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Anne-Sophie Anglaret, *Au service du Maréchal? La légion française des combattants (1940-1944)*. Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2023. 332 pp. Bibliography, illustrations, and maps. \$39.71 U.S. (pb). ISBN 9782271137234; \$19.99 U.S. (eb). ISBN 9782271137234.

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Anne-Sophie Anglaret's *Au service du Maréchal? La légion française des combattants (1940-1944)* offers a readable and well-researched account of an organization under Vichy which, while numerically important, remains relatively little known and little studied, even given the massive scholarly interest on both sides of the Atlantic in the "Dark Years" and their legacies. The reasons for this neglect, however, are understandable in light of several factors Anglaret lays out in her study. First, given the remarkable number of adherents to the organization—at its height, the Légion française des combattants could boast 1,125,000 members in the Southern Zone and 1,425,000 in all territories under French domination—the organization's political importance and clout in Pétain's *État Français* never matched its impressive membership numbers. For this reason, its historical interest and arguably its significance is diminished compared, for example, to its more radical offshoots, the Service d'ordre légionnaire (SOL) and the Milice. The latter, of course, assumed an unusually high level of visibility as a consequence of two iconic moments of the Vichy Syndrome of the 1980s and 1990s. The first moment in question was the release of Louis Malle's 1988 film, *Au revoir les enfants*, in which Milice members are shown harassing an elderly Jewish diner in a restaurant before they themselves are humiliated by Nazi officers irritated that their meal is being interrupted in this fashion. More recently, the first trial of a Frenchman on charges of crimes against humanity in 1994 involved the *milicien* Paul Touvier, notable for his wartime corruption and brutality and his protection after the war by highly placed figures in the Catholic Church.

A second reason for the Légion's lack of historical significance and visibility is that the organization itself limited its own potential clout by failing to integrate its membership in metropolitan France and French territories into a united political force throughout the Occupation. The two groups, Anglaret explains, remained autonomous, thus failing to fully exploit their large numbers. Moreover, the Légion refused to recruit members in the northern Occupied Zone of France, thereby depriving itself of potential additional members. (Jews and Freemasons were also, of course, unacceptable.)

Au Service du Maréchal? is divided into five chapters of roughly even length and includes an epilogue dealing with the fate of the Légion following the Liberation, and a conclusion. Chapter one, entitled "La naissance de la légion," focuses on the launching of the organization by a

governmental decree of August 1940, its organizational structure, and the designation of its leadership cadres. From the outset, the new organization faced significant obstacles. The governmental decree creating the Légion made clear that the role of the organization was to fuse the plethora of veterans' organizations that already existed and merge them into one powerful entity in support of the state. As Anglaret explains, this was no easy task. There had always been rivalries and social differences between the veterans' organizations, not to mention political and even economic ones. Moreover, success in integrating all the veterans into a unified whole was complicated by organizational hierarchical structures. Although not in principle based on the actual status of the *ancien combattant* in the military, promotion and rank within the Légion depended on the veteran's status rather than other criteria. So, for example, those invalidated from the army for medical or other reasons tended to fill the roles of simple "soldiers" in the organization, whereas those awarded medals, including *Croix de Guerre* and the *Médaille Militaire*, largely filled the officers' cadres. Those who had received the *Légion d'honneur*, fewer in number, were significantly over-represented in the highest echelons of the Légion. Finally, as one might expect, there was a markedly rightward lean politically in the designation of leadership cadres, although, as will be discussed, the more *ultra* elements eventually broke away to form the SOL.

Chapter two, "Le Temps des adhésions," deals with recruitment and the means deployed to accomplish that end in late 1940 and early 1941. Here, a fascinating historical difficulty emerges in the creation of the Légion. While the organization comprised veterans of both the Great War and the 1939-1940 campaigns, the disaster and, for many, the ignominious defeat suffered by the latter at the hands of the Nazis, created inevitable tensions between the two groups. These tensions played out in the Légion's publications. And, as a result of the discrepancy between generations and questions as to the success of their service to the nation, 1939-1940 veterans were not automatically admitted into the Légion following their application to join: they were placed on probation until their *bona fides* could be established and approved by a board of honor.

In chapter three, "Idéal légionnaire et engagement doctrinal," Anglaret stresses that because the Légion was conceived primarily as a *relai* between the government and the people, one of its chief aims was to serve as a propaganda mouthpiece for the regime. As a result, in 1941, three-fourths of the Légion's budget was devoted to propaganda purposes. The privileged targets of these propagandistic efforts were, in fact, the *légionnaires* themselves, who were then expected to spread the faith, so to speak, to the general populace. To these ends, the Légion produced a number of bi-weekly or monthly publications aimed either at officers throughout the Southern Zone or at the broader membership. Among these publications were *La Légion*, originally a biweekly publication and later a monthly, and the monthly *Le Légionnaire*. Launched in 1940, both publications lasted until 1943.

Although intended simply as mouthpieces for the régime and its values, the Légion's publications had to contend with a certain culture of autonomy that, as noted, had been typical of the various veterans' associations of the prewar period. Not surprisingly, then, especially where editorials written by the Légion's leaders were concerned, specific standards as to both subject matter and vocabulary were followed. Overall, Anglaret describes these publications as narcissistic echo chambers for the shared values and narratives of the Légion and the régime it was supposed to represent. Among these narratives, the most fundamental ones concerned the corruption of the Third Republic (blamed entirely for France's downfall), the need to punish its

leaders (hence a drumbeat of support for the Riom Trial), and the need to root out the corrupt vestiges of the previous regime that might remain within the soul of each *légionnaire*. Alongside the need to build an *ordre nouveau* and embrace the National Revolution that Vichy championed was a willful ignorance of the Nazi occupant and hence of reality itself. As the war progressed and the popularity of the regime declined in the face of material and other hardships, these publications urged their readers not to lose faith in or sight of the now-clearly imaginary radiant future still ahead.

In chapter four, Anglaret focuses on the political and social role of the Légion in Vichy and, with the progress of the war and decline of the Vichy regime, the eventual radicalization and militarization of important groups within the organization. Most important of these was the Service d'ordre légionnaire (SOL), essentially the brainchild of Joseph Darnand, who would later become the leader of the fascist and paramilitary Milice. Created in late summer 1941 in the Alpes-Maritime, where Darnand served as the Department chief of the Légion, the SOL sought to unify the most "active" and militant members of the Légion in the entire region. The function of the SOL, however, was quite different from that of the Légion as a whole. Its purpose was to maintain order at the parent organization's rallies and demonstrations and to serve as an auxiliary force for public authorities and the police, who could requisition the SOL as needed. So, for example, prefectures and sub-prefectures in the region called on the SOL in late 1942, spurred by fears of political repercussions after the Nazi occupation of the Southern Zone in November 1942. Overtly militaristic, the SOL found inspiration in Nazi and Fascist paramilitary organizations. But its ideology, articulated in Darnand's "Twenty-one Points of the SOL", remained close to that of the Légion's own propaganda. Both denounced the "Jewish leper," "Gaullist dissidence," "bourgeois egoism," "Bolshevism" and "international capitalism," among other things.

Deep friction between the SOL and the Légion emerged in July 1942 with the investiture of the SOL chapter in Lyon. In his speech at that event, Darnand called on SOL members and recruits to join Nazi Germany's fight in the East by joining the Légion Tricolore, an army of French volunteers who embraced the Nazis' struggle against Bolshevism. Following Darnand's call, many members of the SOL broke with the group as this pro-Nazi stance emerged more and more. Darnand himself would end up swearing an oath of loyalty to Hitler. (Interestingly, Darnand's oath would play a major role in securing the conviction of the *milicien* Paul Touvier on charges of crimes against humanity some fifty years later.)

For Anglaret, the ultimate break between the Légion and the SOL can be explained in part by the social, generational, and political divergence of the organizations' respective members. While large numbers of Légion members were from rural areas, SOL members were more urban: shopkeepers, *cadres*, and even factory workers. Moreover, many of the latter had been active politically on the far right before the war, belonging to organizations like Action française, the Jeunesses Patriotes, and even the Parti populaire français (PPF). Additionally, SOL members were generally younger than their Légion counterparts: one had to be forty-five or younger to join the SOL. This restriction limited the number of potential members, and it also precluded veterans of the Great War from joining. Although Anglaret doesn't mention it, it is worth stressing that many, if not most, in Nazi and SS leadership roles were also too young to have participated in World War I. This arguably contributed to their radicalization.

The final chapter of *Au service du Maréchal?* traces the decline and eventual collapse of the Légion over the final years of the Occupation. This demise was, of course, inevitable, but the process itself was hastened along by a number of political developments, some violent in nature. First, the shared animosity toward and denunciation of the decadent Third Republic that served as a glue early on was no longer relevant three and four years after the Republic's demise, and other, more urgent realities were at hand. Along these lines, the radicalization of the regime and the rise to prominence of figures like Joseph Darnand discouraged many more moderate members and leaders of the Légion, many of whom would subsequently resign. Additionally, Pierre Laval's infamous 1942 statement that he wished for a German victory in the war was too much for some members, for whom, after all, Germany was the nation's traditional enemy. Besides, Laval himself was none too popular with many members. Finally, late in the war, assassination attempts carried out against some Légion leaders encouraged other defections, even though some of those leaders were targeted because they were also members of the fascist PPF, for example.

In her conclusion, Anglaret offers a number of summary remarks that shed light on who, precisely, the typical *légionnaire* was, where the organization recruited most effectively, and the politics of the majority of Légion members in a deeply politicized and divisive moment in modern French history. On the first point, the average *légionnaire* was a combat veteran of the First World War and typically worked in agriculture. Second, the organization succeeded most spectacularly in its recruiting in areas where there were already strong veterans' associations with numerous devoted members. As to the politics of most members, these were certainly conservative but not, as a rule, radicalized or militantly collaborationist. There were, of course, exceptions, and numerous leaders were obliged to compromise themselves by supporting measures such as the deeply unpopular Service du travail obligatoire and similar initiatives of the Vichy regime. But by and large, most members avoided more radical compromises. For example, recruitment from the Légion into the SOL and certainly the Milice was minimal, although as Anglaret notes, when Joseph Darnand moved to the SOL and then to the Milice as its chief, he took many of his lieutenants along with him. These lieutenants then constituted the leadership of the Milice and were prosecuted during the Purge or after the war. But most Légion members faced no postwar sanctions for their commitments.

As these remarks should confirm, Anne-Sophie Aglaret's *Au Service du Maréchal?* constitutes a valuable addition to our understanding of the Vichy regime and its organizations and, more generally, the history of veterans' movements in modern France. Elegantly written, its exhaustive attention to detail might prove occasionally distracting to the non-specialist reader. but this does not detract from its status as a book of historical importance and real erudition.

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