



*Riviera at War: World War II on the Côte d'Azur* by George G. Kundahl.

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In *Riviera at War*, George Kundahl, a former US military officer and longtime resident of France's Côte d'Azur, has produced a lively, well written account of the region during the Second World War. He begins by stating that, unlike most French citizens, those in the Riviera were shocked by France's decision to surrender to Nazi Germany in June 1940. After all, French Army forces there had repelled thirty-two Italian divisions (19).

The author sketches the Vichy regime's effects on the Côte d'Azur, which remained unoccupied until the Allied invasion of French North Africa in November 1942, whereafter 150,000 Italian soldiers came to occupy the seven southeastern départements of France. After Italy left the war in September 1943, the Germans moved in to replace them, in the process taking 52,000 Italian soldiers prisoner (58). Anticipating a potential Allied invasion, German forces fortified the region with ca. 100,000 mines and began to construct a "Mediterranean Wall" along the shoreline (61-63).

Prewar southern France was a gathering place for Jewish refugees from Germany and Austria seeking passage to the United States or Latin America. The Vichy period brought the enactment of many anti-Semitic laws targeting both foreign and French Jews. The first round-up of Jews across the city of Nice and the Département of Alpes-Maritimes began on 26 August 1942. The Italians' occupation provided some respite, as their officials argued against interning and deporting Jews, despite orders from the Vichy government and pressure by the Nazis (85). As a result, the Jewish community flourished and its relations with Italians extended even to raising money for air-raid victims in Italy (86).

All this came crashing to an end when the German occupation began in September 1943. The arrival of German troops caused a panic in Nice, and the first arrests of Jews took place in Cannes (8-9 Sept. 1943). In a large-scale round-up, SS commander Alois Brunner oversaw the deportation of some 1820 Jews from the region, but only 1400 (of 25,000) from the Côte d'Azur; the latter was the result of significant efforts by resistance members, church officials, and others to rescue Jews or provide them with false papers.

Kundahl devotes several chapters to the work of British Special Operations Executive (SOE) agents, who encouraged French resistance groups to sabotage the Nazi occupation; this began in the South of France with nautical drop-offs in 1942 (107). The British believed SOE's success in coordinating resistance efforts made it a factor after D-Day (122). The resistance itself gathered momentum in this part of France and elsewhere when the Nazis imposed forced labor on military-aged males in 1943. Many resistance cells, notably the communists, circulated tracts urging these men to reject forced labor and join groups actively resisting the occupation. There were debates whether to delay action until the Allied invasion or strike whenever they could.

The author enlivens his narrative with details about small resistance groups, like the seven men who trained in the mountains of the Var from October 1943 through March 1944 (129). He

also describes the unique cooperation of French and Italian resistance groups around the border region, both of which made contact with US special services (136).

Did the resistance help militarily when American and Free France forces landed in the south of France (15 Aug. 1944)? In recounting the battles of Toulon and Marseille, among others, Kundahl notes that the resistance came out of hiding, identified and rounded up collaborators, set up roadblocks in cities and towns, and destroyed bridges vital to the Germans (227). It was also essential in capturing country towns in the region as the Germans retreated. The author stresses that retaliation against collaborators was an important part of such actions, as well as military victories in August 1944 (244). In this sense, it is important to assess the resistance not just from a military perspective.

Most resisters, especially communists, rejected Gen. Charles de Gaulle's demobilization order in late August 1944. They were motivated by a desire to rid France of Germans altogether, to rescue captured friends and other Frenchmen, and to exact vengeance. In short, the experience and motives of resisters went well beyond the purely military (247). The Gestapo's summary executions of prisoners in Nice and Cannes in the last days of German control inspired the communist resistance to set up a post-liberation government rather than await directives from Paris and de Gaulle's government (267). Arrests of collaborators soon followed.

One wishes for more detail on post-liberation reprisals, the restoration of central governmental control over the Côte d'Azur, and the role of collaborators there during the war. Nonetheless, George Kundahl has provided us with a solid, absorbing, and lucid introduction to the complicated history of the various resistance groups in the South of France during and immediately after the Second World War.