

---

H-France Review Vol. 5 (October 2005), No. 113

Pierre Bolle, Ed. *Grenoble et le Vercors: De la Résistance à la Libération 1944-1944*. Grenoble: Presses Universitaires de Grenoble, 2003. 271 pp. Appendix, maps, photographs, bibliography, index of people, index of place names, list of abbreviations. €30 (pb). ISBN 2 7061 0998 X.

Review by Julia Torrie, St. Thomas University.

---

*Grenoble et le Vercors*, an edited volume by Pierre Bolle, was first published in 1985. It had been out of print for some time, and has now been reissued by the Presses Universitaires de Grenoble. The book brings together the proceedings of an innovative meeting between former resisters and academic historians, which took place in November 1975 at the *Institut d'études politiques*, Grenoble. The republication of *Grenoble et le Vercors* makes it accessible to a new generation of readers, who may find a new place for it within the extensive historiography of the Resistance in France.

Rather than a formal essay collection, the volume resembles the minutes of a meeting, or a set of memoirs. It combines academic papers, first-hand narratives from the resisters, and debates among the colloquium's various participants. The focus is, as the title indicates, the resistance in the department of Isère, specifically. A useful appendix reprints key documents related to the presenters' talks, but the majority of the text is devoted to reproducing the conversations at the colloquium. The book includes a map of Vichy-era Grenoble, a map pin-pointing the location of various Resistance activities in the Vercors, various photographs, a short bibliography, and a detailed index of proper names that has been updated for this edition.

In the papers and discussions at the colloquium, two major themes recurred. The first was the role of the cadre training school, Uriage, and its later off-shoot, the *équipes volantes*. Bernard Comte's essay explores Uriage's development from 1940 through 1942, as it moved from being an institution of the Vichy regime closer and closer to resistance. In 1942, the school was closed down by Pierre Laval, ushering in a period of clandestine activity for those behind the Uriage movement. Uriage disappeared officially, but the founder, Pierre Dunoyer de Segonzac, and others, including Hubert Beuve-Méry (future founder of *Le Monde*) continued to perpetuate its moral and educational ideas through clandestine *équipes volantes*. From the spring of 1943, these teams of two or three Uriage-inspired individuals visited the numerous resisters' camps hidden in the Vercors. They played an educative role and also, according to Benigno Cacérès in his essay, "Culture Populaire et Résistance," helped integrate the very diverse groups of individuals from all over France who had joined the Resistance into close and effective fighting units. Their role was not always entirely appreciated by the men of the maquis, as a debate between Cacérès and Fernand Rude, detailed in *Grenoble et le Vercors*, indicates.

The Vercors itself formed the second major subject of debate at the colloquium. The contribution of Fernand Rude, who was a history professor during the war and a member of the Franc-Tireur *maquis* in the Vercors, addresses the controversial fate of the resistance in this region. Just after the Normandy Landings in 1944, resisters in the Vercors sought to make it a national redoubt that could be used as a safe base to attack German forces. However, they were never given the heavy weaponry that was necessary to hold what they had declared, on 10 June 1944, to be the Free Republic of the Vercors. By the third week in July that year, the Germans had attacked and defeated the forces holding the plateau, with heavy losses for the French, and reprisals against local civilians. Rude contends that the tragic fate of the Vercors was in large part determined by the civilian-military tensions that coloured local

resistance activities from the very outset. He suggests that the military leadership went too far, too fast, in trying to defend the area as a redoubt against the Germans. This point of view is contested by General Alain Le Ray, head of the FFI in Isère in 1944, who sees Rude's account of the military-civilian tensions as exaggerated, and views the events of 1944 as the result of justified, if unfortunate, decisions on the part of Resistance leaders.

Beyond these two major themes, Charles Katz's contribution draws attention to the extensive role played by foreigners, many of them East Europeans and Jews, in the French Resistance. More detailed studies on this subject have been published since 1975 (a number of works are listed in a footnote on p. 141 of *Grenoble et le Vercors*), but Katz's essay, based on personal experience, opens up a topic that had been relatively little explored at the time. Katz focuses on the foreign resisters' motivations, arguing that they were moved by a sense of duty, rather than necessity, obligation, or fear. The foreigners sought to combat fascism, for the dignity of humanity.

*Grenoble et le Vercors* is rounded out by a brief contribution from Pierre Montergnole, who touches on the role of the press in Isère, by Pierre Flaureau's account of the Comité de Libération de l'Isère, and General Le Ray's comments about the FFI in the same department.

The conversational quality of *Grenoble et le Vercors* is both a strength and a weakness. On the one hand, the reminiscences of the various participants give the work the immediacy of a primary source. The reader gains a good sense both of the camaraderie and of the controversies of the Resistance, still visible in 1975 at the colloquium. Specialists in the Resistance, or those who want to learn more about clandestine activities in the Grenoble area, will find the book's re-publication a welcome event. It opens a window into how the Resistance functioned at the ground level, in a region that was clearly crucial. The role of Uriage and the question of the "battle of the Vercors" remain controversial today.

On the other hand, some of the information presented here is too detailed, local, or personal for all but the most dedicated reader to find useful. Even the more academic contributions to the colloquium, moreover, contain few or no references, which makes it difficult to trace or verify the material. Most readers, and particularly students, would be better served by a more general account, such as Roderick Kedward's *In Search of the Maquis*.<sup>[1]</sup>

Since the colloquium this volume documents took place thirty years ago, and a virtually identical previous edition of the work already exists, *Grenoble et le Vercors* can contribute nothing new, strictly speaking, to the historiography of the French Resistance. The book is limited by its focus on the Resistance proper, making little or no attempt, for instance, to acknowledge the manifold links between the *maquis* and the surrounding population. Topics such as popular non-compliance and protest, and the grey area between resistance, *attentisme*, and collaboration, which have drawn historians' attention more recently, are simply not addressed. Neither the former resisters, nor the scholars who joined them in 1975, were thinking along these lines.

These reservations aside, *Grenoble et le Vercors* remains an intriguing document. It is more useful as a primary source than anything else, and as a reminder of the long shadow cast by the resistance in post-war France. The book might prove especially helpful to historians interested in the memory of the resistance, or in how former resisters themselves interpreted their actions some thirty or more years after the fact.

#### LIST OF ESSAYS

- Bernard Comte, "Uriage et la Résistance"

- Pierre Flaureau, “Le Comité de Libération de l’Isère”
  - Alain Le Ray, “Les FFI dans L’Isère”
  - Fernand Rude, “Le Vercors”
  - Charles Katz, “Les étrangers dans le Résistance à Grenoble”
  - Benigno Cacérés, “Culture populaire et Résistance”
  - Bernard Montergnole, “La presse dans l’Isère en 1944”
- 

## NOTES

[1] Roderick Kedward, *In Search of the Maquis: Rural Resistance in Southern France, 1942-1944* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993).

Julia S. Torrie  
St. Thomas University  
jtorrie@stu.ca

Copyright © 2005 by the Society for French Historical Studies, all rights reserved. The Society for French Historical Studies permits the electronic distribution for nonprofit educational purposes, provided that full and accurate credit is given to the author, the date of publication, and its location on the H-France website. No republication or distribution by print media will be permitted without permission. For any other proposed uses, contact the Editor-in-Chief of H-France. ISSN 1553-9172