the United States casualties (10,635 to 17,931). The French fought in Italy, but regardless of the casualties that the FEC suffered, the real difficulties are trying to

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<sup>206</sup> Ernest F. Fisher, Jr., *Mediterranean Theater of Operations: Cassino to the Alps* (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1977), 222.

<sup>207</sup> The Polish took a large number of losses taking the German Cassino position. Ellis called their tactics full of bravado, “We Poles have a completely different attitude to fighting. We are heroic, the British are methodical. What the British soldier does is prompted by duty, whilst we respond to our sense of commitment and the need for heroism.” Ellis, *Cassino*, 318.



determine the number of white Europeans killed, wounded, and missing as compared to Africans killed, wounded, and missing. The studies just do not break the numbers down to show the discrepancy between white Frenchmen and African, but how could they if the French military did not during the war? But what if the military had kept more precise statistics? One result might have been the lack of need for this thesis: the FEC was very willing to spend the lives of Africans for France. Another outcome would be the real debt owed to Africa by France, rather than de Gaulle sending his troops back to Africa – “whitening” – as quickly as possible to keep the belief of a great French empire alive in the colonies. This thesis is just a beginning to show how important Africans were to the overall French military effort in the last two years of the war. France needed Africans, and the numbers of Africans killed, wounded, and missing needs to be known by more than just a few French historians, or authors writing in English but providing the wrong information (or using the wrong information to make their point).

One of the goals of this thesis was, however, to determine if there was a strong willingness by French officers expend African lives in combat. The evidence found for this paper, at least in Italy, is an affirmative. Was that willingness based on a colonial mindset? Again, the answer is an affirmative. Another study by a French author highlights the disparity of coverage between white Frenchmen and African soldiers. Jacques Robichon, in *Les Français en Italie*, examines the campaign from the perspectives of the soldiers at the tip of the French spear. Examples of this approach are spread throughout the chapters. Robichon mentions names during many of the engagements, “despair for the officers shot, which dispatched them - Lieutenant Stefani,

NCO Girard, Lieutenant de Villèle.”<sup>208</sup> Robichon also makes mention of the losses of officers:

Dead by the enemy ... Roux, colonel. Baluze, Carré, Châtillon, Goiffon, Isaac, Jean, Tixier, captains. Prisoner ... Berne commander of the battalion ... In total, fifteen officers dead, 160 NCOs, 1200 corporals and riflemen dead, wounded, or missing. For the 4<sup>th</sup> R.T.T. alone.<sup>209</sup>

These samples do show that white Frenchmen were leading in battle, and taking losses for it, but they also illustrate something more. Where are the names of the African soldiers killed, wounded, missing? Africans are only included in the catchall, “1200 corporals and riflemen.” Thirty-five years after the event, since Robichon wrote his book in the late 1970s, the African contribution is still only partially told since Robichon focuses more squarely on the role that white Frenchmen played in the campaign, while the indigenous soldiers are mentioned only occasionally by name. This reader wondered what the African soldiers had to accomplish to be included in Robichon’s study since they were the soldiers most often face-to-face with the enemy. A colonial mindset existed during the war and has continued many years later.

But what of the Africans that Robichon does mention: “*Il est mort ... et Boukhrif Kadda, Kiali Salah, Ben Kirour?*”<sup>210</sup> As this thesis has shown the importance of the FEC has been seemingly lost to history, in both English language versions as well as French, and even followers of World War II history, but it is especially so for the Africans who participated in the campaign. John Ellis wrote in *Cassino* that another book published a

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<sup>208</sup> (pour les officiers de tir qui les expédient – le lieutenant Stefani, le sous-lieutenant Girard, le lieutenant de Villèle.) Robichon, *Les Français en Italie*, 135.

<sup>209</sup> (Tués à l’ennemi ... Roux, colonel. Baluze, Carré, Châtillon, Goiffon, Isaac, Jean, Tixier, capitaines. Disparu ... Berne chef de bataillon ... En tout, 15 officiers tués, 160 sous-officiers, 1200 caporaux et tirailleurs tués, blessés ou disparus. Pour le seul 4<sup>e</sup> R.T.T) Robichon, *Les Français en Italie*, 150.

<sup>210</sup> (They are dead ... and) Robichon, *Les Français en Italie*, 145.

few years earlier by Jacques Robichon, *Les Français en Italie* that was just examined above, cited a French war correspondent in Italy who wrote in 1946 that, “And those who died in Italy are asking me why France has forgotten them.”<sup>211</sup> Only recently has France tried to answer this question.

In 2006, a group of *Beurs* (French popular term for French of North African origin) released the motion picture *Indigènes*, titled *Days of Glory* in the United States.<sup>212</sup> On both the World War II and H-War listservs, there were groups of individuals who began asking about the numbers of French, African and European, who participated in the later stages of the war. Many members of these lists were completely unaware of the African component in the FEC, and later the 1<sup>st</sup> French Army. In the final few scenes of the movie, the last African soldier left alive, the others killed in action defeating a German attack, is completely ignored when a French cameraman finally decides to take a picture of French soldiers in the village. The cameraman is, in fact, taking a picture of white soldiers brandishing their arms – the true hero of the battle is completely out of the picture. Furthermore, the treatment of black Africans released by “whitening” often did not dramatically improve their situation, either in relation to getting back to Africa or their relationships with the French military hierarchy. Some of the black ex-POWs, liberated by the Allied advance through France, were rounded up to work in military labor units.<sup>213</sup> Eventually, all these released servicemen were grouped into six centers in France. While white ex-POWs were quickly issued back pay and discharged, black

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<sup>211</sup> (Et les morts d’Italie me demandent pourquoi la France les a oubliés.) Ellis, *Cassino*, 471.

<sup>212</sup> *Indigènes* would be translated as “natives,” which is a slur. The director, Rachid Bouchareb, wanted his French audience to understand that these African men believed that risking their lives in battle would make them an equal, in the very least, in the eyes of their white countrymen.

<sup>213</sup> Echenberg, “Morts Pour la France,” 373.

Africans often had to wait for their pay and embarkation to Africa – some waited over a year to return.<sup>214</sup> The Africans, and their contributions, were purposely made invisible during the war, and in many ways this state has remained until the present. But thankfully, this has changed recently.

The difficulties between France and its soldiers began even before the war ended, but became a true issue for Africans during the decolonization of Africa after the war ended. The riots of black Africans in 1944-45 often grew out of the unequal and inferior treatment of them in comparison to their fellow white soldiers.<sup>215</sup> And after 1950, when the French National Assembly voted to accept the principle of equal rights for equal sacrifices, “most African veterans reaffirmed their loyalties to the State that paid their pensions” (as if they had much choice if they wanted what was owned them).<sup>216</sup> The problems of decolonization and the soldiers began when France – under de Gaulle – voted to freeze African pension payments to soldiers from countries no longer under French rule (benefits were placed at 1959 levels). France could claim that it was honoring its commitments to its veterans since they were still being given a pension. However, over a period of forty years, the value of the France’s payments to its African soldiers was approximately thirty percent (if not less) of what their French counterparts received.<sup>217</sup> While the French Council of State, France’s highest administrative court, decided in 2001 that France’s overseas veterans should receive the same pension as a

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<sup>214</sup> Echenberg, “Morts Pour la France,” 373.

<sup>215</sup> Over one hundred black Africans were killed and many hundreds more injured in these riots, throughout France and African, in comparison to just a few white Frenchmen killed and wounded. Echenberg, “Morts Pour la France,” 378.

<sup>216</sup> Echenberg, “Morts Pour la France,” 379.

<sup>217</sup> Mann, *Native Sons*, 184.

French national (as well as additional money to cover the previous unfair payments), little was done by the French government to begin these payments.<sup>218</sup> This changed when French President Jacques Chirac saw a screening of *Indigènes*. He finally chose to have France adjust the soldier's pensions upwards to allow some of these men – approximately 85,000 still alive in 2006 when *Native Sons* was first published – to no longer live in poverty.

This thesis had two goals: to illustrate how France managed to send an army to fight in Italy and explain why were the troops that France managed to send to Italy so effective once they were there. It became a paper on the French colonial mindset because that is where the evidence led. The FEC was a French and African army that fought in Italy, but also an army of Africans that little is known about except for a very few informed historians. They were the men at the sharp end: the men doing the killing but also doing most of the dying. After all the research completed for this paper, the conclusion is that this thesis is just a beginning. More work must be done on this topic if a balanced history of France's involvement in the war is ever going to be written. But more importantly, a balanced history also means that not only is credit given to the African soldiers who fought for France in World War II, but that the colonial system they fought under must also be explained to illustrate the shortcomings of the French empire.

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<sup>218</sup> Mann, *Native Sons*, 185.

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