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The Brereton Diaries

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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

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not readily apparent. Nothing at all has been added (as, for example, a new introduction or statement of purpose), and one can only assume that this standard reference, long out of print, is needed by libraries whose original copies have disappeared. Lewis Hyde Brereton (1890-1967; USNA, 1911) served with the Air Force and its predecessor organizations continuously from 1912 to 1948. He had entered the Naval Academy in 1907 only because he couldn't get into West Point, and upon graduation switched to the Coast Artillery Corps and, a year later, the Aviation Section of the Signal Corps.

These diaries cover the period from 3 October 1941 through 8 May 1945, a period during which Brereton held an unmatched series of senior appointments in all major theaters of the war: Commander, Far East Air Forces at the opening of the war; then Commander, 5th Air Force; Commander, 10th Air Force (India, 1942); Commander, Middle East Air Forces (June 1942); Commander, 9th Air Force (Europe; October 1943); and Commander, 1st Allied Airborne Army (August 1944, in time to be in overall command of the airborne forces who sought out, under his deputy, British Lt. Gen. F.A.M. Browning, *A Bridge Too Far*). A paragraph written by Hanson W. Baldwin (USNA, 1924), when the book first appeared in 1946, remains valid.

'Louey' Brereton pulls no punches; he is aggressive and quick in sizing up a . . . situation and he can be frank to the point of tactlessness. From such a man one might expect, therefore, war diaries of startling impact. Yet the reader will find little that is exciting and not too much that is new in the present volume. Neither in content nor in style do they reflect the same reckless, restless vigor that personifies the author.

Despite Baldwin's disappointment, the account has value as an insider's

view of many important decisions, campaigns, and personalities of the war. For that reason it is still considered an integral part of the semiofficial literature of World War II.

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Bond, Brian and Roy, Ian, eds. *War and Society: A Yearbook of Military History*. New York: Holmes and Meier, 1977. v. II. 196pp.

The noted British military historians Brian Bond and Ian Roy are the editors of this collection of essays and book reviews. The editors state in the introduction of this yearbook that their purpose was "to provide a forum for the scholarly interest in war and its repercussions which has increased and broadened in recent years." Unfortunately, this thin volume fails to accomplish the purpose of its editors. Readers intent on finding a scholarly collection of essays on war comparable to E.M. Earle's *Makers of Modern Strategy* or Michael Howard's *The Theory and Practice of War* will be disappointed. The items that are of value in the yearbook are obscured by this volume's defects.

One drawback is its prohibitive price of \$25. For this amount the reader receives a poorly bound volume with typescript printing. The general impression thus created is that of a collection of undergraduate senior essays finished the night before the deadline, rather than a collection of thoughtful essays on a serious subject. Another drawback is that there is no connecting theme to the essays and reviews. Articles covering social, political, administrative, medical, diplomatic and archival aspects of military history appear in this volume without any meaningful introduction by the editors. Because of these drawbacks the reader is bound to ask himself whether time should be spent in the reading of this volume when the editors do