

# In German-occupied Europe were all collaborators traitors and all resisters heroes

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In German-occupied Europe were all collaborators traitors and all resisters heroes?

Firstly, in order to answer the question in the title, we have to define what do we exactly mean by the term 'resistance'. We have to underline two main aspects of this phenomenon: resistance was in part a nationalist and patriotic effort to achieve freedom from an enemy power that had imposed its rule or influence, usually by force of arms; and in part a political and ideological opposition to a specifically German and National Socialist domination. (There was also resistance against invading Russian troops in Poland, for example, but this time we will focus on anti-German resistance.) Although there was a great variety in the forms of resistance throughout German-occupied Europe, there are some main characteristic features which they all have in common.

Resistance always began as something passive, spontaneous and individual and expanded through the war in progressively more offensive, planned and corporate forms. In this process the emergence of specific resistance organizations, movements and circuits was crucial. Resistance activities can be divided into three categories: intelligence, escape and subversion, and this latter can be divided further into four subcategories: sabotage, attacks on troops, propaganda, and lastly the culmination of the others in insurrection.(1) The proportion of the aforementioned aspects determined the character of resistance in the various occupied countries, but it was always a result of the interaction between German domination and the particular social, political, economic, cultural and geographic conditions of each country.

Depending on the kind of German administration the given territory was under, we can make a distinction between the occupied countries. First, there were those lands that were integrated into the Reich and therefore governed as a part of it - principally Alsace, Lorraine, Luxembourg, Austria, the Sudetenland, Danzig and north-western Poland. Second, there were those areas

that were annexed and ruled as part of a Greater Germany - chiefly the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, and the Government General of Poland; and those areas which although conquered and administered directly were not regarded as part of Germany as such - above all Holland, Belgium, northern France, Serbia, Greece and the lands taken in Russia. Then there were the regions not ruled directly, but which retained institutions of at least nominal self-government; there were two basic categories of these. First were defeated countries: Norway, Denmark, southern or Vichy France and Croatia. Second were Germany's allies - Rumania, Bulgaria, and Hungary - together with Slovakia. (2)

However, these types of administration did not always result in the same degree of oppression and therefore the degree to which resistance was organized in the different countries was also different in each case. Provoked partly by a terrible hatred towards Jews, Slavs and Bolsheviks, partly by the desire for Lebensraum, the German leadership set about reducing Poland and the lands conquered in Russia to a degree of subjugation unparalleled anywhere else, accompanied by an equally unparalleled regime of terror and extermination. Exploitation and repression were universal themes of Nazi policy, but they varied significantly in intensity: there is little to compare with the unbelievable savagery of the treatment meted out in Poland in Russia. It was no accident that Poland was the scene of the final solution, of the most notorious extermination camps and that in response to the killing of one German by local resisters the number of local inhabitants shot in reprisal was, in Norway ten, in Yugoslavia 100, and in Poland 1000. (3)

Compared to this extreme degree of terror, German policy in other parts of occupied Europe was relatively mild, although we know about cases, like the tragedy of the wholly exterminated French village, Oradour. In Norway, the Low Countries and France, the invaders made some attempt to gain the cooperation of the local populations, providing they were prepared to accept the subservient role allotted to them in the New Order. This explains why we could find a greater number of collaborators (e.g. Quisling) in these countries, though we have to mention that the Danish Freedom Council carried out a significant resistance activity. (4)

The most well-organized forms of resistance existed in the Soviet Union, which is no wonder since with its traditions of national unity and

independence, its enormous resources of space, manpower and materials, and its ideology totally opposed to that of National Socialism, the Soviet Union was Hitler's most implacable European enemy and stood most directly in the way of his strategic and political ambitions. Although the two countries' opposition was temporarily suspended by the Nazi-Soviet Pact of 1939, it was shattered by the German attack in June 1941. Triggered by the ferocity of the invading German troops and Stalin's appeal to deep-rooted Russian nationalism, resistance became part of a war effort in which Soviet military forces were simultaneously engaged. The geography of the country provided plenty of cover for large partisan groups to organize themselves, and the stretched-out lines of German supply and communication provided obvious and accessible targets. Soviet resistance quickly emerged as the strongest, numerically speaking, in occupied Europe, committed to the most directly military forms of organization and activity, under central direction from Moscow and with its strategy closely aligned with that of the main Soviet forces. Functioning as an auxiliary arm of the Red Army, resistance played a real and important part in the defeat of the Germans and the preservation of the Union. (5)

The case of Poland was different, since the country was defeated within three weeks of the outbreak of the war in September 1939, but the savagery of German policy inspired stronger and more united resistance than in Western Europe. By the end of 1940 a well-organized Home Army was created under General Bor Komorowski, while at the same time the Polish Jews formed their own Combat resistance organization in the Warsaw Ghetto. However, these two groups could not cooperate for reasons like anti-semitism and their different orientations and were both defeated: the rising Warsaw Ghetto failed in April 1943, while the Home Army's Warsaw uprising in July 1944. Warsaw was one of the few examples, when the Jews tried to fight back. Apart from Warsaw there were sixteen other ghettos in which armed risings took place against the Nazi oppressor. (6)

There were also two main resistance groups in Yugoslavia. After the country surrendered in April 1941, some of the Royal Yugoslav Army fled into the mountains when Colonel Mihailovic established a headquarters in Montenegro that became a core of a resistance army, which was soon joined by the

Serbian Chetniks. Mihailovic's army was linked to the Yugoslav government in exile in London. The other resistance force, the National Liberal Movement was formed by Tito, the leader of Yugoslav Communists. His movement was concentrated in Croatia, Slovenia, Dalmatia and Bosnia, where the terrain was suitable for guerrilla warfare. The two resistance groups were not only fighting the Germans, but also each other. Tito's partisans achieved one of the largest resistance successes of the war, both militarily and politically. They played a major part in clearing Yugoslavia of the Germans, and earned recognition and acceptance as the basis of the government by 1945. (7)

In the Western part of Europe, resistance was most significant in France. The country's North-western part was governed directly by the Germans, while the Southern part, Vichy France was led by a collaborationist government until the Germans occupied it in 1942. Already in 1940, the London-based De Gaulle declared that the war had not been lost and opposition to the Germans would continue under his leadership. However, the emerging resistance groups were confused at the beginning. They did not know whether they should expect help from De Gaulle or the also London-based Special Operations Executive. A significant proportion of the French partisans, the maquis became Communist-dominated, but finally De Gaulle's FFI (Forces Françaises de l'Intérieur) emerged as the strongest, and their leader became the head of the government in 1944. In both Tito's and De Gaulle's case resistance was a prelude to the new post-war system in their countries.(8)

As we could see, the common belief that all hard-core resisters had been Communists was not true at all, they only represented one group among several others. As it happened in France too, Communist resistance groups were generally separated from the rest. The reason for this was partly that their leaders had had training in clandestinity, often coupled with recent practical experience in Spain, and knew the importance of partitioning resisters off from each other. The other reason was that because of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact the others did not really want to cooperate with them. (9)

However, resistance also had its more dubious aspects. Its members often operated as terrorists and were frequently as brutal and ruthless as the Germans. As a result of their actions, reprisals were provoked and innocent

people could have been caught in the cross-fire. There was a partisan who once said &bdquo;I shot a great many Germans, and I wish I could shoot more. I enjoyed it.&rdquo; This quote demonstrates quite well that some of the people involved in resistance acquired a taste for blood. So answering the question in the title, there were plenty of rascals as well as plenty of heroes among them. There were some plain bandits, in it for the money, some scroungers, there for the tobacco and the rumours of easy women. A great many people went into the black market (which the Nazis encouraged) because they were hungry and stayed there to line their pockets as well as their bellies. And there were no fewer cowards and fools in resistance than in any other group of men and women; though they seldom lasted long. (10)

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