SOLDIERS OF MISFORTUNE

Ivoirien *Tirailleurs* of World War II

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Preamble

The Problem

This is a study of men from the Côte d'Ivoire who fought and died in World War II. It has particular reference to those recruited from the Korrhogo region of the north. They served alongside soldiers drawn from all the colonies of French West Africa in the Tirailleurs Sénégalais, the Senegalese Rifles. My interest in the topic had been stimulated by Amon d'Aby's work, La Côte d'Ivoire dans la cité africaine. "The declaration of war on 3 September 1939," he claimed,

was not a surprise to anyone. The public had long awaited it, and now welcomed it with more enthusiasm than it had ever shown twenty-five years ago. This change demonstrated that the affection of the Blacks of the Côte d'Ivoire for the motherland had become more defined and deeply rooted since the last war. Through the medium of its elite, the indigenous population followed with interest, if not with passion, the preliminary phases of the war, the excessive demands and deceit of Chancellor Hitler, Munich, the invasion of Czechoslovakia, the dismemberment of Poland. . . . These aggressions aroused unanimous feelings of indignation. Public opinion, especially among anciens combattants, opposed any new concession to Germany and feverishly awaited the declaration of war.

Ivoiriens, d'Aby reported, flocked to recruiting centers, and after the collapse of the French army in 1940, thousands crossed into the British Colony of the Gold Coast to join La France Combattante. "They thought," he maintained, "that France, land of Liberty, should not be absent from the camp of Liberty." Was it possible, I wondered, that Ivoiriens had so thoroughly identified themselves with France that they were able to choose, in the circumstances of 1940, between two Francs: between that of Pétain on the one hand and that of de Gaulle on the other?
It is well known, of course, that upwards of 160,000 West African soldiers, virtually all conscripts, fought in the trenches during World War I. Their contribution is excellently chronicled in Marc Michel's *L'Appel à l'Afrique.* They fought, it is true, but there had been strong resistance when France attempted to introduce general conscription into her African colonies. Throughout the AOF, every means of evading the draft was used. In 1916 and 1917, there had been riots throughout the Côte d'Ivoire. Many Ivoiriens fled into the Gold Coast and Liberia. Such was the extent of the opposition to conscription in 1917 that in September the administration temporarily suspended it. The next year, a renewed effort was made. Blaise Diagne of Senegal, the first African elected to a seat in the French Chamber of Deputies, was appointed a Commissioner of the Republic and charged with overseeing the new recruitment drive of 1918. During his visit to the Côte d'Ivoire, he was able to calm the situation and convince both chiefs and people of their patriotic duty to aid France by accepting conscription. He was so successful that thousands of Ivoiriens joined the ranks of the *Tirailleurs Sénégalais* and were to fight and die in the bloodbaths of the final stages of the Great War.

Those who survived to return home came to be regarded as men with *la force,* men of strength and power, men who had seen the land of the whites; who had fought side by side with some, and against other, white men; who had learned something of the language of the white men and had acquired many of their secrets. In the villages, they were held in awe as men apart. They commanded respect and they engendered fear. Yet, they did not gain much in a purely material sense. A few were selected as canton chiefs; others were employed as interpreters for canton and village chiefs. Most, from time to time, found themselves being mustered as official “greeters” for administrators on tour. They were expected to serve as examples to new conscripts at recruitment time, and on national holidays they were to appear as beribboned and uniformed symbols of France’s imperial greatness. But that was it. They had no pensions and no hopes of advancement beyond these mainly menial roles. They were, by and large, reabsorbed into village society.

France was gratified by the part these men had played in the war and showed its appreciation of their fighting abilities by the passage of a peacetime conscription act in 1919. This act remained in force throughout the interwar period. Ivoiriens, like their counterparts throughout the AOF, had no choice but to accept a system of military recruitment by annual “class.” Each class comprised those estimated to be 20 years of age. Every year, approximately 5,000 recruits were selected from the able-bodied young men of the AOF. They accepted it as yet another example of the black man’s burden.
In the Côte d'Ivoire, military service was seen as but another form of forced labor, to be compared with building roads and bridges, thatching government residences, or being sent to work in the forests and plantations of the south. Service in the army, however, carried with it one advantage. Once completed—or so it was believed—the ex-soldier could neither be recalled to the colors nor required to carry out forced labor. The first of these beliefs was shattered in 1939, when veterans from classes as early as that of 1924 were called up after the declaration of war against Germany. But were they as enthusiastic about their return to the ranks as Amon d'Aby claimed? How did their attitudes compare with those of new recruits? How well did the *Tirailleurs Sénégalais* fight in the cause of France, or rather of the two Frances which would emerge after 1940? How did they view their role? How far did their experiences as *tirailleurs* affect them and their society after the fighting was over? These are the key themes of this study.

The existing body of scholarly work on the *tirailleurs* of the AOF in the 1939–45 period is remarkably sparse. Myron Echenberg's long-awaited book, *Colonial Conscripts*, appeared just as *Soldiers of Misfortune* was going to press and too late therefore to be taken into account. Five of its ten chapters, however, existed in previously published form, and reference to them will be made. Echenberg, in turn, was able to consult texts of this writer's interviews with Ivoirien veterans and drew heavily upon them. On the war itself, no one has yet produced a study of the specifically African contribution. Anthony Clayton's useful study of the French army in Africa contains much data on the *Tirailleurs Sénégalais*, while Robert Paxton's equally useful history of the French army under Vichy has, in the nature of the case, little about them.

The present study is not military history as such, although inevitably it has been necessary to provide a chronological and descriptive framework for the war and some account of the campaigns in which the *Tirailleurs Sénégalais* were involved. Insofar as this is a social history, it is of the kind often described, accurately although inelegantly, as "from the bottom up." Insofar as it is cultural history, it is that of a minority—of Ivoiriens abruptly moved from village and home and forced to take on new identities as soldiers of France.

**The Interviews**

The study draws extensively upon the testimony of *ex-tirailleurs*, veterans of World War II, interviewed between 1985 and 1987. It provides data which often usefully supplement official reports of battles
and the like. This, however, was not the primary object of interviewing these *anciens combattants*. The essential purpose was rather to explore the ways Ivoirien soldiers interpreted the events in which they were involved and assimilated these events into their own understanding of their place in a rapidly changing world. I have let them, whenever possible, speak for themselves, albeit through my translations into English.

The veterans were, for the most part, eager to talk. They had a strong sense of being a lost generation. The tunes of glory, heard infrequently enough during the war, ceased to play for them as the cataclysm of 1939–45 receded in memory. By the late 1980s, they found their children, and certainly their grandchildren, little interested in the strange and wonderful stories they had to tell. They found they had little or no place in the new history with which the independent Côte d'Ivoire was rapidly equipping itself. In this new history, the focus was to be upon the nationalist struggle and upon the person of its leader, President Félix Houphouët-Boigny. To this new history, those who had fought (and died) in the defense and liberation of France became largely irrelevant. In a real sense, then, this study seeks to rescue the *ancien combattant* from oblivion.

In 1984, I found myself working on food production in the Côte d'Ivoire in the late colonial period. Much of this research centered on the Korhogo region of the northern savanna, then widely regarded as the rice and yam basket of the colony. Korhogo had another distinctive feature. After the Mossi areas of Upper Volta, it was regarded as the largest reservoir of forced labor during the colonial era. It was therefore natural enough to focus the present study of military service, which can certainly be seen as another form of forced labor, upon that region. There was another possibility. This was to carry out a series of interviews with veterans scattered over the country. This I rejected as unlikely to provide the depth of information I needed. I wished to work with a large sample of veterans who shared a relatively homogeneous background. As it turned out, I was able to interview an estimated one-fifth of the surviving *anciens combattants* of World War II in the Korhogo region.

The decision to use Korhogo as a case study inevitably raises a question about the extent to which the findings can be generalized for the whole of the Côte d'Ivoire — for the people not only of the savanna country but those of the forests and lagoons as well. I believe that a certain level of generalization is possible, not because I wish to argue that the people of Korhogo are in some sense or other typical or average Ivoiriens but precisely because those recruited, whether from Korhogo or any other part of the Côte d'Ivoire, were all brought together into a new and overarching military community and inculcated with a new
set of values which eclipsed those of particular locality and ethnicity. The point was eloquently made, but with characteristic racism, by a writer in *Le Monde Colonial Illustré* in 1940.

Bambara, strapping and stubborn, Mossi, proud but tenacious, Bobo, rough, but calm and hardworking, Senoufo, timid but faithful, Peuls, with the atavism of nomads who reject strong discipline, but are full of fire and likely to make excellent troop leaders, Malinké, more refined, good natured and quick to understand an order; all of them, with their diverse qualities, resulting from their atavismes and their temperaments fashioned from their adaptation to their natural habitats, all these representatives of the vigorous and prolific Sudanese race, all with their ingenuous souls and their devotion, make admirable soldiers, having the right to our recognition and to our solicitude.  

The combination of identical training and common combat experience in regiments of soldiers drawn not only from the entire colony but indeed from everywhere in the AOF, was to make the war a transcending reality for them all. Volunteer or conscript, villager or townsmen, illiterate or évoluté, and whether from north, south, east, or west of the colony, the army forced them all into the same mold. They emerged from their training, their service in Europe, their combat, and for some, their prisoner of war camps as soldiers of France, fiercely proud of what they had done and with a sense of apartness from civilians, who could never truly appreciate what they had seen and experienced. In the process they came to belong to a larger and newer “tribe,” the great fraternity of men who had served in the army. In their conversations, they were always “we Sénégalais,” never “we Senoufo,” “we Yacouba,” or “we Lobi.”

This said, I did nevertheless carry out a shorter set of interviews with veterans mostly from the Man region in the mountains and forest of the western Côte d'Ivoire. Those in this control group were very different in background and current circumstances from the Korgolese, yet proved indeed to share in that same new reality created by their years in the army. The men of Man and the men of Korhogo, so we shall see, demonstrated remarkably similar perceptions and interpretations of the events of 1939–45.

Those interviewed were asked primarily to recount their own life stories. No questionnaire was used, and the interviewee was given full rein to speak about whatever he thought relevant. Some were born raconteurs, and were able to take their own stories and view them against a wider setting of family, village, and army life. Few of the interviews were held in private. There were generally in attendance, if not other anciens combattants, other men and women of the village, who never hesitated to offer their observations on the proceedings.
In Man, to have served in the army was a matter constantly referred to in public. Indeed, as one observer remarked of the Man region, it was virtually impossible in those days to get a wife unless you had done military service. Even after discharge, you wore your braid (galon) to show your status, “to show that you were a man.”

In the Senoufo villages of Korhogo, by contrast, non-veterans were often hearing for the first time the stories recounted to me. There, the ancien combattant has tended to keep his wartime experiences, suffering, and sacrifices to himself. Lapon Silué of Topinakaha, near Korhogo, was among many veterans who told me why this was so.

There were three in my family who did military service. We discussed things among ourselves. “I did this. I went there.” We did not speak with others. Only among ourselves. Those who have not done it cannot be talked to. Only those in the same village who did it can talk about it. The army is like the Poro—if you leave for it—you know its secrets. We cannot divulge them.

Thus bound by a self-imposed code of secrecy which looks on military service as similar to membership in a secret society, one whose rites cannot be revealed to the uninitiated, the Senoufo veteran lives out his life in his village, and finally, in words made famous by another ancien combattant, Douglas MacArthur, “just fades away.”

Why then were the veterans prepared to speak so freely to an American researcher, and a woman at that? To some extent, it was precisely my foreignness which enabled them to feel at ease and to have stories recorded which, as the veterans aged, they had been longing to tell. In the circumstances of the late 1980s, moreover, I was under no necessity of approaching them through chiefs or prefects. They seemed gratified that I had arrived unannounced in their villages and displayed an interest in their lives. Their pleasure was compounded by the fact that I was more than willing to assist them in their perpetual battle with French and Ivorien bureaucracies over their pension rights.

The interviews were for the most part taped, although in some cases this was either technically impossible or politically inadvisable. In the villages near Korhogo, many veterans preferred to speak in Senoufo or occasionally in Dyula. However, when it came time to talk of purely military matters, the veteran often, despite a gap of almost half a century, reverted to barrack-room French, parler tirailleur. In Korhogo town and throughout Man, however, French was invariably used. The translations into English are mine. I have attempted to render the interviews as literally as possible and to preserve the staccato-like effect of the original conversations, including the use of repetition for emphasis.
The chronology given by the interviewees was often inaccurate. Their knowledge of geography was, to say the least, vague. Nonetheless, they had near total recall of their serial numbers, the names of their regiments, the ships on which they sailed, indeed even the dates of their passages to and from Europe and North Africa. Their descriptions of the campaigns in which they fought proved (after cross-checking in the military archives in Vincennes and Versailles) to be remarkably accurate in detail. If they did not always know exactly where they were and just what month it was, they certainly knew how the battles went. Their perspective was obviously different from that of the French officers who filed the official reports of these engagements, but there could be no doubt that all were referring to the same events.

We may note, in passing, that few of the veterans interviewed in the late 1980s had any advantage of hindsight. Most had virtually no access to films, television documentaries, books, articles, or radio broadcasts on the war period. They had a keen sense of their own part in, and importance to, the period extending from the battle for France in 1940 to the liberation of France in 1944–45 and of their fortunes—or rather, misfortunes—on repatriation to their homes. If the years have tended to make them remember their individual contributions to the war as possibly more heroic and dramatic than they were, it does not mean we are dealing with fiction. In the interviews we meet men not only conscious of their earlier existence as young, vigorous soldiers sent overseas to rescue France in her years of distress, but also at the same time aware of their survival as a virtual anachronism in their own land. For this study, their testimony on both scores is of importance.

The People

B. Holas's *Les Senoufo*, which appeared in 1957, usefully summarized the state of knowledge in the field at that time and also provides a useful bibliography of earlier writings. It covers the Senoufo peoples of Mali and Burkina Faso as well as those of the Côte d'Ivoire. Much of the work, however, is devoted specifically to the Cercle of Korhogo, reflecting the heavy concentration of Senoufo in that region. In 1954, the cercle, 38,635 square kilometers in extent, had a population of 346,380 people. Of these, 262,241 were Senoufo, and 66,841 Dyula. It comprised the three subdivisions of Korhogo, Boundiali, and Ferkessedougou. Interviews in the present study were for the most part carried out in the first of these. The subdivision of Korhogo, 10,985 square kilometers in extent, had 193,940 people in 1954: 149,275 were iden-
tified as Senoufo, and 35,107 as Dyula. The census of 1963 indicated 
that the population of what had then become the prefecture of Korhogo 
had grown. About 240,000 Senoufo and 58,000 Dyula were counted. 18 
Korhogo town is at the center of the cercle and subdivision. Its tradi 
tional importance lies in the fact that it is the seat of a Tiembarra Senoufo 
chiefdom founded (though this remains a matter of some controversy) 
in the mid-eighteenth century. Its history has been the subject of a broad 
study by Tiona Ouattara. 19 Nevertheless, Korhogo remained little more 
than a village when envoys from the Almamy Samory arrived there in 
the early 1890s and were informed by Korhogo’s chief, Gbon Coulibaly, 
that the Senoufo were cultivators, not warriors. 20 The Tiembarra 
Senoufo retained this stance when the French displaced Samory in 1898. 
They offered no resistance to the newcomers. Indeed, Gbon Coulibaly 
welcomed them with gifts of food and other supplies. The development 
of Korhogo from village to town, and then to city, resulted from the 
decision of the French, in 1903, to make it the administrative center 
for the northern Côte d’Ivoire. 

The Senoufo were, and indeed are, first and foremost cultivators. They 
grow millet, sorghum, maize, rice, and yam primarily for household 
subsistence. A shift toward commodity production—mainly of cotton 
and rice—has gained momentum since independence. Nevertheless, the 
Senoufo peasant remains essentially concerned with household 
subsistence, though his children increasingly seek employment in towns to 
generate cash income. Descent is reckoned matrilineally, but household 
rather than matrilineage is the basis of production. The village, under 
its elders, possessed a high degree of autonomy. Small chiefdoms emerged 
in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but those who held them 
had little direct political power. Their authority was based more upon 
their control, exercised through village and compound heads, of the 
initiation society (Poro), which managed the various rites de passage 
from birth to death and was custodian of the mores of the community. 
In 1978, Sinali Coulibaly’s Le Paysan Senoufo appeared. 21 It is a com 
prehensive account of the social organization and traditional agricultural 
practices of the Senoufo specifically of the Korhogo region. 
The French experiment in using Senegalese soldiers as their agents 
in the Senoufo villages was abandoned by the 1920s. They found it more 
expedient to rely upon local chiefs to sustain a flow of forced labor into 
both public works and the plantations and forests of the south. During 
the colonial period, then, chieftaincy in the Korhogo region was in a 
sense strengthened by being made an arm of colonial administration. 
It was only under the government of an independent Côte d’Ivoire, intent 
upon “modernizing” the new nation in part through the centralization 
of power, that the chiefs were not only deprived of the last vestiges of
Member of Poro Society, Korhogo
Aerial view of Senoufo village

Granaries in Moroviné, near Korhogo
their traditional authority but often saw their people relocated as villages were consolidated into large and artificial units of production.

A broad overview of political change in the region is the subject of a study by W. C. Gunderson, spanning the hundred years from the 1870s to the 1970s. The author argues that “local leaders had to operate within a variety of contexts as the needs and priorities of outsiders (Mande warriors, colonial officials and the leadership of the newly independent Ivoirien state) were translated into administrative systems and programs which disrupted local society to an ever increasing degree.” Gunderson, however, ignores the role of World War II veterans in the process.

Gunderson’s work is complemented by T. J. Bassett’s study, completed in 1984, of change in the regional economy. Bassett selected Katiali, some sixty kilometers to the northwest of the town of Korhogo, as a case study of the forces moving the Senoufo peasant from household subsistence to commodity production. He argues that “one of the major consequences of peasant involvement in crop and labor markets has been the transformation of the Senoufo lineage-based mode of production and ‘culture of production’ to a transitional mode.” The transition in question has to do with the “functional dualism” between “the capitalist export-enclave plantation economy of the forest region and the peasant sector of the north which produced cheap food and labor for the capitalist sector.”

The Dyula are dispersed through the Korhogo region in villages of their own, in sections of Senoufo villages, and in quarters of the towns. Malian by origin, and speaking a dialect of Malinke, their migrations into the region have extended over a period of about half a millennium. They arrived to trade but identified themselves either as warriors, tun tigi, whose function was to defend their communities, or as scholars, mori, whose role was to maintain the Islamic values of Dyula society. The relationship between Dyula and Senoufo was essentially one of mutual benefit. That the Dyula did not seek to proselytize greatly diminished any potential for conflict between them and their hosts.

The Dyula necessarily engaged also in farming for household subsistence. In the nineteenth century, however, they commenced production for export, using slaves to work newly created plantations. The old commercial links, maintained with other Dyula communities across the West African savannas, provided them with ready access to markets for their produce. The turbulence of that century, which witnessed the rise (and fall) of a succession of Muslim states across the Western Sudan, greatly stimulated those markets. The Dyula are credited with the introduction into the Korhogo region of a number of cash crops, notably cotton and tobacco, and with the development of manufacture, particularly weaving and dyeing. They have thus constituted an entrepre-
neural factor within Senoufo society. In 1982, R. Launay's excellent book on the Dyula of Korhogo appeared. He explores the nature of the symbiotic relationship which has long existed between Dyula and Senoufo and identifies the constraints upon the assimilation of the former to the latter.

The Dyula remain firmly attached to Islam, the Senoufo somewhat less firmly to their traditional gods. There are converts to Islam among the latter, and the process is a continuing one. Figures compiled on the basis of the 1954 census gave the Muslim population of the subdivision of Korhogo as 50,000, the Catholic as 2,100, and the "animiste" as 133,900. The 1963 census yields no comparable breakdown, but the Rapport Sociologique suggests that Senoufo conversion was mainly an urban phenomenon. Almost 70 percent of the Senoufo in Korhogo town claimed to be Muslim.

The interviews with veterans in the Man region, in the western Côte d'Ivoire, were conducted mainly with those who identified themselves as Yacouba (or Dan) and Wobe. These two peoples share a common life-style and culture, though the former speak a dialect of southern Mande and the latter of Kru. In the mountainous northern part of the region, rice cultivation has long been practiced. In the heavily forested southern part, yam is grown and hunting was formerly an important element in household subsistence. Traditionally, the Yacouba and Wobe lived in small settlements of, at most, a few families. Each family unit farmed for itself, however, there being little evidence of communal effort unless for ritual and defensive purposes. In the nineteenth century, and probably before, kola was extensively collected. It was sold to Dyula traders in exchange for salt, cloth, and other such commodities. Over the last seven decades or so, cocoa and coffee have been increasingly grown as cash crops, introduced with the "encouragement" of the colonial administration. Useful studies of the social organization and culture of the similar, and neighboring, Toura and Guéré peoples have been published by Holas and Schwartz.

The early history of the Dan and Wobe has been outlined by J.-N. Loucou. Unlike the Senoufo, the people of the Man area fiercely resisted the French occupation. "Pacification" of the area was only achieved after a series of campaigns lasting from 1905 to late 1908. Governor G. Angoulvant (1908–16), in charge of the operations, described the Dan as "unyielding savages," expressing surprise that "they wished to chase us [the French] from the country." Finally victorious, the French received the surrender of 670 rifles. Within the next seven years they were to seize and destroy almost 25,000 more rifles within the cercle of Man. That the Man country was in time to prove a splendid source of volunteers for the Tirailleurs Sénégalais should scarcely be a surprise.
Like the Senoufo, the mass of the Dan and Wobe people remain strongly attached to the old gods. On the basis of the census of 1954, the subdivision of Man embraced 119,000 "animistes," 15,000 Muslims, 4,000 Catholics, and 2,000 Protestants.  

When I first decided to study Ivoirien veterans and selected the Korhogo region, a knowledgeable anthropologist maintained that there were few such and suggested I "go west," that is, to Man. Perversely, perhaps, I ignored the advice. Nonetheless, it will now be apparent why he gave it. If not, perhaps the perspective of the Senoufo veteran Sekongo Yessongui will be convincing. Yessongui regretted not having stayed in the army once he had accepted the inevitability of being drafted.

Military service was good for me. If I'd stayed in, I would be well off today. I would have a beautiful house today. But I didn't stay in. They asked me to reenlist as a volunteer, but I said no. After that came the war. They gathered us all together and they took me to war anyway. There I saw the same white who had asked me to volunteer. He said: "Hah! I told you to stay in. You said no. And here you are again." We didn't stay in because our parents made amulets so that we would stay here and work for them. That is why there was no spirit to stay in the army. Our elders had one single concern—farming. They only wanted us to farm for them. When we were children, they were only farmers—that's the only thing they knew—that's all they wanted. Now, if my son wants to leave here, I will give him my blessing. If you stay here, you don't do well.

I found, indeed, that there were few Senoufo villages without their anciens combattants. On the face of it, this might seem strange in a society so devoted to agricultural pursuits, in which many had seldom left their villages even to travel to the towns of the region. The point was, however, that the Korhogo and had had little choice about serving in the army; class by class, age group by age group, they were recruited involuntarily whatever their personal predilections. So there turned out to be many Korhogo veterans but scarcely a volunteer or career man among them. But when I did "go west" to Man, I found that a significant proportion of the veterans were indeed volunteers, and men moreover who chose to serve their full fifteen years in the army. Those interviews proved, then, a truly useful control group. The administrator Gaston Joseph, who knew his Côte d'Ivoire well, had made the point in 1944. For him the Senoufo were "cultivators, extremely attached to the land, hard working, sweet, trustworthy, obedient to powerful chiefs." The Dan, by contrast, were "at the moment of the occupation, counted among the most backward people of the colony, being among the most savage, the most withdrawn and the most individualistic."
The Winds of Change

It has become a commonplace that those Africans who participated in World War II became a driving force in the nationalist movement which brought their countries to independence in the late 1950s and early 1960s. The point was put in a different but telling way by Albert Tevoedjre. "When Africa becomes independent," he wrote, "we will have to raise a statue in memory of a cursed person in history, Hitler."35

There can, of course, be no question that World War II had immense consequences for Africa in general and for French West Africa in particular. Although Britain and France had experienced a radically different war, the six long years of conflict left both great colonial powers impoverished. Unlike Great Britain, however, in 1945 France was in the throes of a grave moral crisis resulting from the circumstances of its capitulation in 1940 and its collaboration with Germany between 1940 and 1943. Its savior in 1944, Charles de Gaulle, was the very man condemned to death as a traitor in 1940.

Winds of change had begun to waft gently into France's vast African empire following the signing of the Atlantic Charter in 1942. Not even the most radical thinker foresaw the abandonment of empire, but there were those who began to recognize that a transfer of power from the metropole to the colonies, the beginnings of a process of decolonization, would inevitably occur in the aftermath of the war.36 Yet, if such thoughts were in the air during the later years of the war, it was to take the excesses of power practiced successively by the Pétainist and Gaullist regimes to create the stir of discontent in the colonies which was in time to swell into the nationalist movements and ultimately to bring independence. At issue is the role of the anciens combattants in this process, with particular reference to the Côte d'Ivoire.

The people of the Côte d'Ivoire, the African majority and the tiny European minority alike, experienced to the fullest extent the vagaries of France's vacillations between support of the Allied and Axis causes. No matter which side France was on, however, the Côte d'Ivoire still had to contribute its quotas of raw materials and forced labor. Over and above that, it had to provide tens of thousands of men for the armies of France. Ivoirien recruits joined the ranks of the 150,000 men who formed the West African regiments.37 It is somewhat paradoxical that Free France, holding itself up as the champion of liberty and justice, in fact carried to new heights the economic abuse of the colonies. In the Côte d'Ivoire, the political goal of winning the hearts and minds of the white, pro-Pétainist colons was deemed so important that the
Free French administration felt obliged to afford them protection against competition from the Ivoirien planters. This, then, was the situation confronting returning veterans.

Did the *anciens combattants* return with ideas that one day their countries would become politically free? Had they heard the cry, “Africa for the Africans”? As early as December 1941, immediately after Pearl Harbor, American intelligence services began drawing up plans for possible landings, one of them at Dakar. Col. William Donovan, head of the Office of Strategic Services, received a feasibility study which addressed American long-term objectives. The author envisaged, with extraordinary foresight, the need for

the organization of a new independent Africa, based on the federation of African states. Africa for the Africans! The present African situation is parallel to that in South America during the Napoleonic Wars. The African Bolivar is needed. \(^{38}\)

The slogan “Africa for the Africans” did not, of course, pass into currency from this source. Yet nevertheless it did in time become one that African soldiers began increasingly to hear and use. Aoussi Eba, a teacher drafted in 1939, spoke of this:

> We never thought about independence—not even one day—in the future. We never imagined it. The French were everywhere. Assimilation was the goal. People wanted the same rights as the French—toward assimilation. It was after the Second World War—even then. There was a slogan everywhere—Africa for the Africans. Everywhere you heard it. We thought then that that was good. . . . I was a sergeant then. We heard that slogan everywhere—in the bars—everywhere. After the war, emancipation was simple. There was a new spirit of emancipation. The *tirailleurs* returned with that spirit. After all, it was inappropriate—the kind of life we lived here—with the whip over us. \(^{39}\)

As the war drew to a close, the people of the Côte d’Ivoire demanded reform. In these early stages of protest it was not the philosophy behind France’s assimilation policy that was being questioned but rather the constraints imposed on it by practical considerations. Yet this debate was eventually to lead to the transformation, if not dismantlement, of the entire colonial system. The experience of the soldiers, and their behavior following the conflict, mirrors the decolonization process. They, above all, expected recognition of their sacrifices and accomplishments. They felt, like *ancien combattant* Namble Silué, that “only the French know what we did for them. We liberated them. What greater thing could you do for them?” \(^{40}\) To appreciate the role of the *anciens combattants*,
and the part they played in the new politics of the Côte d'Ivoire, it is essential that the evolution of their new consciousness and the results of their often bitter anger toward all forms of inequality be taken fully into account. What follows is the story of the Ivoirien Tirailleurs Sénégalais of World War II.

Notes to Chapter One

3. Ibid., 117–33.
4. Ibid., 226–35.
5. Ibid. 233–34. See also Amon d'Aby, *La Côte d'Ivoire dans la cité africaine*, 37–38.
12. Interview 102. See Appendix for a detailed list of all interviews conducted.
13. Interview 65.

15. Col. Emile Bombét, prefect of Korhogo, was indeed kind enough to issue me a virtual laissez-passer in the form of an open letter to all civilian and military officials in the department to cooperate in my inquiry. In fact, the good colonel will not, I hope, mind my saying that the only time I found it necessary to use the document was when I ran a stop sign in front of a police post. The document worked: my driving record remained unblemished.

16. The tapes of the interviews are on deposit at the Institut d'histoire, arts et archéologie africains, University of Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire. A complete set of transcripts is on deposit at Africana Library, Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois.


20. Senoufo informants, asked about “the war,” assume first that the reference is to Samory's intrusion into the region. Gbon Coulibaly's response is widely quoted and used to explain why Gbon made a politically wise decision in supporting the Almamy.


24. Ibid., 250.


27. *Cartes des Religions de l'Afrique Noire*, République de la Côte d'Ivoire (Centre des hautes études administratives sur l'Afrique et l'Asie modernes, 1957). The pages of this report are unnumbered. The figures cited are from the tabulations at the end. The main text differs in giving the “population animiste” as 135,000. The population of the subdivision of Korhogo in 1954 was counted at 193,940. Why the total in the Carte (186,000 or 187,100) falls short of this figure is not explained.

28. *Région de Korhogo* 2 (1965): 22. The analyst remarks, cursorily it may be thought, that the conversion of Senoufo “did not mean that they had totally abandoned their traditional practices and beliefs, but had changed their names and adopted certain Islamic customs.”

29. B. Holas, *Les Toura: Esquisse d'une civilisation montagnarde de Côte*


32. *Carte des religions*.

33. Interview 59. In fact, three of Yessongui's children have left the village to work in the towns.


36. For AOF, see C. Coquery-Vidrovitch, "Vichy et l'industrialisation aux colonies," *Revue d'histoire de la deuxième guerre mondiale*, 29 (April 1979): 69–94. For the British Empire, Ronald Robinson confirms that similar ideas were floating around the Colonial Office in the mid-war period. Personal communication.


38. OSS, Reports, microfilm, reel 1. Plan submitted to Colonel Donovan by Sherman Kent, chief of the medical section, 11 December 1941.

39. Interview 102.

40. Interview 64.