

10th May 1940, Nazi forces invade France. By 1941, Resistance groups have mobilised across the country to push back against the Vichy regime. Until recent years, mainstream French history would lead us to believe that these clandestine groups were made up exclusively of young male French soldiers, however such a perception of Metropolitan France during this period is less accurate without its contextualisation within the network of the French Empire. Alongside my supervisor, Professor Nina Wardleworth, and her extensive database of colonial soldiers who fought for 'La Résistance', I created fact files with the aim of identifying Indochinese soldiers, understanding their story and subsequently humanising them beyond a number in a database. The importance of this research therefore lies in the uncovering of stories where non-nationals contributed to a larger narrative uncovering the truth and complexity of France's history between 1941-1944.

I emphasise the need to humanise South East Asian individuals because in understanding the 'hows' and 'whys' of their story we begin to unpick the colonial implications at play during the Western conflict of the 1940s. This became important to me when narrowing my research on Indochinese soldiers specifically. The volatile sociopolitical relationship between Metropolitan France and Indochina, I hoped, would offer some insightful reasoning for joining the Resistance Forces. My supervisor's comprehensive database listed factors such as military achievements, birthplaces, marital status and the areas of France where they were situated. These provided a starting point for plotting the lives of the Resistance fighters. I was particularly interested in identifying their whereabouts and which groups they were involved in, this interest was driven by the history of Indochinese labourers ('Les Travailleurs Indochinois') which, more often than not, seemed to be the reason for Indochinese presence in France in the 1930s.

This line of research was in partnership with the Fort Mont Valérien in Paris, a memorial and museum commemorating the fallen soldiers in the French Resistance.

Visiting the site in Paris and meeting the other members of staff made my research far more visceral, especially when unpicking the misunderstandings of this area of mainstream French history.

Here is an image of the Groupe Tarzan, a clandestine group operating in the Côte-d'Or region. although the 7 Indochinese soldiers are unidentified, this image is useful in demonstrating how colonial soldiers stuck together.



IDENTIFYING SOUTH EAST ASIANS IN THE FRENCH RESISTANCE

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METHODOLOGY

Before visiting the military archives in Vincennes, Paris, my research consisted of reading literature and watching documentaries and film interpretations about Indochinese soldiers in France, this served to contextualise the socio-political circumstances which brought them there.

I first began identifying the regions, battalions and maquis where the Indochinese soldiers were based. I familiarised myself with online databases such as *Memoires des Hommes* and *Le Maitron* which offered the military background of many soldiers.

Memoires des Hommes in particular had a database of each battalion and clandestine group which enabled me to plot bands of Indochinese soldiers more efficiently, websites with information about memorials and where soldiers were buried also helped.

Books such as 'Les Travailleurs Indochinois' by Liêm-Khê Luguern and 'L'Empire Coloniale Sous Vichy' by Jacques Cantier and Eric Jennings uncovered the nature of Indochinese individuals' arrivals, explaining that they often fell into the maquis with little else to go/ to do, having been denied repatriation. Therefore, when regions and the names of groups reemerged I could paint a more vivid picture of how soldiers grouped together and influenced each other to fight, such as Diep Tran-Ngoc and the Vietnam Battalion in Marseille or the Groupe Tarzan in Dijon.

TRIP TO PARIS

I was lucky enough to travel to Paris in order to visit the national military archives in Vincennes as well as the National Resistance museum, the Liberation museum, the Mémorial des Martyrs de la Déportation and Fort Mont-Valérien. The museums and memorials helped build a foundation for my knowledge of the Resistance movement and contextualise the efforts of Indochinese soldiers in the larger framework. My visit to Fort Mont-Valérien also contextualised the impact of my research, connecting the work to its application as I witnessed the tours given around the memorial site where Resistance fighters were shot as well as visiting the new exhibition curated by Professor Nina Wardleworth. In the archives I accessed the personnel files of Indochinese soldiers, viewing their military contributions, letters of recommendation, police reports and personal accounts. This was crucial in formulating the fact files of the individuals as detailed as I could.

ARCHIVAL OBSTACLES

My findings in the archives were both bountiful and sometimes frustratingly measly. This took its toll on my stamina when it came to maintaining a positive mindset. I learned to embrace the peaks and troughs and it made the successes even more rewarding.

Gaps in the files revealed the institutional disadvantages for Indochinese families in receiving pension and recognition. I noticed these applications were often composed by Indochinese individuals who had little exposure to French administration before and were thus overwhelmed by paperwork, or lack thereof. Alternatively, family members would apply for recognition in retrospect and equally have insufficient paperwork or evidence. It became clear that institutional discrimination against Indochinese soldiers ran deep. Descriptions of personality proved insightful into the nature of Indochinese soldiers and in breaking down the stereotype of a weak and sensitive soldier. Indeed, it became clear that the success of individuals such as Diep Tran-Ngoc, Tu Tran Huho (gifted rifleman for the Maquis de l'Oisans) and Suu Nguyen Van was well-received but also came to surprise the other French soldiers. The latter was particularly interesting when it was clear that an unprecedented amount of loyalty and courage was demonstrated by the Indochinese soldier thus revealing the extent to which stereotypes had been entrenched into the French psyche.

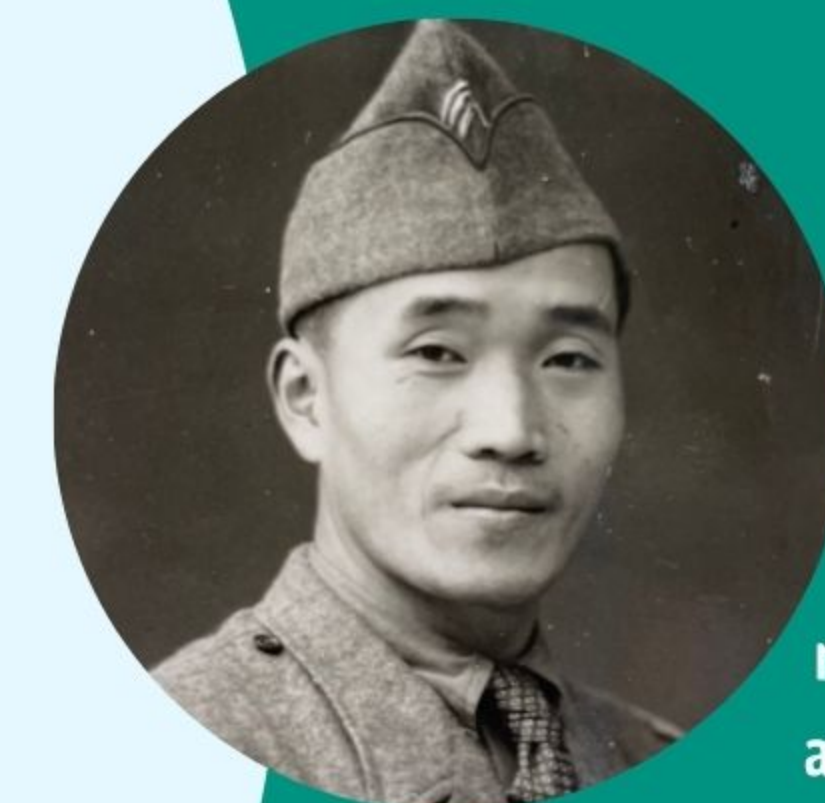
I found genealogy websites harder to navigate as I was blocked by access and certain information was unavailable. However, they occasionally proved useful in filling incomplete familial information I had gathered from the archives which was either outdated or simply incorrect.



Claude André Nguyen-Xuan-Mai

Arrived in Marseille in 1939 after volunteering in Thanh Hoa.

He was engaged in the 2^{ème} légion indochinoise where he worked at the powder factory in Bergerac. He was then in and out of war from 1941 to 1945, eventually staying in Bergerac working for the military health service in the medical ward



Lieutenant Colonel Diep Tran-Ngoc supervised the Vietnam Battalion.

Born in Tanan, Tran-Ngoc was responsible for the recruitment and organisation of Indochinese soldiers whilst also combatting against Vichy propaganda and blocking access to enemy troops.

Suu Nguyen Van

born in Tonkin, he was a former student and later absorbed the Battaillon Vietnam under the supervision of Diep Tran-Ngoc. He was particularly commended on his loyalty and his sense of camaraderie.



RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Indochinese independence was a campaign galvanising more support from natives during the 1940s. To contextualise the narratives of Indochinese soldiers at this time is of paramount importance in order to understand the colonial implications of their being there.

Von Chot is an example of a gentleman who was not repatriated after military contributions in 1930s and therefore found himself engaged in Resistance networks in the Marseille region until he was killed in action in 1944. What became clear is that there was no one conventional route to find oneself participating in the Resistance Movement. Some were volunteers from Indochina who arrived by ship in 1939, like Claude André Nguyen-Xuan-Mai, others were absorbed into local militia after working on nearby factories, often the case in Bergerac where many 'Travailleurs Indochinois' were located.

As the involvement of Indochinese soldiers in the Bergerac and Dordogne region had been covered by academics before, my supervisor and I discussed seeking stories from soldiers elsewhere. I was therefore delighted to find the Groupe Tarzan, pictured in the photo on the left-hand side, located near the Dijon region and much closer to the demarcation line than other findings I had come across.

Other exciting stories include the communist professor, Khuong An Huynh, who married a French woman active in Soviet sympathy groups. Huynh conspired with Resistant students in Paris as well as housing communists for asylum. He was eventually arrested on suspicion of collaboration with Resistors and was shot, like many others, at the Châteaubriant fortress.

