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## The Vildé Affair: Beginnings of the French Resistance

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Blumenson, Martin. *The Vildé Affair: Beginnings of the French Resistance*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977. 286pp.

Frequently history may seem removed from the lives of ordinary people because it deals with major figures, important decisions, and broad trends. But history is the record of what people have done. It is people who make it, who experience it, and who record it. Martin Blumenson's brilliant and sensitive account of the beginnings of the resistance in France is really an account of how a few educated men and women—representing the best examples of civilization—first viewed, then responded, and finally suffered under the Nazi occupation, which exemplified the most brutal, savage and dark side of man. It is a detailed history of the travails of individual men and women under extraordinary conditions.

The fall of France in June 1940, the subsequent German occupation of the northern portion of the country, and the establishment of a rump government at Vichy under the octogenarian Marshal Pétain left Frenchmen stunned. The German occupation was heavyhanded and oppressive even at first and later as food, clothing and other necessities became scarce, it was obvious to all that the Germans were looting the country. In addition, the mere presence of a foreign conqueror virtually insured unrest.

At the Museum of Man in Paris a group of intellectuals recognized from the first that the Nazis were the antithesis of civilization and all that makes life worthwhile. This group included an art historian, an anthropologist, and a librarian, among others. It was led by Boris Vildé, a gifted linguist, a remarkable man and a charismatic leader. Working slowly and cautiously, they succeeded not only in helping prisoners of war to escape from France, but also in obtaining and transmitting to the British detailed plans of the base at St.

Nazaire. They published and distributed several issues of an underground newspaper, *Résistance*. They were the first to use the word "résistance," which later became synonymous with the fight of the French people to liberate themselves.

Important as the political and historical implications of their activities may have been, they pale beside the real importance of Vildé and his group: nothing less than the triumph of man over the forces of evil and barbarism. It is true they were betrayed, captured and tried (surprisingly in a relatively fair trial with a scrupulous and conscientious military judge). Finally, seven were executed. Blumenson has used diaries and letters from Vildé and his group and he has exhaustively sought out and interviewed their friends and relatives, as well as survivors. Leaving no loose ends, he describes in clear, simple, lucid prose—the most difficult of all to write—how these cultivated men and women not only responded to extraordinary political and social conditions, but also how they courageously adjusted and reconciled themselves to the universals of love, hope and death. The import of this fast-paced, gripping and beautifully written book was summed up by the writer Claude Aveline, a surviving member of the Vildé group. "They would not accept a defeat a thousand times worse than military defeat—the defeat of man."

Alas, Vildé and the six others who were shot with him were only a few of the many courageous French men and women who died refusing to accept a defeat of man. In doing so, they reaffirmed the worth, the strength and the vitality of civilization.

B. MITCHELL SIMPSON III

Brereton, Lewis H. *The Brereton Diaries*. New York: Da Capo Press, 1976 [c. 1946]. 450pp.

The occasion for the republication after 30 years of *The Brereton Diaries* is