M'Fam: An African Soldier in Gabon, 1940

Mark Reeves

Introduction

Over three days in October 1940, Marcel M'Fam, a 33 year-old Gabonese first-class guard in the French colonial army, decided to go home and spend time with his wife rather than return to his post. His desertion, along with that of a comrade, created a minor stir in the Gabonese Army during the fall of 1940, at a time when Vichy and Gaullist forces battled for control of the African territory. Throughout his journey, M'Fam was presented with orders from French authority figures from both camps.[1] His reactions to these authorities, and his explanations in the colonial archive, provide valuable insight into African perceptions of the French Empire and highlight the largely ambivalent attitude African soldiers had towards the French state. M'Fam's decisions demonstrated little concern for the national or political affiliations of the Europeans competing for his obedience. Instead, his actions addressed his own concerns and desires.

M'Fam was one of approximately 30,000 troops under French command throughout sub-Saharan Africa in 1940. Most of France's African forces (the famed but misnamed *tirailleurs sénégalaises*) remained in the metropole, where they had been concentrated since the declaration of war in 1939. Once Germany defeated France in June 1940, the *tirailleurs sénégalaises* found themselves trapped in Europe. Consequently, France's military strength in sub-Saharan Africa constituted mere "sovereignty forces," totaling approximately 17,500 soldiers, 86% of them African "natives."[2]

France's partial occupation meant uncertainty as to who governed its empire abroad. At the behest of the fleeing French government, Marshal Philippe Pétain established a new

government at Vichy and signed armistices with Axis powers. Rather than accept this new government, on June 18th, a little-known general, Charles de Gaulle, made an appeal to Frenchmen everywhere over the BBC. De Gaulle claimed that he represented the legitimate French government, which rejected Pétain's agreement with Axis powers. This "Gaullist" call created a dilemma for French colonials throughout French Equatorial and West Africa, particularly those neighboring British territories. They were forced to decide whether they should accept the legitimacy of de Gaulle's movement and continue cooperating with Britain against Italy and Germany, or demobilize in accordance with Vichy's armistice. Conflict over who to support generated profound political divisions throughout the French Empire.

While de Gaulle' vacuous claims to authority inspired Frenchmen across French Equatorial Africa (AEF) to rally to him, those in Gabon did not. On August 26, 1940, French Guyana-born Félix Éboué supported the French colony of Chad when its military announced their alliance with Charles de Gaulle.[3] At two o'clock the following morning, de Gaulle landed with less than thirty Frenchmen at Douala in Cameroon. With a few key allies, they seized control of the city and proclaimed themselves in control of the entire colony, announcing that it would henceforth be aligned with Free France.[4] On August 28, 1940, another Gaullist envoy crossed from Léopoldville (now Kinshasa) in the Belgian Congo to Brazzaville in the French Moyen-Congo and ousted its pro-Vichy governor.[5] The next day, the governor of Oubangui-Chari (now the Central African Republic) announced that his territory would also align with de Gaulle, prompting a brief battle with a pro-Vichy army officer for control of the capital.[6] By August 29th, Gaullist rallies across AEF left only Gabon under Vichy control. However, by November 1940, Gabon would also come under the banner of Free France.

Outside France and Central Africa, few have heard this early chapter in the Second World War, and it has generated almost no historical scholarship in English. Even within French literature and the limited English-language historiography, more has been written about Pétain's Vichy government in French West Africa (AOF).[7] Furthermore, Jérôme Ollandet's singular history of Brazzaville under the Gaullists laments the fact that although there is a history of these Gaullist rallies (at least in French), "the portion of the history of this era which remains unwritten is that of the natives."[8] While historians of Gabon have done excellent work constructing events and processes from African perspectives, their research has not examined the events of 1940 in significant detail.[9] Like many AEF rallies, the Gabon campaign has had scant coverage, with only brief overviews included in the recent historiography.[10]

Gabon's story appears, at least superficially, to be told in the context of a European war that was taking place on African soil by happenstance. While it is a story about Europeans' actions in European-ruled colonies, African actors pervade the story, especially as soldiers.[11] Without an African perspective of the events between August and November 1940, we lose the voices of the majority of those involved and affected. Therefore, Marcel M'Fam's story – which is well documented but never historically analyzed - provides an African's perspective, albeit filtered through colonial interlocutors, of broader geopolitical shifts.

By October 1940, the Gabonese town where M'Fam was stationed was occupied by Gaullist forces. The Gaullists' arrival forced M'Fam to decide which French officers to obey - those of the Vichy government, or the newly arrived Gaullists. This chapter focuses on the few times when M'Fam had the power to exercise his own agency and decide which group to obey. At these junctures, M'Fam obeyed orders selectively as long as possible; using this leeway to pursue his own agenda while showing antipathy for both Vichy and Gaullist authority. M'Fam, like many

other Africans, was neither a passive observer nor a Francophile Gaullist. In M'Fam's opinion, France's global position carried little weight. His decision-making shows us, that for at least one African soldier in Equatorial Africa, pragmatic self-preservation and self-interest overshadowed political loyalties.

Even before the summer of 1940, the unpredictability of war and poor long-distance communication had made life in AEF confusing and disruptive for those tied to the colonial state. Mobilizations and demobilizations throughout 1939 and 1940 left many uncertain when France actually entered into the war. When reality finally set in after France's defeat, observers described a "stupor" settling over Gabon's capital, Libreville.[12]

Gabon's governor, Pierre Masson, made an announcement shortly after the fall of France and de Gaulle's announcement, affirming that "Gabon is prepared to continue the fight as long as it will be necessary."[13] Concurrently, posters advocating the territory's rally to General de Gaulle appeared, but after the British bombing of French naval forces at Oran (Algeria) in early July, enthusiasm for the British-aligned with de Gaulle wavered. Throughout the summer, Gabon remained quiet. Gaullists were stirring, with a petition demanding that Gabon rally to Free France circulating clandestinely in mid-July. However, the petition was discovered by the territory's naval commander, Labouesse, and Masson threatened to arrest the activists. After this incident, the movement failed to gain traction, even after the arrival of a Gaullist from Brazzaville in mid-August.[14] Activity picked up in Gabon only after news arrived of Gaullist victories elsewhere in AEF.

As news poured in, pressure grew for Gabon to rally to de Gaulle. During the nights of August 28th and 29th, Governor Masson held an emergency meeting with local leaders, with the group deciding to rally with the other AEF colonies.[15] This decision generated a rapid reaction

from local residents. A counter-petition, protesting the fact that the population had not been consulted, emerged on the afternoon of August 29th at a Libreville café and quickly gathered signatures.[16]

A civil disturbance then broke out on August 30th, when a submarine dispatched from Vichy-controlled Dakar arrived in Libreville's harbor. Labouesse, who had quashed the pro-de Gaulle petition in mid-July, secured the wharf and allowed the submarine to dock. Joined by other soldiers and pro-Vichy civilians, Labouesse greeted and boarded the submarine. Some confusion ensued when the local militia commander confronted the pro-Vichy crowd after some men seized several rifles, but was apparently convinced to stand down. The submarine's crew and Labouesse then disembarked safely. Finally, Labouesse, the submarine commander, and the Archbishop of Libreville proceeded to consult with Governor Masson, and a handful of other leaders. Masson then appeared outside the Chamber of Commerce to explain that he reversed his decision to rally to de Gaulle and fully acknowledged Pétain's leadership from Vichy. One French merchant cried, "Vive de Gaulle!" in protest, but the crowd soon dispersed and Gabon again found itself in the Vichy camp.[17]

This event is important for two reasons. First, it set the stage for the military conflict that followed. Second, it illustrates the absence of African involvement in the Gabonese political struggle. Even though Libreville was one of the few unsegregated urban spaces in colonial Africa, no French archival materials indicate any African involvement in the disputes of summer 1940.[18] While this void suggests that the colonial state was largely disinterested in African perspectives, it may also mean that Africans were indifferent to the Vichy-Gaullist conflict. These dynamics are central to the story of Marcel M'Fam, whose outlook on the French colonial enterprise helps explain the lack of African voices in the Libreville protests.

The Gaullist territories of AEF quickly aligned themselves with Cameroon to conquer Gabon through military action. The campaign was aided by certain departments within Gabon that ignored Masson's reversal.[19] For the next month, the military situation remained static as both sides organized themselves. After de Gaulle and a British-backed force of Frenchmen failed in their attempt to rally AOF forces at Dakar to the Gaullist cause in late September, Free French commanders were forced to regroup. Soon they developed a strategy to invade Gabon through a two-front attack. One French Gaullist officer would lead African troops located in Douala into northern Gabon, while another would lead African troops from Moyen-Congo into southern Gabon. These two forces would then unite and converge on Libreville.

Marcel M'Fam and Kombila Mombo: Between Two Sides of the Same Coin

Marcel M'Fam first encountered the Free France movement when Gaullist troops under the command of a Lieutenant Desbiey moved north from Moyen-Congo to his post at Booué in Gabon. The Gaullist forces reached and occupied Booué on October 7, 1940, ousting a pro-Vichy *chef du department* named Fontaine. M'Fam and the other African soldiers stationed at Booué saw France's *agent spécial*, Goedert, "harangue" the Gaullists' African soldiers, loudly making known "his sentiments of attachment to the government of Vichy and pronouncing injurious words regarding the chiefs of the Free French movement." After this awkward welcome, the Gaullist commander completed his "occupation" of Booué without incident and replaced the *chef du département*, Fontaine. Goedert then returned to his duties, promising to be on his best behavior.[20] M'Fam and others must have noted the hostility between the Frenchmen and recognized the broader conflict among Frenchmen in Gabon.[21] He must also have noted that the Vichy

administration at Booué, despite having military forces at its disposal, chose only to fight back with profanities.

In this charged atmosphere, ex-*chef du département* Fontaine sent M'Fam out to escort several "deserters" to Koula Moutou (about 130 kilometers south-southeast of Booué). In his later testimony about these events, M'Fam still referred to Fontaine as "chef du département," despite Fontaine's public ouster. More importantly, M'Fam complied with the order despite Fontaine's apparent lack of either authority or power.[22]

M'Fam complied with the powerless Fontaine in order to follow his own routine and his own pursuits. He took advantage of official business, and perhaps the equatorial rainforest, in order to create a window of unsupervised time to take an unusual route to and from Koula Moutou. As M'Fam made his way back from Koula Moutou, he stopped at Mangaba rather than return directly to Booué. It was here that M'Fam "found his wife."[23] Since Fontain's order was routine, M'Fam had likely used such opportunities to create a personal space before; the Gaullist occupation did not modify his agenda.

M'Fam followed his own inclinations as he responded to changes in the political environment, opting to follow his own directives rather than those of his European superiors. While still at Mangaba, a messenger from Booué arrived to tell M'Fam not to return to Booué. M'Fam chose not to comply, saying that "I continued my route toward Booué…despite this [warning]."[24] M'Fam had obeyed Fontain, an ousted official, who had given him a routine order. However, when presented with an out-of-the-ordinary order, M'Fam chose not to comply and to continue on his own routine instead.

The following day, October 22, M'Fam walked to another village, "where [he] wanted to sleep."[25] There, he met Emmanuel Ango, a fellow Gabon native and prisoner of the garrison at

Booué who worked as a clerk in Goedert's office.[26] Ango gave him a letter from Goedert, the French official who had berated the Gaullist forces when they arrived several weeks before. Ango instructed M'Fam to deliver the letter to a pro-Vichy French commander, who was leading troops upriver to reclaim Booué from the Gaullists. He told M'Fam to travel by night in order to avoid being seen "by the guards the new whites led up from Moyen-Congo." After returning with Ango to the outskirts of Booué around twilight, M'Fam waited until darkness and then embarked out toward the column of oncoming Vichy troops.[27]

At this point, M'Fam had been drawn directly into the intra-French military conflict in Gabon. He had received explicit orders to avoid Gaullist authority in order to help Vichy forces commit violence against their own countrymen. M'Fam chose to obey orders from the pro-Vichy Goedert, as he had from Fontaine, once again siding against the Gaullists. Goedert was a known quantity, unlike the newly arrived Gaullists. Rather than an ideological attachment to Vichy or to Goedert, the familiarity with Goedert likely explains M'Fam's compliance.

On the 23rd, M'Fam went as far as Zoanki, some 30 kilometers from Booué, before hearing that the detachment he had been told to intercept had already returned to its post. Apparently, the Vichy force had turned back after hearing "that Booué had been occupied by Saras from Moyen-Congo."[28] M'Fam remained in Zoanki, perhaps deliberating over what to do next. Then, while in Zoanki, he claimed he heard that a sergeant had come looking for him, dispatched the previous day by the Gaullist commander at Booué who had finally noticed M'Fam's absence.[29]

Nothing stopped M'Fam from intercepting the Vichy soldiers now returning to their post. If M'Fam had wanted to actively subvert the authority of the Gaullist administration in Booué by aiding the military force moving against it, he could have done so. At this juncture, M'Fam had the choice of which French authority to obey. Although M'Fam chose not to subvert the Gaullists,

we have little indication of his motivation for doing so. Faced with the uncertainty of the situation, M'Fam opted to stay where he was. While waiting, he heard that he was being pursued. In his testimony to the Gaullist authorities after these events, M'Fam claimed that he "did not want to flee," and so began returning toward Booué.[30]

The news of his pursuit clarified M'Fam's options on the 23rd. Whereas he had operated outside European surveillance since his departure for Koula Moutou, the Gaullist administration now exerted some power over his actions. At this point M'Fam may have evaluated the personal risks in his choice of authority. Having seen Booué's capitulation under paltry verbal abuse and the lack of confidence in the Vichy force advancing toward Booué, M'Fam must have realized that disobeying the apparently stronger Gaullists might have more dire consequences than would disobeying the Vichy. M'Fam appears to confirm this interpretation when, in his interrogation by Lieutenant Desbiey, he explained unprompted that he knew the contents of Goedert's letter.

M'Fam got about 10 kilometers closer to Booué before being met by his pursuer and surrendering to him.[31] M'Fam and his tracker rested in the village where they met, and then returned to Booué the next morning, October 24th.[32] From this evidence, M'Fam did not make his choices out of any particular preference for the Gaullist cause, or any political sentiment whatsoever. Instead, M'Fam showed antipathy for both authorities competing for his obedience. M'Fam made his decisions on whom to obey when based on routine, ease of compliance, and personal risk. Each of these were judged by M'Fam's desire for a small space of autonomy in the tumult of the Franco-French conflict in Gabon.

M'Fam's decisions also occurred largely outside the surveillance of Europeans. M'Fam's circuitous path demonstrates Frederick Cooper's characterization of colonial power in Africa as "arterial," concentrated in isolated outposts that penetrating colonial territory inconsistently.[33] In

a loosely populated colony such as Gabon, European power did not extend directly beyond these colonial outposts, giving an African such as M'Fam considerable autonomy in the interstitial space between European settlements. One French author, writing about the Gabon campaign, noted that "the equatorial forest constituted by itself" an obstacle akin to those of an opposing army. Africans such as M'Fam could use Europeans' difficulty in penetrating these forests to create a space of autonomous action and self-direction.[34]

However absent European oversight may have been, M'Fam's decisions did not occur in isolation. Other African soldiers made similar decisions when faced with the decision of whether to obey Gaullist or pro-Vichy authorities. Kombila Mombo, another Gabonese native stationed at Booué, also received orders from Goedert. Kombila claimed Ango summoned him to Goedert's office the night of October 22, the same day Goedert sent Ango to intercept M'Fam. In Goedert's office, Goedert ordered Kombila "to walk to Touka [a post downriver from Booué] tonight," paying attention not to be "arrested by the guards that the new whites have brought here." If the guards from Libreville are not at Touka, Kombila was to continue all the way to N'Djolé, a larger post farther downriver, in order to "leave [a letter, written in Alsatian] with Monsieur Hommel."[35] Much like M'Fam, and at approximately the same time, Kombila was presented with an opportunity to actively undermine Gaullist forces. Also like M'Fam, Kombila complied with Goedert's orders, although within limits.

At first, Kombila had the same ease as M'Fam in complying with Goedert's orders. He encountered no soldiers of any kind during his nighttime march to Touka. Upon arriving there on the morning of October 23, Kombila made a similar discovery as M'Fam did when he had reached Zoanki; that the pro-Vichy soldiers had turned around to return to N'Djolé. Despite Goedert's orders to go as far as N'Djolé, Kombila "decided to return to Booué."[36] While M'Fam only failed

to continue toward N'Djolé after hearing of the Vichy retreat, Kombila actively disobeyed Goedert, reversing the previous day's decision to comply with Goedert's orders.

Kombila claimed to be unaware that he was, like M'Fam, being pursued by Gaullist-commanded African soldiers dispatched from Booué. While en route from Touka back towards Booué, Kombila encountered these men and complied with them once he learned of their mission.[37] The Gaullist-dispatched Africans confirmed Kombila's story, telling how they had seen him from the banks of the Ogooué River in a boat headed back toward Booué. They testified that Kombila "made no difficulty in coming to Booué."[38]

Kombila, like M'Fam, demonstrated a profound disinterest in the political identities of the French. Within 48 hours, he obeyed orders from both Gaullist and Vichy authorities. He responded, like M'Fam, to familiarity and convenience. One of the Africans who tracked Kombila told Desbiey that Kombila had returned toward Booué because he "had not wanted to go any farther and push toward N'Djolé."[39] According to another tracker, Kombila simply "preferred" to forego a long trip to N'Djolé.[40] Although this does not offer the fullest explanation of why Kombila chose not to obey his Vichy orders, we can see that Kombila was not making a politicized choice between de Gaulle and Vichy.

Contesting Perspectives of Africans' Agency

Kombila's preference over orders from Europeans represents his and M'Fam's broader control over their own paths. We can use their testimonies to go beyond the small spaces of independence they carved out of their chaotic wartime environment. Following the tried-and-true method of using oral sources to read colonial documents against the grain, M'Fam and Kombila's testimonies can upend the Gaullist-Vichy narrative of the Gabon campaign, since with their stories we can see the Gabon campaign from ideologically ambivalent African eyes and precisely locate African agency within a colonial context.[41]

At the most basic level, the presence of M'Fam and Kombila's testimonies in the colonial archive demonstrates their ability to assert control over their own stories. Both used their testimonies to appeal to a specific audience, claiming to know nothing of Vichy plots in order to exonerate themselves. Theoretically, Kombila and M'Fam could have depoliticized their narratives entirely, but instead tailored their testimonies to Gaullist authorities in order to absolve themselves of any willful capitulation in Goedert's plot. Both men were interviewed by Desbiey, who had begun investigating Africans in contact with Goedert after his arrest on the 23rd. Desbiey interviewed Kombila, and the men sent to track him down, after their return on the 24th. He then interviewed M'Fam and his tracker on the 26th. However, at this point M'Fam had had almost two days to craft a testimony. M'Fam insisted "I did not know what this letter contained" when he handed over the letter Ango had given to him from Goedert.[42]

With less time before his interrogation, Kombila made a similar statement. He justified his initial obedience to Goedert by telling his interrogator that "Monsieur Goedert [was] my direct superior [and] I had no reason not to obey him." Kombila also implicated two Europeans in his testimony, which the Gaullists took seriously enough to investigate for two more days.[43] Only after

another African contradicted Kombila's testimony did he relent on European involvement.[44] The Gaullists revealed their low opinion of African testimony, though, by apparently disregarding this inconsistency and allowing the two French colonials to escape arrest and trial. Kombila may have attempted to manipulate the Gaullists' suspicions, though without further testimony we cannot be certain.

The testimonies are yet another example of how Africans represented themselves and shaped their narratives to follow their own predispositions and escape European discipline. Less abstractly, virulent anti-Gaullists recognized and feared the possibility of African empowerment during the Booué incidents. They feared that the Gaullist-Vichy dispute had disrupted colonial solidarity and reversed the racial power dynamic. Goedert was duly arrested and sent to Brazzaville for prosecution. Shortly afterward, Goedert described his arrest on October 23rd and attempted to evoke the racial sensibilities of his fellow French colonials by portraying himself as the victim of terrible black violence unleashed by the Gaullists. By his account:

> …the unchained brutes would no longer obey anyone. The guards pushed away [the Gaullist official] himself in order to lay upon M. Fontaine [another pro-Vichy official at Booué] and myself. They estimated [I] was dangerous enough to tie my arms and legs up… They finally threw me down on the ground, in the middle of a puddle, and accosted me with insults and threats, saying that it was because of me that they had to post guard in the rain and that it broke them, that I was Chief of the Subdivision and that I had done nothing to find them anything to eat. They added: 'You are a white German, we could kill you, no problem. …' …The canoe-rowers started making ironic reflections, comparing me to Jesus Christ. They presented me dirty water to drink. One of them said: 'The White there is too strong, he will save himself.'[45]

In Goedert's opinion, then, African soldiers vented about longstanding personal resentments and used the Gaullist takeover to reduce him to their subordinate. The power reversal was manifested in how they threw Goedert down, totally constrained his motion, verbally abused him and threatened to kill him. By identifying Goedert as "German," the soldiers also showed their awareness of the political dynamics of the Franco-French conflict, namely over the collaboration

of the Vichy regime with Nazi Germany. Where Kombila's testimony may reveal a subtle attempt to manipulate the Vichy-Gaullist conflict to pursue his own interests against specific Europeans, Goedert claimed that these events constituted a frightening breakdown in the colonial order and a dangerous level of freedom for Africans.

However, it is wise to read Goedert's account with a degree of skepticism. He emphasized points likely to scandalize colonial racial sensibilities by emphasizing the violence of blacks against whites. In fact, the main target of his critique was the Gaullists, for whom he blamed for unchaining "the brutes." By portraying Gaullists as a dangerous challenge to the colonial racial order, Goedert sought to delegitimize the movement. He even appealed to the religious sensibilities of other Frenchmen by placing himself as the mocked and martyred Christ, which could also represent a complex and ironic appropriation of the colonial Catholic message to the Africans. Goedert's claims mirrored other anti-Gaullists, most notably Raymond Waag, who composed a nearly 100-page letter to Marshal Pétain detailing the racial travesties visited upon him while in Gaullist custody.[46] Goedert's companion Fontaine apparently lamented after revealing a rifle blow to his head from an African soldier that "he had never, even during [the First World War] when he had been in so much more danger, lived in such times."[47] Finally, another pro-Vichy official in Gabon complained of "ever more arrogant" guards during his captivity.[48] Goedert's complaints, then, fit into a broader discourse seeking to discredit Gaullism by its laxity in European-African power relations. However, his complaints do not necessarily indicate an actual reversal in racial relations.

Even if exaggerated, the claims by Goedert and Waag likely refer to a sense of empowerment over traditional colonial masters felt by African soldiers. By choosing the right side, African soldiers could create fluid situations and reverse the power dynamics of colonial life while

Europeans fought other Europeans. Pierre Kalck, writing about contemporary Gaullist-Vichy struggles in Oubangui-Chari, noted that Africans must have noticed that "for the first time, captured French officers were going [down the river], guarded by black soldiers," rather than the other way round.[49] Likewise, Ollandet insisted that, in Brazzaville, "the impact, on the psychological level, that this fighting between Frenchmen created among the Africans, was important. For the first time these populations – the natives – were called on to help some Frenchmen to combat other Frenchmen!"[50] Such historical evaluations and the aforementioned European complaints indicate at least some African empowerment. While Europeans fought themselves, Africans could assert power in the brief moments that sanctioned African violence against particular Europeans. However, these are relatively limited examples, representing liminal breaks in the European rule.

This reading of power-reversal in the Gabon campaign must ultimately be compared with the most striking demonstration of African independency in these events, their outright refusal to be co-opted into the Gaullist-Vichy struggle, or even the Allied-Axis conflict. The African perspectives found in the Booué depositions give small clues into how African soldiers conceived the conflict, clarifying our understanding of "what Africans thought about the symbolic structure of colonial power or the identities being inscribed on them."[51] Both M'Fam and Kombila claimed that Ango and Goedert, respectively, referred to the Gaullist invaders as 'the guards' brought in by the "new whites." The racialized (white) rather than nationalized or politicized (French or Gaullist) terms applied to the opponent may reflect that Africans categorized their colonial dominators less as French, German, pro-Vichy or Gaullist, but as past and present subjugators. Thus, invaders were referred to as "new whites," with their African military forces seen as

"brought" or "led" into Gabon.[52] Rather than Vichy or Gaullist, or even French or English, the Europeans were merely 'whites.'

This undifferentiated view of the Europeans also appeared elsewhere in the Gaullist struggle for Equatorial Africa. Henri-Richard Manga Mado, a Cameroonian laborer writing in 1970, offered a similar articulation of how Africans viewed Europeans. Pressed into service of the Gaullists in 1940, Manga Mado remembered that "we had to recognize that, certainly, 'the White is the same,' whether he be English, French or German." Furthermore, he spoke of the Second World War as a "war between enemy white tribes."[53] Pierre Messmer, French Prime Minister under the Fifth Republic, also remembered his time as a soldier stationed in AEF after the rallies. He claimed that "in Gabon…the Blacks were passive: for them, the debates and eventually the combat stayed 'the Whites' business' in which it was wise not to get mixed up. There would always be time to rally to the victor."[54] Ollandet claimed that for Africans, the change of French authorities in AEF "was simply a change in master," after which "the African masses accommodated themselves to the new *modus vivendi*."[55] Rather than viewing the Second World War, or the French conflict in Gabon, as politicized narratives, Africans like M'Fam, Kombila and Manga Mado displayed indifference, dismissed them as conflicts over white men's differences, and accommodated themselves to the victors in the name of self-preservation.

M'Fam and Kombila's easy switch between Vichy and Gaullist commanders illustrates their indifference, but their articulations of indifference to the political identities of the Europeans they interacted with suggest an even deeper antipathy to European rule. M'Fam and Kombila's stories demonstrate a noticeable concern for their own security, their own convenience and their own agendas. Compounded with their antipathy for their European overlords, they personify the difference Frederick Cooper makes between conscious, politicized resistance and small-scale,

individual actions of resistance. Rather than engaging in consciously political acts, M'Fam, Kombila, and other Africans seem focused on following their own paths. While their paths sometime intersected with European authority, they ignored it whenever possible.[56] Whereas Cooper argues that "little actions [of resistance] can add up to something big" and identifies the historical problematic as "link[ing] the potential with the dynamics of a political process," the cases of M'Fam, Kombila, and others show that the very absence of political processes of 'Resistance' can refocus individuals and groups into apolitical acts of 'resistance' that ignore the existence of colonial power as much as possible.[57] Recent French scholarship has noted this African antipathy, but has failed to recognize the potential political value in such indifference to European projects.[58]

Without more extensive oral testimony from African soldiers of the Gabon campaign, our comprehension of their perspectives and intentions remains incomplete. However, M'Fam and Kombila's testimonies offer a small window into the African side of a typically European story. The most striking aspect of M'Fam and Kombila's stories remains the power both men had to chart their own paths outside European surveillance, to make choices about which authorities to obey, and then to shape their own narratives. In these ways, M'Fam, Kombila, and likely many other African soldiers during the Gabon campaign confirm Jeremy Rich's depictions of Africans in late 1930s Gabon. Whether they were clerks defending themselves against corruption charges or lumberjacks and chiefs "evading surveillance and confounding efforts by officials to survey their activities,"[59] the inability of French authorities to control M'Fam and Kombila was due to the "fluid and chaotic nature of European authority."[60] This is not to deny the French state's interference in African affairs. After all, the Gaullists tracked down and interrogated both M'Fam and Kombila. However, the Gaullists only brought M'Fam and Kombila back by dispatching other

Africans to find them, and both M'Fam and Kombila shaped their own narratives to shield themselves. Therefore, recognizing the greater power of Europeans "does not negate the importance of African agency in determining the shape the encounter took."[61] This was as true during the initial European penetrations of Africa as it was in 1940 Gabon.

From Booué to Libreville and Beyond

In the absence of similar records, M'Fam and Kombila can offer insight into African agency during other events in the Gabon campaign. This field is particularly rich for further research since other events created similar opportunities for African soldiers to decide which French authority to obey and thus reclaim power and authority over Europeans. For example, at Mayumba a small group of Gaullist Europeans and the Africans under their command executed a ruse to force the surrender of the port. Despite their small numbers, the mission was successful because the African soldiers stationed there "assumed" the unfamiliar Europeans they encountered to be in command, and therefore "followed" them with little question.[62] The deference of African soldiers to European officers evidenced in this incident suggests a widespread African indifference to which French authority was in command. As in the case of M'Fam and Kombila in Booué, deference was given to race rather than political authority or even national identity. However, unlike Kombila and M'Fam, these soldiers did not enjoy the same circumstantial or geographical flexibility, and the colonial archive did not record their voices.

Another recurrent phenomenon in the Gabon campaign was the abandonment of colonial towns by pro-Vichy French officers while African soldiers remained and rallied to the Gaullist forces. This phenomenon offered African soldiers the possibility of exercising their own judgment for self-preservation by choosing which French authority they would comply with. This first

occurred at Mitzic, captured by the Gaullist force descending from Cameroon. Gaullist air forces bombed Mitzic, whereupon the European officers and colonists abandoned the town, fleeing toward Libreville or Spanish Guinea (now Equatorial Guinea). The African soldiers who remained accepted the Gaullist authority.[63] The same happened at Lambaréné, where the flight of the Vichy officers resulted in the looting of the city, apparently by the African soldiers left there.[64] French contemporaries traded blame for whether Gaullist or Vichy officers prompted this event, but neither believed that Africans could have acted in their own self-interest and taking advantage of a power vacuum to enrich themselves.[65] British observers reported to London that "native troops [were] wandering around Lambaréné without arms."[66] Whatever the circumstances at Lambaréné and Mitzic, Africans' failure to follow their officers reflected their ability to adapt to changing military and political situations. Recognizing the Gaullists' military superiority after aerial bombing and Vichy flight, Africans chose the winning side. While the events at Lambaréné and Mitzic did not generate the same level of French interest in African perspectives as Booué, we can extrapolate from M'Fam and Kombila's stories that Africans did indeed forge their own paths throughout the Gabon campaign, at least until the capture of Libreville on November 9, 1940.

This reconstruction of the Gabon campaign proves especially important because it contradicts Gaullist constructions of these events. Gaullists projected their desire to defeat Vichy and Germany onto Africans. At various points during and shortly after the war, Gaullists attributed their victory in Equatorial Africa to native African indignation of Pétain's armistice with the Nazis, to African anti-German attitudes, and to African pro-French attitudes.[67] These narratives always spoke of "Africans" and "natives" in a generalized sense, without giving individual Africans the opportunity to explain their own actions. Instead, Africans provided silent slates onto which Gaullists could project their movement's mythology. Henri Laurentie, the Gaullist governor and

key ally of Félix Éboué during the rally of Chad, claimed that Africans had been drawn to Gaullism through imagery taken from de Gaulle's obsession with honor and glory. Africans saw in Gaullism "a grandeur, perhaps indefinable, but certain."[68] Failing to identify individuals, Laurentie spoke in 1946 of the "unanimous" population of AEF having "a personal attachment to General de Gaulle, as much as a man as a symbol."[69]

Gaullists also engaged in pseudo-cultural explanations for alleged African support, claiming that Africans naturally gravitated toward Gaullism. Indeed, one source claimed that an African narrative could be found in the struggle between Pétain and de Gaulle, with Pétain representing "respect for the ancestors" and de Gaulle representing "the young warriors animated by the spirit of honor, against the abuses of the so-called ancestors." Laurentie saw de Gaulle as a mythic hero "who inspired the griots to represent, at least confusedly, the hero who would lead the French and the Blacks to a victory in which dignity would be equally shared among one and the other."[70] Even later generations of Gaullists have imbibed this legacy. A military historian of the Gaullist rallies in Equatorial Africa spoke of how "the faithfulness and ardor of [African] troops owed much in part to the ancestral prestige given the status of 'warrior' at the heart of these societies."[71] These generalizations completely erased African agency by characterizing their actions as instinctive, culturally-predetermined responses after subsuming all African culture into a generalized, erasing plot.

Gaullist narratives erased African agency in Gabon even after the military campaign. Thus, Gaullist political agents in Gabon monitoring the post-campaign situation assumed African passivity and absolved certain Africans of their loyalty to the Vichy regime by citing their manipulation or cultural inclinations. A Gaullist intelligence report that acknowledged support among certain ethnic groups in Libreville for the pro-Vichy government (notably the Poungwé)

cited the overwhelming influence of the local Catholic Society in shaping African opinion. Since "the majority [of Poungwé] belong to the Catholic Society," they also "[belonged] to the general views of the President [Petain]," and therefore their views were "that of Vichy [rather than de Gaulle]."[72] Any intensely interesting political and religious dynamics of Africans engaging with the intra-French dispute disappeared beneath Gaullists claims that Africans simply echoed European views. However, in light of M'Fam and Kombila's stories and recent scholarship on African agency in Gabon, African passivity should neither be assumed nor seen as unproblematic.

The incidents at Booué in late October 1940 counteract these Gaullist narratives of African passivity and malleability. Instead, they show that behind and between the larger military movements within Gabon, Africans operated with their own agendas in an environment of fluid authority and negotiated a new position for themselves in the wake of the Gaullist takeover. These Africans assumed their own power to such an extent that they felt the need to defend the rationale behind their actions, or preempt accusations of cooperation with pro-Vichy administrators. Since these factors were present in such a localized case, historians should explore other stories of African agency, at least during the military operations in Gabon, which parallel those of M'Fam and Kombila. Further examples may not have the same official documentation, but oral and local historians in Gabon may discover additional examples of African activities outside European control during this period. The chaos of wartime may have been liberating to these African soldiers, providing an opportunity to reach beyond the regimentation of European colonialism and even claim precious power over Europeans. Even by demonstrating antipathy for French authorities, Vichy and Gaullist alike, African soldiers took control of their own stories. However, in light of Gaullist historical distortions, these stories need to be told.

References

Albertelli, Sébastien. Atlas de la France Libre: De Gaulle et la France Libre, une aventure politique. Paris: Éditions Autrement, 2010.

Archives de la Congrégation du Saint-Esprit 4J1.7b3 (108386): Gabon ("Dossier Berger"), pièce 1: P. Berger, "Les événements tragiques du Gabon: L'après-guerre au Gabon (Juin-Décembre 1940)."

Archives Nationales de France 72AJ/225/1/pièce 2: "Témoignage de Monsieur le Gouverneur LAURENTIE Délégué adjoint de la France à la commission du "Trusteeship" témoignage recueilli par Melle GOUINEAU, le 19 octobre 1948 à Versailles (O.N.U.)."

Archives Nationales de France 72AJ/238/1/pièce 3: Jean-Noël Vincent, "Les Aventures du Patriotisme, ou de l'Origine, du Recrutement, des Motivations des Forces Françaises Libres" (Service Historique de l'Armée de Terre; Communication présentée dans le cadre du 103° Congrès National des Sociétés Savantes Metz-Nancy avril 1978).

Archives Nationales d'Outre-Mer AEF/GGAEF/5D/187 (La Deuxième Guerre mondiale): "Rapport des télégrammes de Boisson, été 1940."

Archives Nationales d'Outre-Mer AEF/GGAEF/5D/187 (La Deuxième Guerre mondiale): Monsieur Gachon, "Témoignages sur les évènements qui se sont déroulés, à Libreville du 15 juin à fin août 1940," annex 6 to Letter from Raymond Waag (prisoner at Lambaréné) to Maréchal Pétain (April 23, 1941).

Archives Nationales d'Outre-Mer AEF/GGAEF/5D/187 (La Deuxième Guerre mondiale): Letter from Raymond Waag (prisoner at Lambaréné) to Maréchal Pétain (April 23, 1941).

Archives Nationales d'Outre-Mer AEF/GGAEF/5D/187 (La Deuxième Guerre mondiale): "Rapport du Lieutenant d'Infanterie Coloniale Desbiey Jules, de l'État-Major du Commandant Supérieur des Troupes de l'A.E.F., chef du détachement de Booué à Monsieur le Commandant Supérieur des Troupes de l'A.E.F. Brazzaville."

Archives Nationales d'Outre-Mer AEF/GGAEF/5D/187 (La Deuxième Guerre mondiale): Goedert, "Rapport sur les évènements qui se sont produits au poste de Booué, Chef-Lieu du Département du Djouah, pendant la journée du 23 Octobre 1940."

Archives Nationales d'Outre-Mer AEF/GGAEF/5D/187 (Deuxième Guerre mondiale): H.A., "France Libre Propagande Rapport No 1" (February 1941).

Archives Nationales d'Outre-Mer AEF/GGAEF/5D/198 (Politique indigene, 1940-1941): "Chronique Coloniale" (June 28, 1943).

Azevedo, Mario. "The Human Price of Development: The Brazzaville Railroad and the Sara of Chad." African Studies Review 24.1: 1-19, 1981.

Bernault, Florence. Démocraties Ambiguës en Afrique Centrale : Congo-Brazzaville, Gabon 1940-1965. Paris: Karthala, 1996.

Bonin, Hubert, et al. (eds.). Les entreprises et l'outre-mer français pendant la Seconde Guerre mondiale. Pessac: Maison des Sciences de l'Homme d'Aquitaine, 2010.

Bouche, Denise. "Le retour de l'Afrique Occidentale Française dans la lutte contre l'ennemi aux côtés des Alliés," Revue d'histoire de la Deuxième guerre mondiale 114: 41-68, 1979.

Bourgi, Robert. Le Général de Gaulle et l'Afrique Noire 1940-1969. Paris: Librairie Générale de Droit et de Jurisprudence, 1980.

Cantier, Jacques and Jennings, Eric (eds.). L'Empire Colonial sous Vichy. Paris: Odile Jacob, 2004.

Casalis, André. 2000. "Adrien Conus." Revue de la France Libre 310. http://www.france-libre.net/temoignages-documents/temoignages/adrien-conus.php.

Chauliac, Médecin-Général Inspecteur Guy. "Souvenirs du Tchad." In Le Général Leclerc et l'Afrique Française Libre 1940-1942 Actes du Colloque International 12, 13, et 14 novembre 1987 (Paris: Fondation Maréchal Leclerc de Hauteclocque): 259-266, 1988.

Chauliac, Médécin-général inspecteur Guy. 1994. "L'AEF et le Cameroun se rallient." Revue de la France Libre 288. http://www.france-libre.net/temoignages-documents/temoignages/aef-cameroun.php.

Cooper, Frederick. "Conflict and Connection: Rethinking Colonial African History." American Historical Review 99.5: 1516-1545, 1994.

Crémieux-Brilhac, Jean-Louis. La France Libre. De l'appel du 18 juin à la Libération volume 1. Paris: Gallimard, 1996.

De Gaulle, Charles. Speech of July 30, 1940. In Médecin Général Vaucel (ed.), La France d'Outre-mer dans la Guerre, Documents (Paris: Ministère des Colonies Direction de l'Information et de la Documentation): 10-11, 1945.

Deroo, Éric and Champeaux, Antoine. La Force Noire: Gloire et infortunes d'une légende coloniale. Paris: Tallandier, 2006.

Derrick, Jonathan. "Free French and Africans in Douala, 1940-41." Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria 10.2: 53–70, 1980.

Duval, Eugène-Jean. L'épopée des tirailleurs sénégalaises. Paris: L'Harmattan, 2005.

Echenberg, Myron. "'Morts Pour La France': The African Soldier in France during the Second World War." The Journal of African History 26.4: 363-380, 1985.

Florentin, Colonel Jacques. "Les confins sahariens du Tchad et le colonel Leclerc." In Le Général Leclerc et l'Afrique Française Libre 1940-1942 Actes du Colloque International 12, 13, et 14 novembre 1987 (Paris: Fondation Maréchal Leclerc de Hauteclocque, 1988): 411-422, 1988.

Gamble, Harry. "The National Revolution in French West Africa: Dakar-Jeunes and the shaping of African opinion." International Journal of Francophone Studies 10.1-2: 85-103, 2007.

Gardet, Général Roger. 1974. "Le ralliement du Cameroun à la France Libre (27 août 1940)." Revue de la France Libre 207. http://www.france-libre.net/temoignages-documents/temoignages/ralliement-cameroun-fl.php.

Ginio, Ruth. "Marshal Petain Spoke to Schoolchildren: Vichy Propaganda in French West Africa, 1940-1943." The International Journal of African Historical Studies 33.2: 291-312, 2000.

Ginio, Ruth. "French Colonial Reading of Ethnographic Research: The Case of the 'Desertion' of the Abron King and its Aftermath." Cahiers d'Études Africaines 42.166: 337-357, 2002.

Ginio, Ruth. "Vichy Rule in French West Africa: Prelude to Decolonization?" French Colonial History 4: 205-226, 2003.

Gray, Christopher J. Colonial Rule and Crisis in Equatorial Africa: Southern Gabon, c. 1850-1940. Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2002.

Gray, Christopher and Ngolet, François. 1999. "Lambaréné, Okoumé and the Transformation of Labor along the Middle Ogooué (Gabon), 1870–1945." The Journal of African History 40.1: 87–107, 1999.

Hitchcock, William I. "Pierre Boisson, French West Africa, and the Postwar Epuration: A Case from the Aix Files." French Historical Studies 24.2: 305-341, 2001.

Jennings, Eric. Vichy in the Tropics: The National Revolution in Madagascar, Guadeloupe, and Indochina, 1940-1944. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002.

Kalck, Pierre. Histoire de la République Centrafricaine : des origines préhistoriques à nos jours. Paris: Berger-Levrault, 1974.

Lanne, Bernard. "Le Tchad Pendant La Guerre (1939-1945)." In Charles Robert Ageron (ed.), Les Chemins de la Décolonisation de l'Empire Colonial Français (Paris: Éditions du CNRS): 439–454, 1986.

Larminat, Edgard de. Chroniques irrévérencieuses. Paris: Plon, 1962.

Lawler, Nancy. “Reform and Repression under the Free French: Economic and Political Transformation in the Côte d’Ivoire, 1942-45.” Africa: Journal of the International African Institute 60.1: 88-110, 1990.

Lawler, Nancy. “The Crossing of the Gyaman to the Cross of Lorraine: Wartime Policies in West Africa, 1941-1942.” African Affairs 96.382: 53-71, 1997.

“Le Tchad et le Congo.” 1965. Revue de la France Libre 156bis. http://www.france-libre.net/temoignages-documents/temoignages/tchad-et-congo.php.

Lemarchand, René. “The Politics of Sara Ethnicity: A Note on the Origins of the Civil War in Chad.” Cahiers d’Études Africaines 20: 449-471, 1980.

Loucou, Jean-Noël. “La Deuxième guerre mondiale et ses effets en Côte-d’Ivoire.” Annales de l’Université d’Abidjan 8: 181-207, 1980.

Mabon, Armelle. Prisonniers de guerre « indigènes »: Visages oubliés de la France occupé. Paris: La Découverte, 2010.

Manga Mado, Henri-Richard. Complaintes d’un forçat. Yaoundé: Éditions CLE, 1970.

Martin, Phyllis M. “Contesting Clothes in Colonial Brazzaville.” The Journal of African History 35.3: 401-426, 1994.

Mémorial de Caen FL 50(2):B: “À Brazzaville,” France d’Abord 30-31 (August 28, 1942).

Mémorial de Caen FL 50(2):C: Etchegoyen, L. (Chef de Bataillon). 1942. Historique des Forces Français Libres volume 2 : « Ralliements : 18 juin 1940 – 31 décembre 1941 ». Londres: France Libre Commissariat National à la Guerre.

Mémorial de Caen FL 50(2):C: “Le Ralliement de l’Afrique Noire,” section of Ralliements et Libération des Territoires d’Empire et Sous-Mandat Français (Chronologie jusqu’au 14 Juillet 1943).

Mémorial de Caen FL 70(2): Laurentie, Gouverneur Henri. 1946. “L’Empire au secours de la Métropole” (Office Français d’Édition).

Mémorial de Caen FL 70(4): Effort de guerre française: “Au Service de la France, 1940-1944.”

Mémorial de Caen FL 71 (II-?): “French Colonial Policy,” France Forever 11 (July 1944).

Messmer, Pierre. Les Blancs s’en vont : Récits de décolonisation. Paris: Albin Michel, 1998.

Métégué N’Nah, Nicolas. Histoire Du Gabon: des origines à l’aube du XXIe siècle. Paris:

L'Harmattan, 2006.

Mordal, Jacques. "La Campagne du Gabon." Écrits de Paris: Revue des Questions Actuelles 86: 94–105, 1951.

Mordal, Jacques. "La Campagne du Gabon." Écrits de Paris: Revue des Questions Actuelles 87: 95-111, 1952.

Muracciole, Lieutenant J. "La Conquête de la Base Africaine." In Louis Mouilleseaux (ed.), La France et son Empire dans la Guerre, volume 1. (Paris: Éditions Littéraires de France): 83-98, 1947.

Muracciole, Jean-François. Les Français libres: L'autre Résistance. Paris: Tallandier, 2009.

N'Dimina-Mougala, Antoine-Denis. "L'apport économique du Gabon à la France lors du second conflit mondial: 1939-1945." Annales de l'Université Omar Bongo 12: 302-321, 2005.

Notin, Jean-Christophe. 1061 Compagnons : Histoire des Compagnons de la Libération. Paris: Perrin, 2000.

Nzenzé, Mireille. L'Armée Française en AEF de 1919 à 1958. Villeneuve: Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 1998.

Ollandet, Jérôme. Brazzaville Capitale de la France Libre: Histoire de la Résistance Française en Afrique (1940-1944). Brazzaville: Éditions de la Savane, n.d.

Rich, Jeremy. "Troubles at the Office: Clerks, State Authority, and Social Conflict in Gabon, 1920-45." Canadian Journal of African Studies 38.1: 58–87, 2004.

Rich, Jeremy. "Forging Permits and Failing Hopes: African Participation in the Gabonese Timber Industry, ca. 1920-1940." African Economic History 33: 149–173, 2005.

Rich, Jeremy. A Workman Is Worthy of His Meat: Food and Colonialism in the Gabon Estuary. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007.

Rich, Jeremy. "Manhood, State Power, and Scandals in the Gabon Estuary, 1940-1946." Outre-mers: revue d'histoire. 360/361: 192-208, 2008.

Rich, Jeremy. "Cruel Guards and Anxious Chiefs: Fang Masculinities and State Power in the Gabon Estuary, 1920-1960." Cahiers d'études africaines. 195: 705-732, 2009.

Rochette, M.J. 1955. "La « maison des conspirateurs » ou les dessous du coup d'État de Brazzaville." Revue de la France Libre 75. http://www.france-libre.net/temoignages-documents/temoignages/maison-conspirateurs.php.

Sicé, A. L'Afrique Équatoriale Française et Le Cameroun Au Service de La France (26-27-28 Août 1940). Paris: Presses Univérsitaires de la France, 1946.

Suret-Canale, Jean. French Colonialism in Tropical Africa, 1900-1945. Translated by Till Gottheiner. New York: Pica Press, 1971.

United Kingdom National Archives, WO 178/4, "Military Mission Brazzaville, 1940 Oct-Dec." War Diary, French Equatorial Africa, 20 Military Mission, October 1940.

United Kingdom National Archives, WO 178/4, "Military Mission Brazzaville, 1940 Oct-Dec." War Diary, French Equatorial Africa, 20 Military Mission, November 1940.

United Kingdom National Archives, WO 178/10. "20 Spears Mission." War Diary, French Equatorial Africa, 20 Military Mission, September 1940.

Vacquier, Raymond. Au temps des factoreries (1900-1950). Paris: Karthala, 1986.

Weinstein, Brian. Éboué. New York: Oxford University Press, 1972.

[1] "Procès-Verbal de Déposition de Témoin: M'Fam Marcel, devant Lieutenant d'Infanterie Coloniale Desbiey Jules" (October 26, 1940), 7 of annexes to "Rapport du Lieutenant d'Infanterie Coloniale Desbiey Jules, de l'État-Major du Commandant Supérieur des Troupes de l'A.E.F., chef du détachement de Booué à Monsieur le Commandant Supérieur des Troupes de l'A.E.F. Brazzaville" (October 29, 1940) [hereafter, 'Desbiey, "Rapport"']. Archives Nationales d'Outre-Mer [hereafter ANOM] AEF/GGAEF/5D/187 (La Deuxième Guerre mondiale). M'Fam's testimony will hereafter be referred to as 'M'Fam,' and those of other prisoners introduced merely as 'Testimony of… annexed to Desbiey.' Since the depositions given in this case were written on pages front and back, but only the sheets were numbered, hereafter I will reference which side of the sheet the cited information came from.

[2] Eugène-Jean Duval, *L'épopée des tirailleurs sénégalaises* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2005), 239; Jean-Noël Vincent, "Les Aventures du Patriotisme, ou de l'Origine, du Recrutement, des Motivations des Forces Françaises Libres" (Service Historique de l'Armée de Terre; Communication présentée dans le cadre du 103° Congrès National des Sociétés Savantes Metz-Nancy avril 1978), 7. Archives Nationales de la France [hereafter AN] 72AJ/238/1/pièce 3.

[3] For Chad, see "Le Tchad et le Congo," extract from *Revue de la France Libre* no. 156 bis (June 1965), available at http://www.france-libre.net/temoignages-documents/temoignages/tchad-et-congo.php (accessed April 8, 2012). Also, Bernard Lanne, "Le Tchad pendant la guerre (1939-1945)," in *Les Chemins de la décolonisation de l'empire colonial français,* ed. Charles Robert Ageron (Paris: Éditions du CNRS, 1986), 439–454.

[4] For Cameroon, see Général Roger Gardet, "Le ralliement du Cameroun à la France Libre (27 août 1940)," extract from *Revue de la France Libre* no. 207 (August-September-October 1974),

available at http://www.france-libre.net/temoignages-documents/temoignages/ralliement-cameroun-fl.php (accessed April 3, 2012); Médécin-général inspecteur Guy Chauliac, "L'AEF et le Cameroun se rallient," extract from *Revue de la France Libre* no. 288 (1994), available at http://www.france-libre.net/temoignages-documents/temoignages/aef-cameroun.php (accessed April 3, 2012).

[5] For Brazzaville, see M.J. Rochette, "La « maison des conspirateurs » ou les dessous du coup d'État de Brazzaville," extract from *Revue de la France Libre* no. 75 (February 1955), available at http://www.france-libre.net/temoignages-documents/temoignages/maison-conspirateurs.php (accessed April 3, 2012).

[6] For broad accounts of these events across AEF, in widely available published sources see: A. Sicé, *L'Afrique équatoriale française et le Cameroun au service de la France (26-27-28 août 1940)* (Paris: Presses Univérsitaires de la France, 1946); Edgard de Larminat, *Chroniques irrévérencieuses* (Paris: Plon, 1962), 134-161; Jean Suret-Canale, *French Colonialism in Tropical Africa, 1900-1945*, trans. Till Gottheiner (New York: Pica Press, 1971), 462–470; Brian Weinstein, *Éboué* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 230-251; and Jean-Louis Crémieux-Brilhac, *La France Libre. De l'appel du 18 juin à la Libération* volume 1 (Paris: Gallimard, 1996), 140-150.

[7] One might characterize this phenomenon as a Vichy Syndrome in reverse: fixation on the Vichy Empire, with little critical attention to the Gaullist Empire. The reasons for this, perhaps rooted in the conflation of the wartime Gaullist narrative of resurrection with De Gaulle's Fifth Republic presidency of decolonization, need further exploration. On Vichy's role in administering AOF, see: Ruth Ginio, "Marshal Petain Spoke to Schoolchildren: Vichy Propaganda in French West Africa, 1940-1943," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 33, no. 2 (2000): 291-312; William I. Hitchcock, "Pierre Boisson, French West Africa, and the Postwar Epuration: A Case from the Aix Files," *French Historical Studies* 24, no. 2 (Spring 2001): 305-341; Ruth Ginio, "Vichy Rule in French West Africa: Prelude to Decolonization?" *French Colonial History* 4 (2003): 205-226; and Harry Gamble, "The National Revolution in French West Africa: *Dakar-Jeunes* and the shaping of African opinion," *International Journal of Francophone Studies* 10, no. 1-2 (2007): 85-103. For a territorial focus across the Vichy and Gaullist periods, see for example Jean-Noël Loucou, "La Deuxième guerre mondiale et ses effets en Côte-d'Ivoire," *Annales de l'Université d'Abidjan* 8 (1980): 181-207. On AOF's involvement with Gaullism, see: Denise Bouche, "Le retour de l'Afrique Occidentale Française dans la lutte contre l'ennemi aux côtés des Alliés," *Revue d'histoire de la Deuxième guerre mondiale* no. 114 (1979): 41-68; Nancy Lawler, "Reform and Repression under the Free French: Economic and Political Transformation in the Côte d'Ivoire, 1942-45," *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 60, no. 1 (1990): 88-110; Nancy Lawler, "The Crossing of the Gyaman to the Cross of Lorraine: Wartime Policies in West Africa, 1941-1942," *African Affairs* 96, no. 382 (January 1997): 53-71; Ruth Ginio, "French Colonial Reading of Ethnographic Research: The Case of the 'Desertion' of the Abron King and its Aftermath," *Cahiers d'Études africaines* 42, no. 166 (2002): 337-357.

On Vichy's imperial policies generally, see: Eric Jennings, *Vichy in the Tropics: The National Revolution in Madagascar, Guadeloupe, and Indochina, 1940-1944* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2002), especially 9-31; Jacques Cantier and Eric Jennings, eds., *L'Empire Colonial sous Vichy* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 2004); and Hubert Bonin, Christophe Bouneau, et Hervé Joly, eds., *Les entreprises et l'outre-mer français pendant la Seconde Guerre mondiale* (Pessac: Maison des Sciences de l'Homme d'Aquitaine, 2010).

Notable exceptions include Jonathan Derrick, "Free French and Africans in Douala, 1940-41," *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 10, no. 2 (June 1980): 53–70; Jérôme Ollandet, *Brazzaville capitale de la France Libre: Histoire de la résistance française en Afrique (1940-1944)* (Brazzaville: Éditions de la Savane, n.d.); and Mireille Nzenzé, *L'Armée française en AEF de 1919 à 1958* (Villeneuve: Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 1998). However, Bernard Lanne claims that the history of July-August 1940 alone demand a book to themselves; Lanne, "Le Tchad pendant la guerre," 441.

[8] Ollandet, *Brazzaville*, 9.

[9] Cf. especially Florence Bernault, *Démocraties ambiguës en Afrique centrale : Congo-Brazzaville, Gabon 1940-1965* (Paris: Karthala, 1996), which does deal with the conflict but is concerned with a far broader time period, leaving less space for exploration of the particularities of 1940 itself; other works have also been prevented by their scope from dealing with the war in 1940 in any detail: Christopher Gray and François Ngolet, "Lambaréné, Okoumé and the Transformation of Labor Along the Middle Ogooué (Gabon), 1870–1945," *The Journal of African History* 40, no. 1 (1999): 87–107; Christopher J. Gray, *Colonial Rule and Crisis in Equatorial Africa: Southern Gabon, c. 1850-1940* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2002); Jeremy Rich, "Troubles at the Office: Clerks, State Authority, and Social Conflict in Gabon, 1920-45," *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 38, no. 1 (2004): 58–87; Rich, "Forging Permits and Failing Hopes: African Participation in the Gabonese Timber Industry, ca. 1920-1940," *African Economic History* no. 33 (2005): 149–173; Rich, *A Workman Is Worthy of His Meat: Food and Colonialism in the Gabon Estuary* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007); Rich, "Manhood, State Power, and Scandals in the Gabon Estuary, 1940-1946," *Outre-mers: revue d'histoire* no. 360/361 (2008):192-208 (which comes closest, discussing the 1940s, but which largely elides the 1940 French conflict in Gabon); and Rich, "Cruel Guards and Anxious Chiefs: Fang Masculinities and State Power in the Gabon Estuary, 1920-1960," *Cahiers d'Études africaines* no. 195 (2009): 705-732.

[10] One recent article gives an overview of the Vichy-Gaullist war in Gabon: Antoine-Denis N'Dimina-Mougala, "L'apport économique du Gabon à la France lors du second conflit mondial: 1939-1945," *Annales de l'Université Omar Bongo* 12 (2005), 304-309. A recent overview of Gabonese history does not cover the events of 1940 in depth: Nicolas Métégué N'Nah, *Histoire du Gabon: des origines à l'aube du XXIe siècle* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2006). The military movements are dealt with in detail by Jacques Mordal, "La Campagne du Gabon," *Écrits de Paris: revue des questions actuelles* no. 86 (December 1951): 94-105; Mordal, "La Campagne du Gabon," *Écrits de Paris: revue des questions actuelles* no. 87 (January 1952): 95-111; Nzenzé, *L'Armée française en AEF*.

[11] Work on African involvement in the Second World War has tended to focus on Africans serving in Europe, notably: Myron Echenberg, "'Morts Pour La France': The African Soldier in France During the Second World War," *The Journal of African History* 26, no. 4 (1985): 363-380; and on African POWs, Armelle Mabon, *Prisonniers de guerre « indigènes »: Visages oubliés de la France occupé* (Paris: La Découverte, 2010).

[12] P. Berger, "Les événements tragiques du Gabon: L'après-guerre au Gabon (Juin-Décembre 1940)," 2. Archives de la Congrégation du Saint-Esprit (Chévilly-Larue, France), 4J1.7b3 (108386): Gabon ("Dossier Berger"), pièce 1.

[13] Telegram from Masson (June 19, 1940), in "Rapport des télégrammes de Boisson, été 1940," 14. ANOM AEF/GGAEF/5D/187 (La Deuxième Guerre mondiale).

[14] Monsieur Gachon, "Témoignages sur les évènements qui se sont déroulés, à Libreville du 15 juin à fin août 1940," annex 6 to Letter from Raymond Waag (prisoner at Lambaréné) to Maréchal Pétain (April 23, 1941), 102-103. ANOM AEF/GGAEF/5D/187 (La Deuxième Guerre mondiale).
[15] Gachon, "Témoignages," 103.
[16] Gachon, "Témoignages," 103-104. Cf. also Mordal, "La campagne du Gabon" (1951): 94-95; Bernault, *Démocraties ambiguës*, 116-117.
[17] Gachon, "Témoignages," 103-104. Cf. also Mordal, "La campagne du Gabon" (1951): 94-95.
[18] Rich, "Troubles at the Office," 63.
[19] Nzenzé, *L'Armée française en AEF*, 108.
[20] Desbiey, "Rapport," 1.
[21] News could spread quickly via informal channels in AEF societies: cf. Phyllis M. Martin, "Contesting Clothes in Colonial Brazzaville," *The Journal of African History* 35, no. 3 (1994): 409. Within the context of the 'rallies,' see: Médécin-général Inspecteur Guy Chauliac "Souvenirs du Tchad," in *Le Général Leclerc et l'Afrique française libre 1940-1942: actes du colloque international 12, 13, et 14 november 1987* (Paris: Fondation Maréchal Leclerc de Hauteclocque, 1988), 260. That Africans did not always receive or transmit factual information, though, is discussed in Ollandet, *Brazzaville*, 17-20.
[22] M'Fam, annex to Desbiey, "Rapport," 7 (front).
[23] M'Fam, annex to Desbiey, "Rapport," 7 (front). With limited mapping resources, I have been unable to locate Mangaba. However, the density of the rainforest and low population density of Gabon (even today, after nearly 70 years of population growth) make such a failure no indication that Mangaba does not exist: only that it is not very large. Similar problems have hampered my ability to locate Bian and Gbanda without research on the ground in Gabon.
[24] M'Fam, annex to Desbiey, "Rapport," 7 (front). Emphasis mine.
[25] M'Fam, annex to Desbiey, "Rapport," 7 (back). M'Fam's plodding path over achievable distances seems to indicate a maximization of his time outside of the controls of the garrison.
[26] Ango, annex to Desbiey, "Rapport," 8 (front). If their meeting place was indeed only 5 kilometers from Booué, M'Fam was certainly taking a fair amount of time to return.
[27] M'Fam, annex to Desbiey, "Rapport," 7 (back).
[28] M'Fam, annex to Desbiey, "Rapport," 7 (back). The fact that the detachment from N'Djolé had not yet heard of Booué's occupation, some two weeks later, suggests the difficulty of communication among stations in the rainforest.

The ethnic dynamics of M'Fam's identification of the troops under Desbiey's command as 'Saras,' a French-favored 'martial race' in AEF, would provide another facet of insight onto this incident, especially since Nouba, the officer dispatched to retrieve M'Fam, was himself a Sara.

On the Franco-Sara relationship generally, see: René Lemarchand, "The Politics of Sara Ethnicity: A Note on the Origins of the Civil War in Chad," *Cahiers d'Études africaines* 20 (1980): 449-471; and Mario Azevedo, "The Human Price of Development: The Brazzaville Railroad and the Sara of Chad," *African Studies Review* 24, no. 1 (March 1981): 1-19.

For examples of this dynamic during the Second World War, see: Sicé, *L'Afrique équatoriale française*, 153; Lieutenant J. Muracciole, "La conquête de la base africaine," in *La France et son empire dans la guerre* volume 1, ed. Louis Mouilleseaux (Paris: Éditions Littéraires de France, 1947), 90; Larminat, *Chroniques*, 148; Henri-Richard Manga Mado, *Complaintes d'un forçat* (Yaoundé: Éditions CLE, 1970), 48; Colonel Jacques Florentin, "Les

confins sahariens du Tchad et le colonel Leclerc," in *Le Général Leclerc et l'Afrique française libre 1940-1942: actes du colloque international 12, 13, et 14 november 1987* (Paris: Fondation Maréchal Leclerc de Hauteclocque, 1988), 415; André Casalis, "Adrien Conus," in extract from *Revue de la France Libre* 310 (2000), available at http://www.france-libre.net/temoignages-documents/temoignages/adrien-conus.php; and Jean-Christophe Notin, *1061 Compagnons: Histoire des Compagnons de la Libération* (Paris: Perrin, 2000), 167. British observers also noticed this tendency: cf. Entry for October 15 [1940], "War Diary, French Equatorial Africa, 20 Military Mission, October 1940." UK National Archives [hereafter UKNA], WO 178/4, "Military Mission Brazzaville, 1940 Oct.-Dec."

[29] M'Fam, annex to Desbiey, "Rapport," 7 (back).

[30] M'Fam, annex to Desbiey, "Rapport," 7 (back).

[31] Nouba, annex to Desbiey, "Rapport," 6 (front).

[32] Nouba, annex to Desbiey, "Rapport," 6 (back). Both soldiers gave depositions concerning these events to the Gaullist commander at Booué on October 26, whereupon Marcel also handed over the letter from Goedert given to him by Ango on the 23rd. In his report on these incidents, Lt. Desbiey noted that "if the carrier had been able to bring the message to its destination, the security of the Booué contingent would have been seriously compromised," since the Vichy detachment would have outnumbered and outgunned Desbiey's forces: cf. Desbiey, "Rapport," 1.

[33] Frederick Cooper, "Conflict and Connection: Rethinking Colonial African History," *American Historical Review* 99, no. 5 (December 1994): 1533. Florence Bernault informs us that there were only about 1000 Europeans in all of Gabon in 1940: Bernault, *Démocraties ambiguës*, 34.

[34] Mordal, "La campagne du Gabon" (1951): 98-99.

[35] Kombila, annex to Desbiey, "Rapport," 4-5. Kombila told the same story to the three Africans who tracked him down the next day, or at least they conveyed the same story to their interviewers. Each of them claimed Kombila told them that Goedert had ordered him on this mission.

[36] Goma, annex to Desbiey, "Rapport," 1 (back).

[37] Kombila, annex to Desbiey, "Rapport," 5.

[38] Goma, annex to Desbiey, "Rapport," 1 (back). Also certified by Lebissa, who claimed "he was very well behaved and never made any difficulties about following us" to Booué: Lebissa, annex to Desbiey, "Rapport," 2 (back).

[39] Lebissa, annex to Desbiey, "Rapport," 2.

[40] Youdengué, annex to Desbiey, "Rapport," 3.

[41] Cooper, "Conflict and Connection," 1528.

[42] M'Fam, annex to Desbiey, "Rapport," 7 (back).

[43] Kombila, annex to Desbiey, "Rapport," 5.

[44] Kombila, annex to Desbiey, "Rapport," 9 (back).

[45] Goedert, "Rapport sur les évènements qui se sont produits au poste de Booué, Chef-Lieu du Département du Djouah, pendant la journée du 23 Octobre 1940," 2-3. ANOM AEF/GGAEF/5D/187 (La Deuxième Guerre mondiale).

[46] Letter from Raymond Waag (prisoner at Lambaréné) to Maréchal Pétain (April 23, 1941), cited above in note 14. The only other scholar who seems to have encountered this curious document is Florence Bernault: cf. Bernault, *Démocraties ambiguës*, 117.

[47] Goedert, "Rapport," 5.

[48] Aumasson, quoted in Sicé, *L'Afrique équatoriale française*, 178. He identified these insolents as 'Saras' (see note 29 above).
[49] Pierre Kalck, *Histoire de la République Centrafricaine : des origines préhistoriques à nos jours* (Paris: Berger-Levrault, 1974), 264.
[50] Ollandet, *Brazzaville*, 31.
[51] Cooper, "Conflict and Connection," 1527.
[52] M'Fam, annex to Desbiey, "Rapport," 7; Kombila, annex to Desbiey, "Rapport," 5.
[53] Manga Mado, *Complaintes*, 12 and 31.
[54] Pierre Messmer, *Les Blancs s'en vont: Récits de décolonisation* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1998), 15.
[55] Ollandet, *Brazzaville*, 28.
[56] Cooper, "Conflict and Connection," 1544.
[57] Cooper, "Conflict and Connection," 1532.
[58] Éric Deroo and Antoine Champeaux, *La Force Noire: Gloire et infortunes d'une légende coloniale* (Paris: Tallandier, 2006), 185; Jean-François Muracciole, *Les Français libres : L'autre Résistance* (Paris: Tallandier, 2009), 61-64; and Sébastien Albertelli, *Atlas de la France Libre: De Gaulle et la France Libre, une aventure politique* (Paris: Éditions Autrement, 2010), 14.
[59] Rich, "Troubles at the Office," 69-70, 76; Rich, "Forging Permits," 164, and cf. pp. 158, 163-164.
[60] Rich, "Troubles at the Office," 68.
[61] Cooper, "Conflict and Connection," 1529.
[62] Chef de Bataillon L. Etchegoyen, *Historique des Forces Français Libres* volume 2 : « Ralliements : 18 juin 1940 – 31 décembre 1941 » (London: France Libre Commissariat National à la Guerre, 1942), 19. Mémorial de Caen (Caen, France) [hereafter Caen] FL 50(2):C.

An intriguing anecdote from this incident, courtesy of Raymond Vacquier's memoir, also invites future research: Vacquier remembered a certain timber man named Chapuis, "who only employed Blacks" and never took out credit in Libreville. In September 1940 he provided the transportation to Mayumba for the Gaullist officer and his African contingent: Raymond Vacquier, *Au temps des factoreries (1900-1950)* (Paris: Karthala, 1986), 88.
[63] Etchegoyen, *Historique*, 77. Confirmed by Telegram A from British observers on October 29, 1940 and Entry for October 30, 1940 in "War Diary, French Equatorial Africa, 20 Military Mission, September 1940." UKNA WO 178/10, "20 Spears Mission."
[64] Etchegoyen, *Historique*, 78-81.
[65] Competing claims in Letter from Raymond Waag (prisoner at Lambaréné) to Maréchal Pétain (April 23, 1941), 16; Etchegoyen, *Historique*, 81 and 97; and Sicé, *L'Afrique équatoriale française*, 172. Raymond Vacquier also noted the incident, claiming that merchants were victimized "by Sara troops from Chad under the [Gaullist's symbol, the] *Cross of Lorraine*": Vacquier, *Au temps des factoreries*, 289.
[66] Telegram appended to entry for November 6, 1940, in "War Diary, French Equatorial Africa, 20 Military Mission, November 1940." UKNA WO 178/4, "Military Mission Brazzaville, 1940 Oct.-Dec."
[67] On opposition to the Armistice: Charles de Gaulle had set the precedent in his speech of July 30, 1940, in Médécin Général Vaucel, ed., *La France d'Outre-mer dans la Guerre, Documents* (Paris: Ministère des Colonies Direction de l'Information et de Documentation, 1945), 10-11; he said that "the native populations…judge with indignation this capitulation of the Empire without fighting." Also cf. "Le Ralliement de l'Afrique Noire," section of *Ralliements et Libération des*

Territoires d'Empire et Sous-Mandat Français (Chronologie jusqu'au 14 Juillet 1943), 2 - Caen FL 50(2):C; Gouverneur Henri Laurentie, "L'Empire au secours de la Métropole" (Office Français d'Édition, 1946), 6 – Caen FL 70(2); and "Au Service de la France, 1940-1944," 40 – Caen 70(4): Effort de guerre française.

On anti-Nazi sentiment: Sicé, *L'Afrique équatoriale française*, title page: "Africans – white and black alike – wanted…by their sacrifice, to share, since they had begun, the struggles of France but especially to continue…the fight against Germany." Also see Laurentie, "L'Empire au secours de la Métropole," 29: "The initiative, tacitly or publicly, was the action of all elements of the population and within that, the action of that evolved native bourgeoisie for whom everything was very clear, the defeat like the refusal to surrender. The choice of this elite was deliberate. The enlightened Africans knew all too well what German racism would mean for them, and they preferred France…because they had confidence in its intentions. And so, they contributed to saving it." And, see Muracciole, "La conquête," 97: "The Blacks of the Equator never had any doubt about the necessity of fighting the German, and did not sell out their loyalty and their devotion to white chiefs who had promised to protect them against the German." More recently, cf. Robert Bourgi, *Le Général de Gaulle et l'Afrique Noire 1940-1969* (Paris: Librarie Générale de Droit et de Jurisprudence, 1980), 50: Africans "were not ignorant of the significance of the Hitlerist ideology which was far from giving 'the best part' to the black race.''

On pro-French attitudes, see: "À Brazzaville," *France d'Abord* no. 30-31 (August 28, 1942): 9: "Everywhere, in Chad, Cameroon, Moyen-Congo, Oubangui, in Gabon, wills were strained, hearts pounded with the spirit of sacrifice and everyone awaited the day when they could liberate themselves in a gesture of irresistible love, and conquer." Caen FL 50(2):B. Also, cf. "Chronique Coloniale" (June 28, 1943), 1 and 2: "Our political thought [in Africa] lifted the peoples to a plane where we no longer met a banal and passing gratitude but the total fidelity of the mind and the heart" (p. 1); "For the more evolved, we must not neglect the power of the cultural impact of the metropole. So there appeared at different levels relations of solidarity which created a powerful sense of fidelity, even a certain patriotism for a 'mythic' metropole that one defended without having seen it, but which one appreciated from its representations" (p. 2). ANOM AEF/GGAEF/5D/198 (Politique indigène, 1940-1941). And, cf. "French Colonial Policy," *France Forever* 11 (July 1944): back page: "It is due first to the faithfulness of the natives to French institutions, which the chiefs of the tribes of Equatorial Africa expressed as early as 1940 by continuing the fight on the side of General de Gaulle and the Allies." Caen FL 71 (II-?).

[68] Laurentie, "L'Empire au secours de la Métropole," 15-16.

[69] "Témoignage de Monsieur de Governeur LAURENTIE Délégué adjoint de la France à la commission du 'Trusteeship' témoignage recueilli par Melle GOUINEAU, le 19 octobre 1948 à Versailles (O.N.U.)," 16. AN 72AJ/225/1/pièce 2.

[70] "Témoignage de Monsieur de Governeur LAURENTIE," 16-17.

[71] Vincent, "Les Aventures du Patriotisme," 9.

[72] H.A., "France Libre Propagande Rapport N° 1" (February 1941), 6. ANOM AEF/GGAEF/5D/198 (Deuxième Guerre mondiale).