

MEMOIRS OF THE MAELSTROM

A SENEGALESE ORAL HISTORY
OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR

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HEINEMANN
Portsmouth, NH

JAMES CURREY
Oxford

DAVID PHILIP
Cape Town

Heinemann
361 Hanover Street
Portsmouth, NH 03801-3912
www.heinemann.com

James Currey Ltd.
73 Botley Road
Oxford OX2 0BS
United Kingdom

David Philip Publishers (Pty) Ltd.
208 Werdmuller Centre
Claremont 7708
South Africa

Offices and agents throughout the world

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ISBN 0-325-00139-1 (Heinemann cloth)
ISBN 0-325-00138-3 (Heinemann paper)
ISBN 0-85255-688-8 (James Currey cloth)
ISBN 0-85255-638-1 (James Currey paper)

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

Lunn, Joe

Memoirs of the maelstrom : a Senegalese oral history of the First World War.—(Social history of Africa series)

1. World War, 1914-1918—Participation, Senegalese 2. World War, 1914-1918—Personal narratives, Senegalese

I. Title

940.3'0899663

ISBN 0-85255-638-1 (James Currey paper)
ISBN 0-85255-688-8 (James Currey cloth)

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Lunn, Joe.

Memoirs of the maelstrom : a Senegalese oral history of the First World War / Joe Lunn.
p. cm.— (Social history of Africa, 1099-8098)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-325-00139-1 (alk. paper)

ISBN 0-325-00138-3 (pbk. : alk. paper)

1. World War, 1914-1918. 2. World War, 1914-1918—Senegal. 3. World War, 1914-1918—Personal narratives, Senegalese. 4. Oral history. 5. France. Armee. Tirailleurs senegalais—History. 6. France. Armee—Colonial forces—History—19th century. 7. France. Armee—Colonial forces—History—20th century. 8. Africa, French-speaking West—Race relations. 9. Africa, French-speaking West—History, Military. I. Title. II. Series.

D811.A2 L85 1999

940.3—dc21 99-29405

Paperback cover photo: Biram Mbodji Tine. Photograph by the author.

Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper.

Docutech RRD 2008

*In memory of my father, William Dixon Lunn (1923–1978),
whose last words to me were a request for a copy
of the as yet unrecorded interviews
on which this book is based.*

“TO MEET DEATH FAR AWAY”: THE SENEGALESE IN THE TRENCHES

Nearly 140,000 West Africans served as combatants in Europe during the First World War. Their presence on the western front, as well as their purported conduct in the fighting, aroused intense controversy at the time, while the use made of them by French generals has been the subject of ongoing debate ever since.

The ferocious image of the Senegalese *tirailleur* brandishing his *coupe-coupe* and beheading Germans in behalf of *la patrie* was widely disseminated by the French in an effort to terrify their adversaries and boost the morale of metropolitan forces. The Germans, for their part, eagerly repeated allegations of African brutality.¹ It was also frequently asserted that French officers regarded the Senegalese primarily as “cannon fodder” and systematically employed them as assault troops with the deliberate intention of sacrificing their lives in order to spare French ones.² This charge was denied by the government. Rather, they portrayed their willingness to use African soldiers as an example of the nonracist character of French society that was consistent with the egalitarian principles of French Republicanism.³

In addition to the myths and controversy surrounding Senegalese participation in the fighting, the nature of the soldiers' experience in the trenches has also remained enigmatic. The combat experience of the Senegalese in Europe can be assessed by examining how African troops were deployed at the front and exploring their interpretations of their ordeal and motivations for fighting. With respect to their use, a new interpretation of the evidence will show that during the last two and a half years of the war, the casualties suffered by Africans were indeed significantly higher than those incurred by the French. Moreover, it is maintained that this was not accidental but rather the product of a calculated policy concerning their use on the part of many French commanders. Senegalese

recollections of the Great War thus paint a compelling picture of the nature of their combat experience from their particular vantage point in the frontlines.

"LES TROUPES DE CHOC"

The Use of the Senegalese at the Front

The use that the French made of the Senegalese in combat between 1914 and 1918 fell into three distinct phases. During the first year and a half of the war, the French High Command, imbued with the erroneous belief that the conflict would be brief and often skeptical about the military value of the Senegalese, generally opted to use them as garrison troops to release French units in North Africa or in secondary operations outside of France, notably at the Dardanelles and later in Thessaloniki.⁴ In the wake of the disasters suffered during the first year of the fighting, French policy toward the Senegalese was revised in late 1915. In light of the inescapable evidence that the war would be both bloody and protracted, massive recruitment was authorized in West Africa, and the new formations raised there were combined with preexisting units and deployed in large numbers on the western front. In this capacity, over 30,000 West Africans were engaged on the Somme between July and October 1916 and also at Verdun, where a "tactical group" composed in large measure of *tirailleurs* and *originaires* participated in perhaps the most celebrated French military action of the war, the "retaking" of Fort Douaumont.⁵ French policy thus crystallized, and thereafter Senegalese troops were extensively used in France.

With the near collapse of the French army a year later after the debacle on the Aisne, the use of the Senegalese (who had suffered extensive losses in the fighting there) entered its final phase. From mid-1917 onward, Africans were dispersed along the front to serve as the tactical spearheads for larger French units.⁶ In this role, Africans served in the frontlines—notably in the counterattacks at Reims and in the assaults against Villers-Cotteret and St. Mihiel—until the armistice.⁷

Organizational Principles

Just as the use of African troops went through distinct phases, so too did the principles governing the organization of Senegalese formations in combat undergo continual modification between 1914 and 1918. The French High Command was presented with two main options regarding the organization of African troops: they might be grouped with European and other colonial soldiers within squads to form fully integrated units in the *Armée coloniale*, or they could be segregated in separate battalions or regiments composed

(with the exception of their French cadres) exclusively of Senegalese. In addition, they entertained a third possibility, which was to retain the principle of segregation of the Africans except in combat. When fighting, African units of various sizes—companies, battalions, or regiments—might be temporarily “amalgamated” (*amalgamée*) or “juxtaposed” (*accolant*) with other similar sized formations in the Colonial Army to create larger units, either in “variegated” (*panaché*) or mixed (*mixte*) units of battalions, regiments, or brigades.⁸

With the exception of the Senegalese *originaires*, who were usually integrated at a company level with French soldiers in the Colonial Army, the first option was never considered by the military authorities.⁹ Instead, the *Tirailleurs sénégalais*—which accounted for over 96 percent of the African combatants in Europe—were systematically “isolated” in units behind the lines and, frequently, during combat.¹⁰ The third option was, nevertheless, also employed by the army. Never formally systematized by the High Command, which, depending on particular situations, left the tactical organization of combat formations largely to the discretion of unit commanders, the range of African-European alignments utilized during the fighting varied in the extreme.

Though occasionally formed into regiments composed entirely of Senegalese troops, the prevailing practice during the first two years of the war was to combine two African battalions with a third battalion of French (or other colonial) soldiers to form a mixed regiment of colonial infantry.¹¹ The guiding organizational principle throughout this period was that the Senegalese battalion—including its small French cadre, which amounted to about 11 percent of its complement¹²—should remain inviolate.

The decision to utilize large numbers of Senegalese troops on the western front in 1916 initiated a period of ongoing experimentation that continued throughout the war. During 1916, African units were deployed by the Colonial Army in one of three types of combat formations: in regiments composed entirely of Senegalese battalions; in regiments consisting of both Senegalese and European battalions; and, much more rarely, in battalions or “tactical groups” that interspersed African companies among other companies of colonial infantry.¹³ Regardless of how they were deployed, all African combat units used during 1916 also contained a very high percentage of soldiers recruited from “warrior races.”¹⁴

After General Charles Mangin’s rise to a position on the High Command in 1917, Senegalese units were concentrated in order to maximize their “shock” power. Two organizational patterns predominated. Senegalese battalions were temporarily assigned to *régiments “blancs”* to create a fourth battalion for assault, or they were grouped into exclusively African regiments.¹⁵ Limited experimentation was also conducted with the *panaché* of units, whereby Senegalese and European battalions placed in line next to

each other exchanged one company apiece.¹⁶ These measures, however, failed to achieve the desired result.

In the aftermath of the mutinies that erupted in May 1917 following the disastrous attacks on the Aisne, the High Command's general policy concerning the deployment of Senegalese troops was again revised. Though still assigned primarily to the Colonial Army, African battalions were also dispersed among metropolitan formations for the first time. During the last year and a half of the war, these latter units were temporarily "loaned" to French infantry divisions as "tactical groups" of two or three battalions whenever a "determined" attack (or counterattack) was planned.¹⁷ Their cadres had been increased to about one-fifth of their complement by this time, and the variation of Senegalese and French battalions was often (though not exclusively) practiced by divisional and corps commanders.¹⁸

French Tactical Doctrine

French tactical doctrine about how best to use the Senegalese in combat, no less than military opinions about their value, was sharply divided at the beginning of the war. This internal dispute represented a continuation of earlier disagreements within the army about the efficacy of undertaking expanded recruitment in West Africa in 1912, and it remained largely unresolved during the first two years of the war. Thereafter, when it was decided to deploy the Senegalese in large numbers on the western front, controversy continued over the question of their qualities as soldiers, while the tactical principles concerning their employment were subject to ongoing experimentation and revision. Nevertheless, military doctrine governing their use was conditioned throughout by French racial preconceptions about Africans.¹⁹

Early advocates of the policy of deploying the Senegalese as combatants in Europe stressed their hereditary qualities as "warriors." Ranking the comparative martial prowess of West Africans according to "race," they sought—by means of apportioning appropriate combinations of these groups within infantry formations—to exploit their "natural" combativeness to maximum advantage. Though conceding their alleged intellectual inferiority to Europeans, this faction argued that several of the more "advanced" races were capable of providing the requisite number of N.C.O.s for their units and that the remainder, if they were provided with proper French leadership, made excellent soldiers. Moreover, their comparative lack of "nervousness" made them ideal for use as "shock troops." Their tactical role was thus envisioned from the outset as primarily an offensive one.²⁰

While those who advocated using Senegalese troops emphasized their innate fighting qualities, detractors laid stress on their "limited intellectual faculties."²¹ Because of the perceived "simplicity" of their languages, preventing their comprehension of complex instructions in French, it was sug-

Quelques types des principales
Races de l'Afrique
Occidentale d'où proviennent
les Tirailleurs Sénégalais
combattant en France.



1. — Wolof. — Tirailleur RAKHE DIAGNE, né en 1879, à Tivaouane (Sénégal).



2. — Wolof (de Dakar). — Soldat MAMALIC SOW, né à Dakar, incorporé au 4^e régiment colonial comme sous-officier de l'une des Quatre Compagnies du Sénégal.



3. — Wolof fils de chef. — Caporal ALDIBIH GYNI, fils de Dialgué Dial, ancien chef du canton de Nguel Nalaw, Cercle de Diourbel (Sénégal).



4. — Wolof fils de chef. — Caporal SAGHNI DIENG, fils de Touré Dial, ancien chef du canton de Nguel Nalaw, Cercle de Diourbel (Sénégal).



5. — Wolof-Léon. — Tirailleur OUSMAN NIA, né à Bissau (Sénégal), âgé de 22 ans.



6. — Serer. — Tirailleur AMADY BAIROUPE, né à Gambia, Cercle de Kaolack (Sénégal).



7. — Serer. — Sergent MAHE KURI DIAL F., né en 1891, à Niakhar (Sénégal), cousin du tour-sim-chef de la province de Siny et fils de Birum Doro Dial, chef de canton de Ngayo Khem (Sine-Narbour, au Sénégal) ; c'est engagé pour servir d'exemple aux administrés de son cousin.



8. — Toucouleur, fils de chef. — Caporal MAMADOU S.M., fils de Lamtara Mamadou Mhala, ancien chef du Fouta Tora et neveu du chef actuel, né à Pador (Sénégal), en 1896.



9. — Toucouleur. — Caporal DUMBA NDIAYE, né au village de Diour, Cercle de Pador (Sénégal), en 1890 ; blessé à la bataille de la Somme.



10. — Diola, de Casamance (Pogny). — Tirailleur RAMA FATE, né au village de Mandé Guen, près Pignonn (Pogny, Sénégal), âgé de 20 ans.



11. — Saharien. — Tirailleur SIDI HADJARRA, né à l'ouest de l'actuelle Haute-Sénégal-Niger, âgé de 25 ans environ.



12. — Maure, de Mauritanie. — Tirailleur MOUTIAMBA DIAL, né au village de Diourbel, près Casah (Sénégal), âgé de 22 ans.



13. — Peulh. — Tirailleur MAMADOU SIDIB, né au village de Barre, Cercle de Dédougou (Haute-Sénégal-Niger), âgé de 22 ans ; engagé en 1910.



14. — Peulh, du Kaarta. — Tirailleur OUMARI DIAL, né à Segou (Haute-Sénégal-Niger), âgé de 25 ans.



15. — Bambara. — Sergent MAMADOU DIARRA, né en 1879, à Nyantou (Haute-Sénégal-Niger) ; ancien caravanier et aloué ; engagé en 1903 à Casah ; 3 années de service en Tunisie française ; vint au Maroc en 1907 ; blessé devant l'ennemi en 1913, à Kénitra ; nommé caporal, puis décoré de la médaille militaire ; fut, en 1914, la campagne de France, et en 1916 la Somme ; grièvement blessé ; a deux fils éclosés à Saint-Louis. A obtenu la belle citation reproduite plus haut.

NE PAS COUPER

"Warrior Races" from Senegal—Wolof, Serer, Toucouleur, and Bambara. From *La Dépêche coloniale Illustrée*, January 1916.

gested that communication with the Senegalese was perforce restricted and command thereby made more difficult. In addition to their being unable to conduct sophisticated maneuvers, they were also stigmatized as being poor marksmen. Africans, it was argued, were also excessively dependent on their European officers, and if these were killed or otherwise disabled in action, their formations quickly lost cohesion. Worst of all, in such circumstances they were prone to rout. These inherent deficiencies were impossible for the Africans to overcome, and they were accordingly disparaged as unreliable troops who were incapable of mastering the intricacies of "modern" warfare.²²

Nevertheless, these dramatically opposing views about Senegalese "aptitudes" in combat gradually became reconciled in French military doctrine. In light of their inconsistent performance on the western front in 1916 and 1917, principles governing their tactical use were codified in the *Notice sur les Sénégalais et leur emploi au combat* issued during the last year of the war. Distributed to French officers commanding African units, this directive provided a policy that represented a synthesis of earlier preconceptions.²³

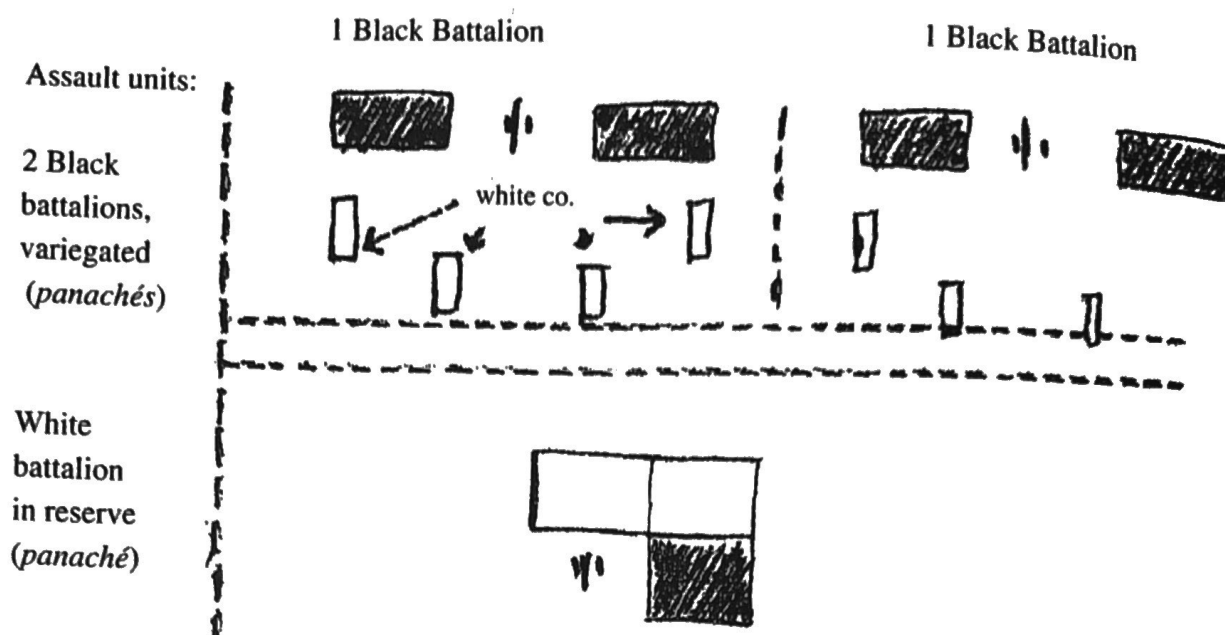
Accepting the martial ranking of African races as a basic premise, the "notice" enumerated the specific military attributes and shortcomings of each group. It further espoused the view that the vocabularies of most African "dialects" were only sufficient to convey "very simple ideas." Under such circumstances, officers were counseled to be patient, to demonstrate their basic commands visually, and to rely on African N.C.O.s as interpreters.

The most "basic" element of the Senegalese infantry battalion was the company, and these were to be composed of races whose dialects permitted intercommunication and whose natural fighting qualities complemented each other. Units composed of Wolofs, Serers, "Tukulors," and Bambaras, for example, were considered to be among the very "best" combat formations. And regardless of how the Senegalese battalions were deployed at the front, under no circumstance was the internal organization of the African companies to be touched.

Senegalese combat characteristics were discussed in detail in the *Notice*, and a series of tactical recommendations concerning their use were made. Though possessing "[highly] developed warrior instincts," they also suffered from serious shortcomings. While there were exceptions to this rule, defensive operations frequently posed difficulties for Africans because of their "unskillful" use of terrain. Offensive actions were, however, a different matter, provided certain necessary precautions were taken.

"Brave" and "impetuous" in attack, the Senegalese were said to pursue assaults to the very "limit of their endurance" if these developed favorably. If they were "checked," however, they became easily confused and unreliable. In such situations, their "sole idea" was to escape from

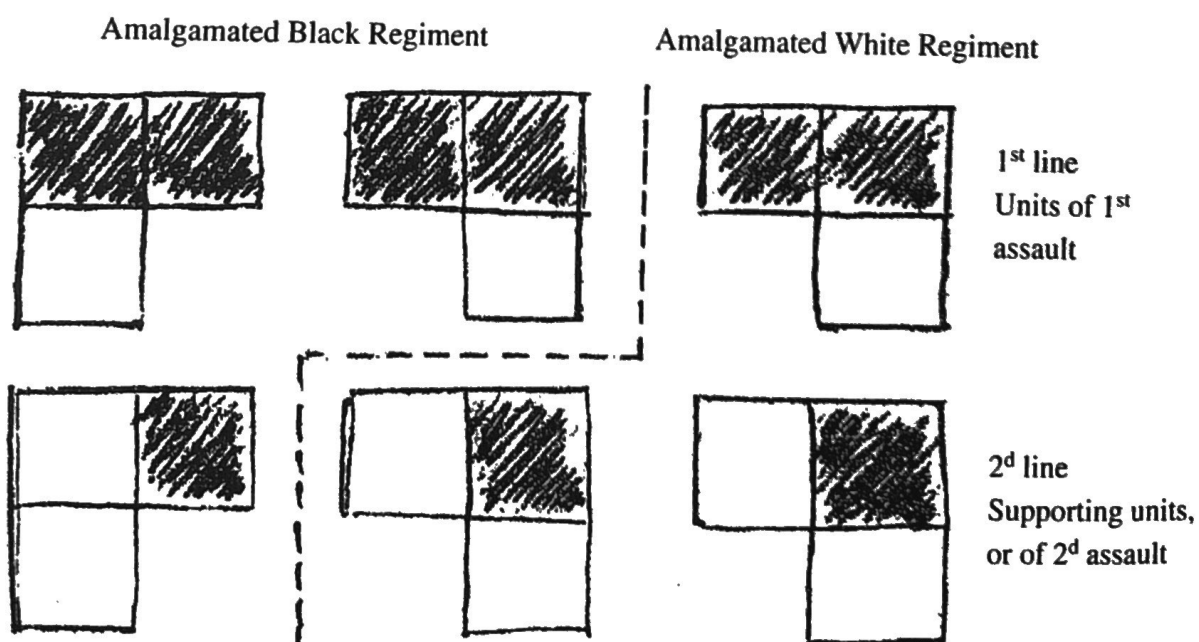
Figure 5.1 Tactical Deployment of Senegalese Troops during Assaults: *Panaché* and *Accoler* of Units.



In this case, the black company of the white variegated (*panaché*) battalion could furnish support for the front line.

The schemes below represent diverse combinations—all possible—without which it would be necessary to disrupt the command at the last moment.

A. Brigade by Regiments placed side by side (*accoler*) and surrounded (*encadres*)



Source: *Archives de la Guerre*: Fonds Clemenceau, 6 N 96: "Note au sujet de l'organisation d'unités offensives mixtes Sénégalaises," Chef de bataillon Arnaud, Commandant de 64^e bataillon de Tirailleurs Sénégalaises, 12 février 1917.

the "hot spots" where their officers had led them and to seek safety in "flight without stopping."

Because the French cadres within African battalions were insufficient to prevent such a situation from occurring, it was "indispensable to provide [additional] support" for Senegalese units in combat. The means of doing so was made explicit: "*behind* black battalions one always ought to have a French unit to sustain [them]" and to "stay their movement if necessary." The recommended method for making such troops available was to variegate Senegalese and French battalions in the lines (*panaché*), which would permit the temporary exchange of one company from each unit during combat. The French company "loaned" to the Senegalese would thus provide the requisite "support" in their rear, while the extra African company would thereby be freed to participate in operations with the European battalion (see Figure 5.1). As these instructions indicate, French tactical doctrine by 1918 embraced the notion that the Senegalese were useful primarily as assault troops, but that they required European formations both behind them and at their sides to fulfill this role properly.

Even though the principles governing the use of the Senegalese changed during the war, the frontline experience of the vast majority of African combatants was nonetheless remarkably similar. Almost always segregated from French troops except at the front, they were usually used in hazardous operations and especially as shock troops. In the face of callous treatment by their commanders and their unenviable role in fighting, their experience is of particular interest in revealing how they reacted to the terrifying combat situations they faced.

SOLDIERS' MEMORIES OF COMBAT

Senegalese impressions of their experience at the front varied considerably depending on individual circumstances. These factors included: their date of entry into the army, and hence their duration of service; their legal classification as French *sujets* or citizens; and, perhaps most significant, the units to which they were assigned. Among *originaires* there was a significant difference in the views of those who served in the *Infanterie coloniale du Maroc* and in other French regiments of the Colonial Army, while among the *tirailleurs* the primary distinction was between the infantry and (much more rarely) the artillery units.²⁴ Nevertheless, in general the reactions of the Senegalese to their ordeal as combatants were strikingly similar, no doubt because they exemplified a shared cultural heritage. Recalling their experience, veterans invariably addressed common themes: impressions of the front, memories of combat, ways they sought to cope with their ordeal, and motivations for fighting.

Impressions of the Front

Alien though the troglodite world of the trenches was to most European soldiers, it was even more bewildering for the Senegalese. Possessing "no idea of war" and frequently unfamiliar with many of the sights, sounds, and physical sensations to which their French counterparts were accustomed, the Africans' impressions of the front convey a mixture of awe and dread.²⁵

The landscape was desolate. Most buildings and houses near the front lines were "destroyed" and the terrain was as barren as the "bush" in Senegal. Soldiers "dug holes to hide in" or were conveyed to deeper redoubts, where they "hid underground before attacks." The trench system was "built in a curved way instead of a straight line" to minimize losses; it was protected by "iron thread with barbs" to prevent encroachments by the enemy; and it was illuminated at night by flares—"white, red, and ones with many colors"—that made their surroundings "as clear as day." "Sentinels" stood guard at the "*petit poste*" in No Man's Land to warn of unexpected attack, where passwords—such as "Dakar"—were whispered to identify friend from foe.²⁶

Agents of death came in many forms. Artillery fire, which "sounded like thunder," sent shells "exploding and flashing overhead." On impact these made "deep holes in the ground," "buried men [alive]," and covered those they missed in "powder and smoke." In addition to the roar of the cannons—which made their heads "ring" and "deafened" and "burned" those near to them—the lethal but distinctive "tat, tat, tat, tat" of machine guns was also "continuously" audible. "Strange metallic birds" with "men inside" inspired wonder and fear among soldiers who had never seen such sights. They shot and bombed terrified soldiers, and fell to earth in flames. "Balloons attached with cords to the ground" directed the fire of French field guns; these were also attacked by the Germans and "burned with men inside them." And amid this visual spectacle and deafening inferno—many "never heard louder noise than at the front"—death also came imperceptibly. Gas blinded or killed those whose masks were defective, and its corrosive effect on lungs lingered decades after the battles ceased.²⁷

The soldiers were not alone at the front. Dogs, whose scent and hearing were keener than men's, forewarned them of impending attacks. Pigeons carried written messages to distant places and hence became targets whenever they were spotted. Horses pulled guns and other heavy equipment, and their corpses were usually the first sign that death was close at hand when the soldiers moved up to the front. In addition to the presence of other creatures, the soldier's dead comrades were also constant companions. References to them were ubiquitous, though descriptions of their appearance varied in detail: "the ground was covered with dark uniforms"; corpses were "everywhere"; and the dead were "like flies."²⁸

Though such sights provided a graphic reminder of the fate that might soon await the soldiers, life among those who survived was one of constant physical hardship. Whenever they were at the front, the men were "always tired, always hungry, and always thirsty." Fatigue was caused by the constant exertions demanded of the soldiers, and in some cases this was so intense that men died of exhaustion. Food was provided irregularly and was often of poor quality. Because of their inability to make "fires or smoke in the trenches" lest they alert the enemy of their whereabouts, the soldiers were unable to cook and subsisted on rations of "cold meals in tins." Moreover, even when deprived of food for extensive periods, such as during prolonged attacks, soldiers seldom felt "like eating [after battle] because [many of] the men they had been with during the day were dead."²⁹

The harshness of the European climate was extremely difficult for the soldiers to endure, perhaps even more so than battle itself. Indeed, veterans referred to this more frequently than any other single aspect of their daily experience in the trenches. Rain lasted for days on end, filling the trenches with water and forcing the soldiers to wade waist deep in mire. If the weather then turned cold, even worse consequences followed. None of the Senegalese had ever seen snow before and many were entranced by its sight, describing it as "a kind of ice that fell from the sky [looking] like cotton; [it] stays on the ground but when the sun comes out becomes water and begins to run." But the consequences of its appearance were dire for sub-Saharan Africans. The cold was often so intense that soldiers "couldn't button [their] uniforms" or "handle [their] rifles," and the "water in [their] canteens became blocks of ice," causing many of them to become so dehydrated that they "couldn't piss." Prolonged exposure to the cold led to frostbite. For some, their "feet became so swollen that they couldn't keep their shoes [on]; they had to be cut off with a knife and they took a pullover and put it around their feet."³⁰ Recounting how frostbite was contracted, Ndiaga Niang remembered:

[One] morning the shells were falling near the trenches, [and] it was very, very cold. And when we got out of the trenches [after the German bombardment, we] were walking to get back [to the rear]. I was walking, but my hands began to get paralyzed because of the cold. I had my rifle in my hand, but I couldn't let go of it because my fingers were completely bent. But I was still walking. After a while my toes began to be[come] paralyzed too, and I realized that I had frostbite and I fell down. One of my friends told me: "Come on, come on, we have to [go]." And I wanted to come, but I couldn't walk any more. Some officers came and said to me: "What's this; who is this guy? Get up and walk like everybody else!" And I said to the officers: "I can't walk anymore—my feet are frozen." And one came and looked at my feet and he told five soldiers to [carry] me on their rifles [like] a stretcher. I was taken to the infirmary to get healed.

The next day I was taken to the hospital in Salonique [Thessaloniki], where all of the soldiers had their feet frozen. When the sun [became] hot enough, our feet were hurting so badly that everybody was shouting and crying in the hospital. And the doctor came and told me that he had to cut [off] my feet. [But on] the day he [had] fixed to cut [them off], when he arrived he found that I was sitting [up in bed]. So he told me "you are very lucky . . . you are going to get better. I have no need to [amputate] your feet [now, because] I can heal them."³¹

Others were less fortunate. Many Africans died of exposure in the trenches, while the sight of amputees missing hands and feet, which was commonplace in postwar Senegal, was often attributable to the frostbite the veterans contracted at the front.³²

Memories of Combat

Miserable though the soldiers' experience usually was in the trenches, it paled in comparison with the horrors they were subjected to during combat. Indeed, as one soldier succinctly expressed it, "Nothing in life is worse."³³

Despite their differing views about where (or when) the hazards they faced were most perilous, the soldiers' impressions of combat bore striking similarities. For nearly all the experience was extremely disorienting. Senses of time and direction frequently became confused. Often guided only by the position of the "sun" or "stars"—which sometimes appeared to come from "different directions," the soldiers frequently had little idea of where they were. They also lost count of the number of days—and sometimes hours—they spent at the front, which were often reckoned simply as "long" or "short" periods. And despite their preparatory training and the commands issued by their officers, in the midst of combat, with "soldiers falling all around you," the men seldom had "time to think [about] what to do."³⁴

Not surprisingly, the experience of the soldiers at the front was not uniform but depended on the various types of operations they had to perform. These fell into several different categories; though all of them were hazardous under adverse circumstances, they differed in significant respects. Sections of the trench network (at least until the summer of 1918, when the fighting became more open) might be occupied in the normal rotation of units. This entailed the upkeep of the position, wariness against sniper fire, and defense against unexpected attack. Night patrols into No Man's Land, on which the soldiers strung barbed wire and gathered reconnaissance information, also figured prominently in the soldier's routine. Though entailing risk—especially if the patrols were spotted in the open and subjected to artillery or machine-gun fire—this type of duty was usually less dangerous than other assignments.³⁵

Alternatively, the Senegalese might be used for *coups de main*—brief surprise attacks by companies or battalions—intended to probe the strength of enemy defenses and dull their preparedness before major attacks. Usually conducted at night by units brought to the front especially for this purpose, these attacks frequently had disastrous results for those involved if the enemy was forewarned or encountered in unexpected strength.³⁶

Finally, the soldiers might also be used in major offensives intended to carry the German positions. Assault troops were normally divided into "three waves," and the soldiers were instructed to advance in lines if they faced artillery fire but to disperse and lie down if they encountered machine guns. They were also taught to advance (or retreat) as well as to fire only on the commands of their officers, who "the Germans always tried to shoot first."³⁷

This last type of operation was regarded as a Senegalese specialty by the French High Command, and it was the one most frequently referred to by the soldiers. Though placing their lives at maximum risk, their experience during the assaults differed depending on the circumstances surrounding them, and they exemplify the range of conditions to which combatants might be exposed. Recounting the ill-fated diversionary attack on the Dardanelles, Daba Dembele vividly described the effects of high explosives on attacking troops:

The first thing we saw when we [disembarked from the ships] were boots just coming out of the ground—they were dead soldiers that had been buried by the shells. . . . And we saw many coins of money everywhere because the soldiers had been bombed by the shells. And most of them [had been] buried without their "change"—only their boots were out. Both the French and the Germans were bombing everywhere when we arrived. I was in the crowd and was advancing. [And a shell] dropped near my legs, and I was blown up about 20 meters [in the air] from where the cannon ball fell. I was not wounded, but I had a stomach full of air . . . because of the impact of the [explosion]. And I was lying there for . . . hours [because] I could not move.³⁸

After literally "walking over the bodies of the dead" during their advance, assault troops getting closer to enemy entrenchment confronted additional obstacles.³⁹ Describing an all too common experience among First World War soldiers, a veteran of the fighting at Thessaloniki remembered:

The general told us that in the morning—the next morning—we would make an attack. [And the next day] he ordered the attack. And the artillery began to shoot the cannons, and after the bombing of the artillery we started to advance toward the Germans. And when we arrived near their trenches, we found that the threads—the barbed wire—were not cut. And that's where many soldiers died because they could not go [any] further. And the Ger-

mans were shooting at us [with their machine guns], and we lost almost all of our soldiers there. . . . The dead bodies were lying on the ground like leaves under a tree.⁴⁰

Even if they reached the enemy lines, the soldiers still had to take them. Though defenders sometimes fled before onrushing troops, if they continued to resist, the actual seizure of the enemy trenches often produced the most ferocious form of combat.⁴¹ This type of experience was recalled by Sera Ndiaye:

In Champagne we were shooting [our] rifles [as we advanced], and [the next] moment we were so close to the Germans that [our] officers told us to stop shooting and to take out our *coupe-coupe*. And we were as near to the Germans as you and I—so close that we were obliged to fight [them] with knives. And from time to time, I saw a soldier who was fighting with a German and another German came from behind him and shot him or stabbed him with a knife. . . . I thought I was going to die. I never [considered that I would be] wounded; I thought I was going to be killed.⁴²

Even if such attacks proved successful, the soldiers inevitably paid a fearful price for them. After each assault, when the Senegalese were withdrawn from the front, "replacements were very numerous," and when the troops were sent to the camps in the Midi for the winter, their units were frequently disbanded altogether or had to be reconstituted.⁴³

Coping with Combat

The psychological distress caused by combat was extreme. Coping with fear was an omnipresent concern among the soldiers, and though thresholds of anxiety fluctuated according to particular situations and individual temperaments, the "terror" engendered by the fighting was pervasive. Under duress, men often "wept like women," soldiers "cried [out] for their mothers," and the wounded said "very strange things before dying." Witnessing their "comrades [being] killed daily, or by the moment," the survivors were preoccupied with "thought[s] about death." Indeed, many soldiers experienced the most dire forebodings. They were convinced that the "war would never end"; that they would "never return [to Senegal]"; or that they "would never escape death."⁴⁴

French efforts to overcome Senegalese apprehensions and bolster their fighting spirit usually proved ineffectual. Customary palliatives, such as alcohol, which were offered before attacks so that the soldiers "would not be conscious of what they were doing," were usually eschewed by most of the troops, who were Muslim. And martial music, which was played to reduce

fears and instill "courage" in the face of the enemy, seldom made an impression. Indeed, far from reassuring the soldiers, the obvious futility of the sacrifices demanded by some French commanders had exactly the opposite effect. Seeking to explain the murderous fate that all too often befell them, many Senegalese attributed it to the "treason[ous]" behavior of particular generals intent on "massacr[ing]" them.⁴⁵

Most Senegalese coped with their emotional ordeal by drawing on a fund of cultural assumptions and beliefs. In this regard, the arbitrary distinctions between *sujets* and *originaires* were reduced to insignificance; in moments of extreme personal crisis most Senegalese sought to fortify themselves in similar ways. And like the responses of their European counterparts, those of the Senegalese exemplify many of the deeper psychological yearnings common to most combatants as they confronted the prospect of their eminent deaths.

Such efforts on the part of the soldiers were not always successful. The stress of battle drove some men "mad," while others—and especially amputees convalescing in hospitals—also frequently "lost their minds." In addition to insanity, despair compelled others to commit suicide. Particularly common among wounded men who were subsequently judged fit to return to the front, acts of suicide also occurred in times of repose, when soldiers had the opportunity to reflect on their fate. Still others sought to enlist help to end their lives: when the pain from wounds became extreme, men begged for death.⁴⁶

Most soldiers, however, managed to persevere through recourse to a variety of psychological supports. Above the din of battle, the will of the men was fortified by the incantations of their comrades. Some of these evoked pride in their ethnic heritage, especially those that derived from their pre-Islamic past. As Souleye Samba Ndiaye recalled, "When fighting was very hard and men were dying, the *ceddo* used to sing the *Goumbala* to encourage Tukulors."⁴⁷ Alternatively, Muslim soldiers, and especially Mourides, recited *Khassidas* to dispel fear in the face of death. The song *Mawahibou*, for example, reminded soldiers as they fought of the promise of paradise that awaited them:

If you are going to Paradise,
these are the steps of Mawahibou.
The steps that take you from this world to eternity,
these are the steps of Mawahibou.
And the steps from eternity to paradise,
these are the steps of Mawahibou.⁴⁸

Like most soldiers, the Senegalese also sought to distance themselves from the specter of death by clinging to the illusion of their personal invulnerabil-

ity. Nearly all Africans wore protective charms to shield them from the hazards of battle, although the faith they instilled in them varied. For some, and especially those who were never wounded or who descended from families with a precolonial martial heritage, their survival was interpreted as proof of the potency of their charms. Other soldiers—including those who were grievously wounded, had had brothers killed, or who were particularly devout Muslims—were more skeptical about their efficacy. Their attitudes resembled those of most European soldiers, who yearned to believe in their “lucky charms” but harbored doubts about their ultimate effectiveness. Though hedging their bets, most of these men believed that “charms were ineffective compared to the [power of the] Almighty.”⁴⁹

Indeed, like their European counterparts, the soldiers’ entreaties for divine intercession on their behalf—and faith in the ultimate rectitude of His eternal design if this were not forthcoming—usually provided a far more compelling source of solace. Regardless of their various religious predilections, the Senegalese were generally sustained in combat by their faith in an Almighty Spirit. This was, however, especially evident among Muslims. In the midst of battle, soldiers—knowing that “only Allah can protect you from death”—“cried [out] to God [to bless them] and continued to go forward.” Moreover, because many believed that “the destiny of men in war is predetermined by Allah,” even if a person were fated to die, “it [was] good.”⁵⁰

Most soldiers, however, sought clues about what awaited them. The tension between the fears they experienced in combat and their hopes of salvation were exemplified in their dreams, which many sought to interpret. Recalling the symbolism in a dream the day before he was wounded, the Fulbe *griot* Demba Mboup believed it to be a premonition:

I dreamed about this event the night before it happened. I dreamed that I was attacked by two lions, but I saw Seriny Touba [Amadu Bamba] in my dreams. And when the two lions came, [he] put me in a basket and raised [me] up like this [away from harm]. But one of the lions scratched my left leg [while I was being lifted up, which was] where I was wounded the next day. So [Seriny Touba] protected me.⁵¹

Despite the range of psychological and spiritual devices the soldiers used to sustain themselves at the front, prolonged exposure to death eventually rendered these of limited utility. In time, the normal distinctions between “life and death” became blurred as their friends perished, and men “acquired the idea that [they] made no difference.” In such situations the soldiers progressively lost the will to survive; indeed they frequently “became indifferent to whether [they] lived or died.”⁵²

And death did come to many. Once all further hopes of survival were extinguished, the soldiers’ thoughts in extremis convey how they reconciled

themselves to the fate that befell them and their own mortality. Those who were fortunate enough to make a final plea to their comrades, or who falsely believed themselves to be on the point of death, were preoccupied with two concerns. Their thoughts turned to the loved ones they would leave behind and their hopes of an afterlife. Most young soldiers spoke of their mothers or fathers and beseeched their friends to ease the pain of their passing by "explain[ing] to their families, how they had been shot and how they died."⁵³ Others distanced themselves from the suffering of their temporal existence and contemplated eternity. Aliou Diakhate recalled his feelings at such a moment:

I was going to die. . . . And I was thinking about God and his Prophet. . . . And when you wish to pray you have to stand up—to stand and bend down on your knees, and put your forehead on the ground. But I could not do that [because I was wounded so badly]. So I took some earth in my hand and I put it to my forehead. And I prayed to God [to bless me] in that way.⁵⁴

Such sentiments offer a fitting epitaph of how the Senegalese coped with their experiences as combatants in Europe. Indeed, even among those who eventually returned to their homeland and were distanced by a lifetime from their ordeal, their interpretations of why they survived harkened back to the same points of reference. As Diouli Missine, who had once nearly been killed by a bullet that tore off his epaulet, explained: "[I escaped] death only by the Grace of Allah and the prayers of my mother and father."⁵⁵

Motivations for Fighting

Unlike most French conscripts, who were aware of the ostensible causes of the war and believed that they were defending their nation against unprovoked German aggression, the Senegalese harbored only the vaguest notions about what had precipitated the conflict or their participation in it. Most frankly acknowledged that they had no idea why the French were fighting the Germans: "The men who took us to France to fight knew the reasons they were fighting, but we only knew that we had to fight for them. That was the only thing I knew. Personally I was never told reasons [for the war]."⁵⁶

Moreover, although some possessed a general awareness of the various European rivalries that precipitated the war, more often than not these were interpreted in the context of precolonial Senegambian struggles between kingdoms and ruling lineages.⁵⁷ Nevertheless, despite their lack of comprehension of the origins of the conflict, the Senegalese were inculcated with compelling motivations for why they should fight. These help to explain why they were willing to risk death.

Though their "officers never explained the reasons for the war [to them]," they did endeavor to stimulate African antipathy toward Germans. The "boche" were characterized as "very wicked" people, for whose defeat the French required Senegalese "help." In addition to being enemies of the French, however, the Germans also were said to despise "'black' people" (whom they regarded as "cannibals" and whose fighting qualities they disdained). Moreover, they were told that it was in their self-interest to defeat the Germans. If Germany won the war, the soldiers would never be repatriated to their homeland but imprisoned instead. In this event, Senegal would become a German colony and the people there would have "a very bad time." This propaganda appears to have had only a marginal impact, for many of the Senegalese veterans felt no animosity toward the Germans, whom they regarded as "human beings like us."⁵⁸ Nevertheless, French efforts to arouse African hostility toward Germans ultimately proved unnecessary: the grim realities that the soldiers confronted in combat offered ample and compelling inducements to fight.

The threat of French reprisals should they not do so, moreover, virtually convinced the Senegalese that they had no alternative but to fight. Daba Dembele remembered that desertion in the face of the enemy was dealt with summarily: "We were [at] the Front [and the fighting] was all around [us]. And one of my friends was telling me: 'Daba, let's try and run away.' But I said: 'No, I prefer to stay and fight.' And my friend tried to flee, [but] a *Tubab* saw him running and he was caught and shot."⁵⁹

Despite the fearful penalties imposed for desertion, many Senegalese did contemplate it, especially in the aftermath of debacles such as occurred on the Aisne. They were dissuaded from making such attempts, however, by a second consideration. Unlike their French counterparts, who might find sanctuary if they escaped, the Senegalese literally had "no place to run to." Under these circumstances, most accepted their fate and complied with their "officers' orders," in even the most dire situations.⁶⁰

In addition to fearing execution by the French if they abandoned their positions, the Senegalese were also motivated in combat by anxiety about being captured by the Germans. The enemy's willingness to take Africans as prisoners—as well as the subsequent treatment accorded to them as P.O.W.s—varied considerably depending on particular circumstances. Nevertheless, most Senegalese—like their counterparts across No Man's Land—gave credence to the more exaggerated rumors about enemy atrocities. Indeed, most soldiers believed that the Germans "killed 'black' people if they caught them," which in at least some instances was true.⁶¹

Surrounded by agents of death at both their front and their rear, most Senegalese realized that they had "no choice" except to "kill or be killed." Under such circumstances, nearly all opted for self-preservation. When con-

fronting their enemies at close quarters, they were obliged to "shoot first" to save their lives.⁶²

In addition to responding to the mortal fears prompted by their hostile and coercive environment, some Senegalese were motivated to fight for more positive reasons. Though constituting a minority among the soldiers, and far more frequently drawn from among *originaires* than *tirailleurs*, these men viewed the war as an opportunity to assert their dignity as Africans in a variety of ways.

For many *originaires*, the "rights" conferred on them by their acquisition of French citizenship offered a convincing rationale for fighting. Some identified with the French cause and adopted it as their own; others took a more self-interested view of the implicit bargain struck by Blaise Diagne with the government. In their eyes, "We were not fighting for the French; we were fighting for ourselves [to become] French citizens."⁶³

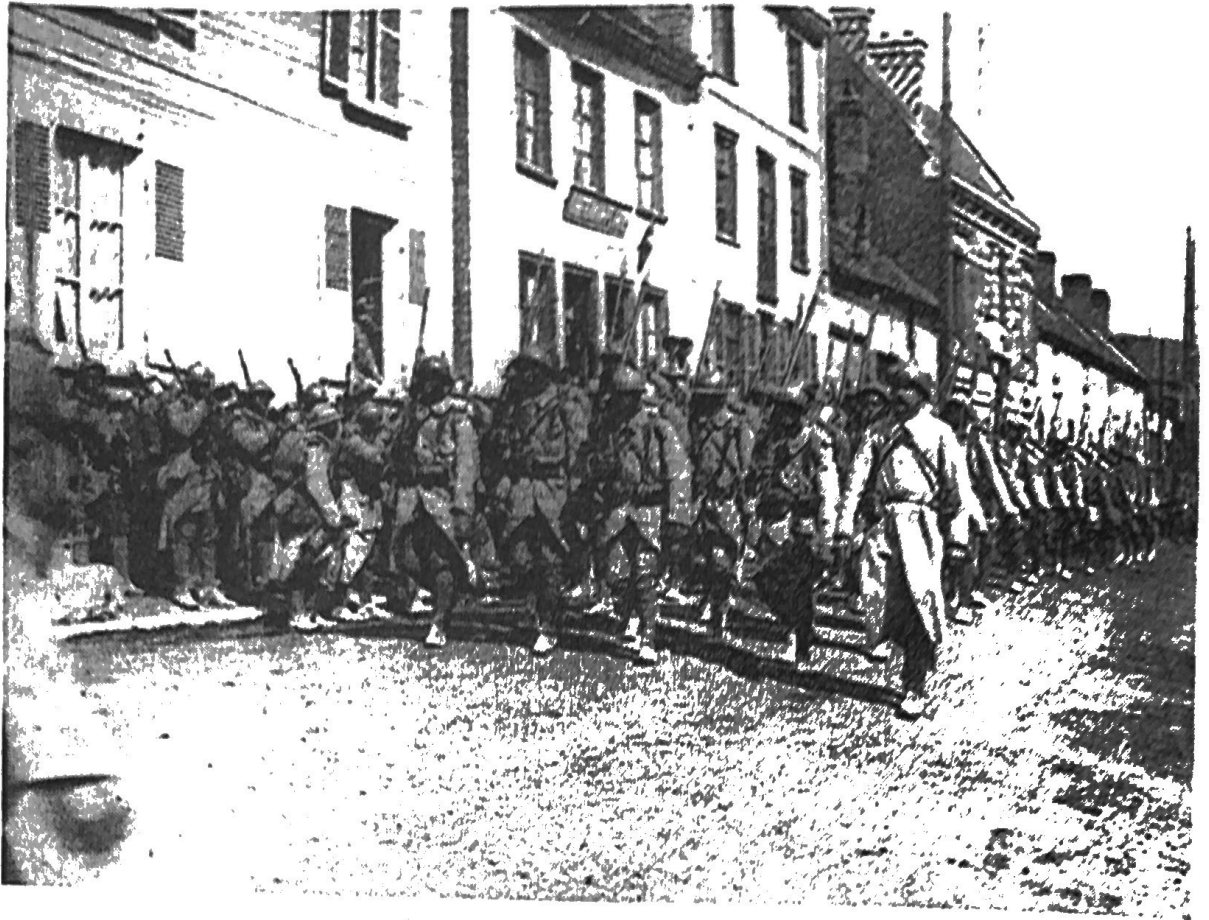
Paradoxically, other soldiers were motivated in battle by a desire to kill particular French officers. Men who repeatedly "insulted, beat, and harassed" the troops were singled out for reprisals during combat, which frequently ended in their deaths. Such actions, which were inconceivable in a colonial context, signaled the refusal by some Africans to continue being abused as "dirty niggers."⁶⁴

Finally, despite their travails, a few soldiers were motivated by a desire to prove their worth in combat and gain indisputable recognition from the French for their deeds of valor. Recalling his feelings after he participated in the *reprise de Douaumont*, Masserigne Soumare stated:

We felt very proud after the attack because the French had tried many times to retake the fort, but finally, we [were the ones] that took it. . . . And when we were leaving the fort, our officers told us not to wash our uniforms even though they were very dirty and covered with mud. But we were told: "Don't wash your uniforms. Cross the country as you are so that everyone who meets you will know that you made the attack on Fort Douaumont." And we took the train [and traveled] for three days between Douaumont and St. Raphaël. And in every town we crossed, the French were clapping their hands and shouting: "*Vive les tirailleurs sénégalais!*" . . . And afterwards, whenever we were walking in the country—everywhere we used to go—if we told people that we made the attack on Fort Douaumont, the French were looking at us with much admiration.⁶⁵

"TO SPARE A FRENCHMAN'S LIFE"

The number of casualties suffered by the Senegalese during the First World War, as well as their proportion in comparison to those of French



Senegalese "shock troops" marching through a French village, 1917. Courtesy of Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris: Collection Poincaré (G 136624). Reprinted with permission.

soldiers, have long been a subject of debate. This lingering controversy is explored here through pursuing three lines of inquiry: (1) examining the attitudes of French commanders toward their Senegalese troops and gauging whether the Africans were used in combat with the conscious intention of sacrificing their lives to save French ones; (2) surveying recent scholarly opinion on this question; and (3) providing a new analysis of African wartime casualties in general, and losses among the soldiers from Senegal in particular, and comparing these figures with those for their ill-fated French counterparts.

French Commanders and the Senegalese

Despite the initial reservations of some about deploying the Senegalese on the western front, there is compelling evidence that from 1916 onward (when this issue ceased to be in question) many French commanders readily sacrificed African troops in an effort to spare the lives of French soldiers. Indeed, this attitude was so widespread that it was expressed at all levels of the French command structure. Although these views were

frequently expressed within the context of the ongoing military debate between 1916 and 1918—specifically, whether to deploy the Senegalese in larger or smaller combat formations and whether they should fight on their own or be variegated with French units—the arguments were invariably predicated on two assumptions: that the Senegalese were especially effective as shock troops and that placing them in the first wave (*première ligne*) of assaults would husband French lives.

During the offensive on the Somme in 1916, the largest number of Senegalese battalions used in the fighting was assigned to the 1st Corps of the Colonial Army commanded by General Pierre Berdoulat. Berdoulat later assessed the performance of his African troops during the battle and speculated about how best to deploy them in the future. Stressing the "limited intellectual faculties" of Africans, which diminished their effectiveness in combat, they were, in his judgment, primarily useful "for sparing a certain number of European lives at the moment of assaults."⁶⁶

Similar sentiments were echoed by General Robert Nivelle, the commander of the French army, during the preparations for the offensive on the Aisne in February 1917. Insisting on the maximum deployment of Senegalese troops during the impending attack, he presented the following argument to the Ministry of War: "It is imperative that the number of [African] units put at my disposition should be increased as much as possible. [This will] increase the power of our projected strength and permit the sparing—to the extent possible—of French blood."⁶⁷

Even among officers most directly responsible for the welfare of the Senegalese troops, such attitudes were not absent. In April 1917, Lieutenant Colonel Debievre, commander of the 58^e *Régiment d'Infanterie coloniale* (composed exclusively of Senegalese battalions), expressed his views about how best to deploy African soldiers: "[The Senegalese *tirailleurs*] are finally and above all superb attack troops permitting the saving of the lives of whites, who *behind them* exploit their success and organize the positions they conquer."⁶⁸

Similar considerations were also voiced the same year by the commander of the 64^e *Bataillon de tirailleurs Sénégalais*. A strong advocate of variegating African and French battalions in combat, he contended that such a tactical scheme would "better utilize [*la force noire*] in order to save, in future offensive actions, the blood—more and more precious—of our [French] soldiers."⁶⁹

Less than a year later, in January 1918, the commander of the Senegalese training camp at Fréjus, Colonel Eugene Petitdemange, set forth his views to General Philippe Petain about how his African charges could best serve "the interest of the country" in the spring: "My aim is to seek the increasing use of the Senegalese . . . in order to spare the blood of French servicemen, France having already paid a heavy tribute during

this war. It is essential to try by all means possible to diminish their future losses through the enhanced use of our brave Senegalese."⁷⁰

Petitdemange was also anxious to prevent the proposed transfer of Senegalese battalions to metropolitan units in 1918 as well as to minimize the practice of variegating them in combat with French troops. Alluding to "the combative spirit of men born to make war," he asserted: "The Senegalese have been recruited to replace the French, to be used as cannon fodder (*chair à canon*) to spare the whites. It is essential then to use them in an intensive fashion and not in small groups (*petits paquets*)."⁷¹

Though there were exceptions to this pattern, such attitudes were nevertheless pervasive.⁷² The fine line between callous indifference to the suffering of the troops (which existed among all European officer corps), and the calculated disregard for the lives of particular groups, was crossed by many French commanders in the case of African soldiers. Indeed, irrespective of their opinions about the merits of the Senegalese as combatants, they frequently sought to use them at the front in ways intentionally designed to husband the lives of French *poilus*.

Nor was this outlook restricted to military commanders. Citing the benefits of the "civilization" that France had brought to Africa (which might now be paid for) and lamenting the loss of three million men during the war, Georges Clemenceau defended his resumption of military recruitment in West Africa before a group of senators on 18 February 1918 in the following terms: "Although I have infinite respect for these brave blacks, I would much prefer to have ten blacks killed than a single Frenchman, because I think that enough Frenchmen have been killed and that it is necessary to sacrifice them as little as possible."⁷³

The Debate over African Casualties

The question remains whether this deliberate practice by many French commanders led to disproportionately high casualties among the Africans. Many contemporaries thought so—including Blaise Diagne, Charles Mangin, and the former *tirailleur* and early Senegalese nationalist, Lamine Senghor, among others—and herein lies the origin of the current debate among historians.⁷⁴

The current opinion among recent investigations of this question, however, remains divided. Several eminent scholars have flatly disputed the claim of higher African casualties. Marc Michel, who has undertaken the most exhaustive inquiry, holds such a position. Arguing that the French were less racist than other Europeans of the era, and pointing to the tactical amalgamation of African and French troops in combat, which ostensibly exposed all soldiers to equal peril, Michel has concluded that

Table 5.1 Postwar Estimates of Senegalese Casualties

Year	Categorization	Dead	Missing	Total
Tirailleurs				
1919	Formations indigènes	17,826	7,112	24,938
1919	Indigènes coloniaux	24,000	7,300	31,300 ^a
1920	Indigènes coloniaux	26,700	7,500	34,200
1920	Sénégalais	—	—	29,224
1923/ 1924	Indigènes des colonies: A.O.F.	24,762	—	
	All colonies	—	6,393	30,196 ^b
1931	Sénégalais	—	—	29,520 ^c
Originaires				
1919		423	45	468
1919		—	—	790
1923		709	59	768

^a Does not include deaths from disease, which in Charbonneau's estimation increased overall losses by about one-third, or approximately 45,000 men.

^b Although "dead" in these publications is differentiated between those from A.O.F. and other colonies, "missing" is not. Senegalese losses amounted to 85.4 percent of the total dead from all colonies; this percentage has been used to estimate the approximate number of missing, and hence the total number of fatalities.

^c Identical to the 1920 figure (cited in *L'Afrique Française*) except that it adds 296 combat deaths in Togo and the Cameroons to those incurred in Europe and explicitly does not include either those dying "from sickness in the army" or from "later exhaustion attributable to the war."

Sources: Yearly figures, respectively, derived from: *Archives de la Guerre*: État-Major de l'Armée: 7 N 2121: "État numérique faisant ressortir la situation des militaires indigènes au Dépôt Commun des Formations Indigènes d'infanterie et d'Artillerie Coloniale à la date du 1^{er} janvier 1919" [no date]; "Rapport du Général Bonnier, Commandant Supérieur des Troupes d'A.O.F., au Direction des Troupes coloniale," 24 May 1919; and "Le Commissaire aux Effectifs Coloniaux [Blaise Diagne] au Président du Conseil," 7 October 1919, p. 12; Charbonneau 1931, pp. 21–22; "Rapport Marin," *Journal Officiel de la République Française, Documents Parlementaires*, Chambre, 1920, t. 2, annex 633, p. 44; "L'Armée Coloniale pendant la Guerre," *L'Afrique Française*, 1920, Suppl., p. 155; Sarraut 1923, p. 44; *Histoire militaire de l'A.O.F.* 1931, p. 826.

Senegalese casualties were equivalent to those incurred throughout the war by the French infantry.⁷⁵

Michel's contention is supported by Charles Balesi, who emphasizes many of the same cultural and organizational considerations. Though his

study of the question is less extensive, Balesi concludes that African and French losses—even on the Aisne—were roughly equivalent.⁷⁶ These general findings are also endorsed by Myron Echenberg. While stressing the “cultural and racial” stereotypes held by French military planners about Africans, Echenberg suggests that instead of being higher than French losses, Senegalese casualties were actually proportionately lower.⁷⁷

One exception to these recent assessments about casualty rates is that provided by Anthony Clayton. Also emphasizing “the extraordinarily racialist views” held by many French commanders, Clayton contends that the casualties sustained by Senegalese units were “slightly higher” than the French ones.⁷⁸

These seemingly irreconcilable conclusions are prompted by the nature of the available evidence employed to support them, and by using differing indexes to gauge the results. It is therefore appropriate to examine these findings more closely and, utilizing different modes of analysis, indicate what the figures presented signified for the soldiers involved.

The total African casualties during the war, based on the most consistent and generally accepted official estimates, can be reckoned at approximately 31,000 soldiers.⁷⁹ (On the variation in postwar French estimates, see Table 5.1.) Although almost certainly an underestimate because incidental deaths—including those from disease—were probably not included, this figure nonetheless affords a means for a comparative inquiry about the dimensions of the sacrifice of the Senegalese and their particular use in combat.⁸⁰

Conclusions about African and Senegalese Casualties

African casualties can be contrasted with those suffered by the French using a variety of standards. As a percentage of all the soldiers mobilized during the war, Senegalese losses were slightly less than those incurred by the French: roughly 15.5 percent were killed in the former group compared to 16.5 percent in the latter.⁸¹ The picture changes significantly, however, when only combatants are considered. Using this criterion, Senegalese losses were nearly 20 percent higher than those sustained by their French counterparts.⁸² Unlike European combatants, however, Africans seldom served in cavalry, artillery, engineering, and aviation units, where casualties were substantially lower than in infantry formations. If only infantry fatalities are considered, the pattern changes again. Using this standard, French and African losses between 1914 and 1918 were virtually identical: they amounted to slightly over 22 percent in both cases.⁸³ This last gauge is the one cited by Marc Michel and other historians who contend that the deaths suffered by African and French combat troops were comparable and offer these figures as evidence against the

Table 5.2 Senegalese and French Casualties: Numbers by Year and Percentage of Total Wartime Losses^a

Year	Categorization	Casualties	Percentage
1914	French ^b	491,000	27.05
	Senegalese ^c	850	2.84
1915	French	439,000	24.19
	Senegalese	1,615	5.40
1916	French	361,000	19.89
	Senegalese	5,440	18.18
1917	French	184,000	10.14
	Senegalese	8,118	27.13
1918	French	311,000	17.30
	Senegalese	11,688	39.06
1919	French	29,000	1.60
	Senegalese	2,210	7.39

^a The numbers of French and Senegalese combatants fluctuated by year, but this does not significantly affect the overall trend indicated by the table. In the case of French combatants, numbers fluctuated between 2,215,000 and 1,688,000 during the period from May 1915 to October 1918: Senegalese combat battalions varied between 39 and 45 between July 1916 and November 1918.

^b French losses include prisoners (which was the practice in reporting the diminution in a unit's effective strength in the French army).

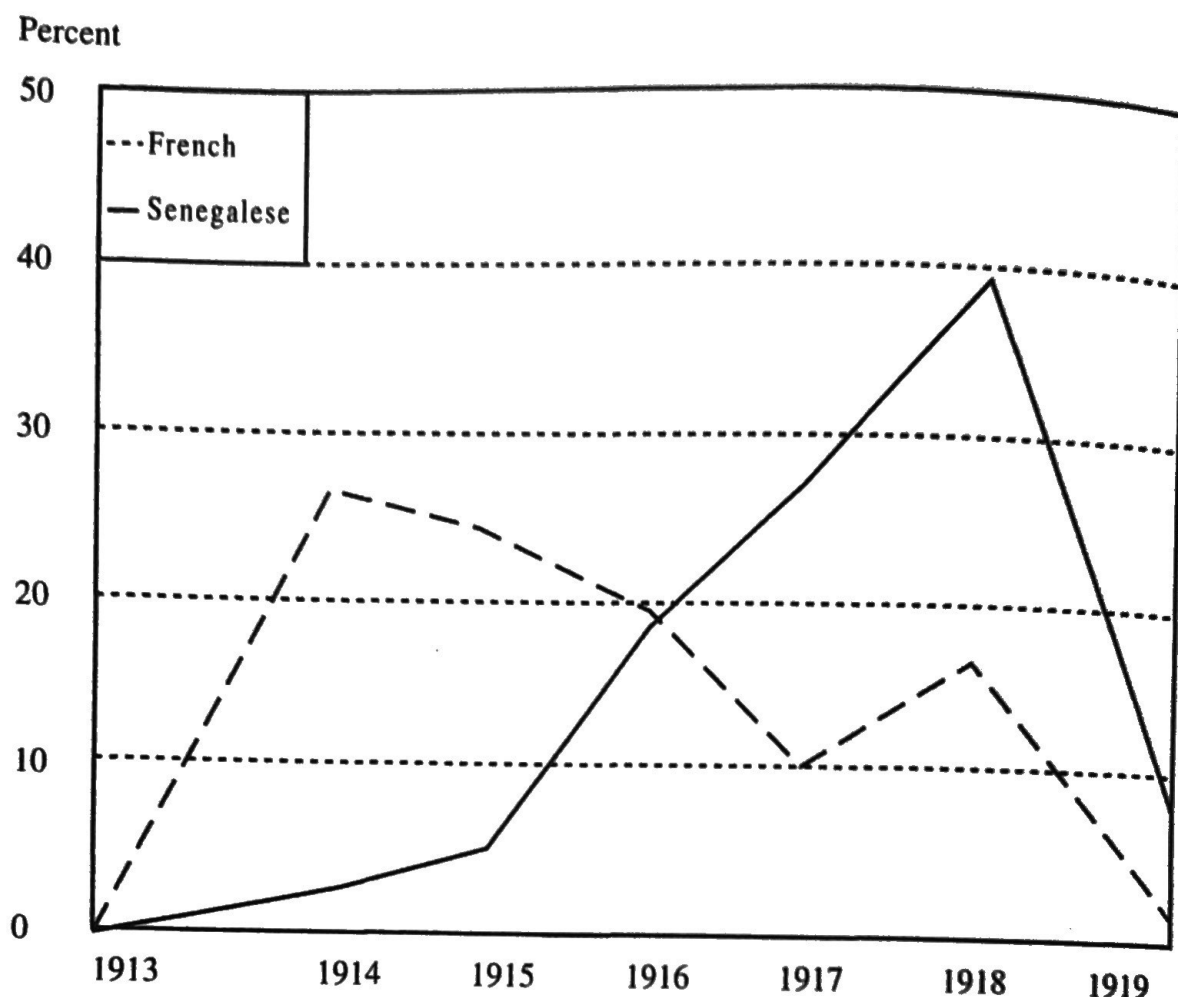
^c Senegalese casualty rates have been adjusted from those presented in the "Rapport Marin." They have been calculated at 85% (29,750) of those listed for "Indigènes coloniaux" (35,200). This adjustment omits *originaire* losses, all of which were sustained after June 1916.

Source: "Rapport Marin," *Journal Officiel de la République Française. Documents Parlementaires*, Chambre, 1920, t. 2, annexe 633, pp. 65, 74, 76.

charge of the systematic misuse of the Senegalese by their commanders.⁸⁴

This interpretation is valid insofar as it goes. It neglects, however, to consider a series of other compelling factors that should be taken into account. The most important one is of a temporal nature. The Senegalese were not employed in significant numbers as combatants in Europe, where 98 percent of all casualties were incurred, before July 1916.⁸⁵ Prior to this time, African losses accounted for less than 10 percent of their eventual wartime total, and these were born primarily by the as yet small pre-war army.⁸⁶ Conversely, French combat deaths during this same period amounted to over 60 percent of all fatalities that occurred between

Figure 5.2 Senegalese and French Casualties: Percentage of Total Wartime Losses by Year.



Source: "Rapport Marin," *Journal Officiel de la République Française. Documents Parlementaires*, Chambre, 1920, t. 2, annexe 633, pp. 65, 74, 76.

August 1914 and November 1918.⁸⁷ Indeed, it was precisely because of the staggering dimensions of French losses during the first 22 months of the war—and the general recognition that these were likely to continue—that earlier resistance to the massive recruitment of West Africans and their deployment on the western front was overcome. If this factor is taken into consideration, a very different picture begins to emerge. During the last two and a half years of the war, Senegalese casualties in Europe were approximately twice as high as those suffered by French infantry combatants.⁸⁸ Moreover, Senegalese losses continued to rise throughout the conflict and, even though roughly equivalent numbers of troops were engaged from 1916 onward, only reached their apogee in 1918, when about 40 percent of all fatalities occurred. Conversely, the percentage of French losses steadily declined throughout this period, with the exception of 1918,

when it rose as the war reached crisis point (see Table 5.2 and Figure 5.2).

A second consideration is the comparative probability of death faced by foot soldiers when they were in the trenches. Under the policy known as "*hivernage*," Africans were removed from the front for five months (between November and March) each year. During these periods, about 18 percent of all the post-July 1916 French losses occurred. As a result, when Africans were deployed in combat during the late spring, summer, and early autumn (the time when all the major offensives took place), their likelihood of being killed was nearly two and a half times as great as that of their French counterparts.⁸⁹

A final factor that gives an indication of both absolute casualties as well as life expectancy at the front was the ethnicity of the African soldiers. Those recruited from "races" deemed by the French to have special "military aptitudes" were prominent in the assault battalions that bore the heaviest casualties.⁹⁰ These "warrior races" constituted about two-thirds of the African complement used in major attacks in 1916 and 1917 and perhaps constituted a majority thereafter.⁹¹ Well over 90 percent of the Senegalese recruited during the war, however, were classed as "warriors." Although ethnic breakdowns of casualties are lacking, it is highly probable that the Senegalese were overrepresented in those formations where the loss of life was the greatest and, hence, that the proportion of their fatalities was significantly higher than among other West African groups. In terms of what this portended for the soldiers, it is probable that a Wolof, a "Tukulor," or a Serer recruited as a *tirailleur* between 1915 and 1917 was about three times as likely to die in combat as his French counterpart, while absolute losses were on the order of two-and-a-half to one.⁹²

As these proportions indicate, Africans paid a very dear price indeed for their prominence in the fighting forces during the last two and a half years of the war, but those from the so-called "warrior races" were most victimized. Moreover, by 1916, very few generals or foot soldiers harbored any illusions about the fate awaiting assault troops attempting to cross No Man's Land to storm entrenched positions. Indeed, by 1918, when French combat losses were a concern to all, the Senegalese were disseminated more widely to French units and used more frequently than ever. Earlier disputes over their relative military merits notwithstanding, Africans were used in this capacity precisely because of this foreknowledge and with the expectation that employing them in this fashion would lessen French losses.

In this regard, the arguments by historians that stress the tactical "mixing" of African and European formations in combat (and, by inference, the equality of danger faced by all) are no more convincing than their conclusions about comparative casualty rates. Although the French

experimented with various organizational schemes throughout the war, all of these were intended to “steady” African formations in combat, and thereby maximize their “shock” potential, rather than to ensure that Senegalese and French infantry faced the same perils. Furthermore, the mixing of battalions or companies, which was never adopted as a systematic policy, was far from pervasive. Regiments composed entirely of Senegalese battalions continued to be deployed as “heavy” units in assaults from 1916 until the armistice. Moreover, because of French tactical doctrine governing offensive operations, the temporary amalgamation, juxtaposition, or variegation of battalions (and, much less frequently, of companies) does not indicate that the African probability of death was lessened. One battalion from each regiment usually formed the first wave in attacks, with the other two (or three) following in support (see Figure 5.1). In mixed regiments, this role almost invariably fell to the Senegalese and, as the distribution of African wartime casualties suggests, the increasing variegation (*panaché*) of units at the end of the conflict proved to be even more lethal than had the earlier tactical doctrine of “massive” deployment. Hence, far from strengthening the contention that there was no discrimination in the army, the temporary mixing of units—particularly the loaning of African battalions to metropolitan formations after the summer of 1917—tends to support exactly the opposite conclusion. Indeed, the tactical function of French and African units in variegated formations was made explicit by the commander of the 44^e *Bataillon de tirailleurs Sénégalais* in September 1918: “It is useful to have a unit of whites in support [of the African formation], not only to urge them on, but for the most rational exploitation of success . . . once the great blow is delivered [by them].”⁹³ Finally, even among the Europeans serving in Senegalese battalions (as officers, N.C.O.s, machine gunners, gunners, etc.), the casualties appear to have been less. Although the evidence is fragmentary, it suggests that African losses in combat were about 25 percent higher than those of their French cadres.⁹⁴

These conclusions are not intended to impugn the courage exhibited by French combatants, or to minimize the scale of their sacrifices, which were horrific. Indeed, as one Senegalese veteran, Mbaye Khary Diagne, succinctly expressed it, “The French were not afraid to die.”⁹⁵ Moreover, even though their overall losses were less than the Senegalese, those *poilus* in close proximity to them during assaults probably suffered much more heavily than others defending quieter sectors of the front. Nevertheless, as the nature of their tactical deployment and the proportion of their resulting casualties indicate, the Senegalese were systematically misused by many commanders. This practice of deliberately sacrificing “others” in combat was nothing new, nor was it restricted to the French. Indeed, it is probably as old as warfare itself. It was commonly practiced by other

belligerents during the First World War and persists to this day.⁹⁶ Thus, despite the efforts of government officials and subsequent historians to deny these claims, the accusations first raised by Diagne in 1917 are not a myth: they are all too true.

The human toll exacted among the soldiers from Senegal in Europe is impossible to estimate with precision. Nevertheless, a rough approximation of their casualties can be given. Among *originaires*, at least 768 were killed in combat. Fatalities among *tirailleurs* (who were not differentiated by colony) can only be surmised. If casualties are assumed to have been distributed evenly among these troops, approximately 3,835 *tirailleurs* from Senegal (or 13 percent of the total fatalities among African combatants) may be presumed to have lost their lives.⁹⁷ This, however, was almost certainly not the case. Among the 31,000 men in the prewar army whose casualties are included in this total, the vast majority were recruited in either Senegal or Haut-Sénégal et Niger. Furthermore, as previously indicated, nearly all Senegalese were considered warriors, and as such they were probably overrepresented among those troops that incurred the most severe losses. As a result, the proportion of casualties sustained by the *tirailleurs* from Senegal was significantly higher than that among their counterparts from other colonies in the Federation. Exactly how much higher is open to speculation, but it seems likely that at least 5,000 to 6,000 were killed, and perhaps more. When combined with the fatalities estimated among the *originaires*, it may be assumed that, at a minimum, between 6,000 and 7,000 Senegalese soldiers perished while fighting in Europe.⁹⁸

Although the Senegalese paid an awesome price for their prominence in the fighting lines, the wartime experience in France influenced the lives of those who survived their ordeal in the trenches in other ways. It enhanced the soldiers' knowledge of the world beyond their homelands and often transformed their image of themselves and of Europeans. It is to the increasing contacts between the African troops and French soldiers and civilians occasioned by the war, and the influence this exerted on changing the previous perceptions of the Senegalese of Europeans, that we turn in the next chapter.

NOTES

¹ On images of the Senegalese in combat, see Myron Echenberg, *Colonial Conscripts: The "Tirailleurs Sénégalais" in French West Africa, 1857-1960* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann/London: James Currey, 1991), pp. 32-38. On the evolution of French and German stereotypes, see Hans-Jürgen Lüsebrink, "'Tirailleurs Sénégalais' und 'Schwarze Schande': Verlaufsformen und Konsequenzen einer deutsch-französischen Auseinandersetzung (1910-1926)," in *"Tirailleurs Sénégalais": Zur Bildlichen und Literarischen Darstellung Afrikanischer Soldaten im Dienste Frankreichs—Présentations*

Littéraires et Figuratives de Soldats Africains au Service de la France, ed. János Riesz and Joachim Schultz (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1989), pp. 57–73, and Keith L. Nelson, "The 'Black Horror on the Rhine': Race as a Factor in Post-World War I Diplomacy," *Journal of Modern History*, 42 (1970): 606–27.

² The use of this term to describe the manner in which the Senegalese were employed in the fighting is ubiquitous; references to it range from French officers to postwar African nationalists. See, for example, the comments of Colonel Eugene Petitdemange, Commandant of the Senegalese troops at Fréjus in 1918: AG: Grand Quartier General (hereafter GQG): 16 N 100.

³ This interpretation was also endorsed by some Americans of African descent, such as Richard Wright and W. E. B. Du Bois. See Tyler Stovall, *Paris Noir: African Americans in the City of Light* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1996), and Shelby T. McCloy, *The Negro in France* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1961).

⁴ For Senegalese battalion and regimental histories for 1914, including their participation in the fighting along the Ijzer, see: AG: Unités: *Journaux de marche et d'opérations* (hereafter JMO): 26 N 869, and Léon Bocquet and Ernest Hosten, *Un fragment de l'Épopée sénégalaise: Les Tirailleurs noirs sur l'Yser* (Brussels and Paris: G. Van Oest, 1918). The attempt to seize the Dardanelles was a British scheme in which the French High Command was reluctant to participate because they regarded it as a diversion of strength from the more crucial theater of operations in northwest France. This outlook helps to explain why Senegalese battalions were prominent in the French Expeditionary Corps. On the failure of this attack, see especially: Maurice Dutreb, *Nos Sénégalais pendant la Grande Guerre* (Metz: R. Ferry, 1922), and the Senegalese JMOs for 1915: AG: Unités: 26 N 869. See also: *Les Troupes coloniales pendant la Guerre 1914–1918* (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1931).

⁵ Many troops used on the Somme were composed of recruits raised in West Africa in 1915 and early 1916. Their movement to France enabled the High Command to create the 2nd Corps of the Colonial Army in 1915. The significance of Douaumont's recapture for the French is perhaps best conveyed in Jean Renoir's classic film, *La Grande Illusion*.

⁶ On the decision of the High Command, see: AG: GQG: 6 N 100. On the re-evaluation of tactical methods in 1917, see AG: Fonds Clemenceau: 6 N 96 and AG: Unités: 22 N 2481.

⁷ AG: Unités (JMOs): 26 N 869–871, and *Les Troupes coloniales pendant la Guerre*, pp. 187–205, 223–30.

⁸ African units, and their theoretical complement of soldiers, were composed as follows: a squad (9 men), two squads comprised a demi-section (18), two demi-sections a section (40), 4 sections a company (160), 4 or more companies (including one of machine gunners) a battalion (ranging between 800 and 1,200 men), 3 or more battalions a regiment, and 2 regiments (sometimes with additional battalions) a brigade. Although the use of brigades fell into disuse during the war, two of them, or alternatively three regiments, comprised divisions, with two to four divisions composing an army corps. On unit organization and tactical alignments between 1914 and 1918, see especially: AG: État-Major de l'Armée: 7 N 441; AG: Fonds Clemenceau: 6 N 96; and the JMOs of the 28th, 54th, and 68th battalions of Senegalese *tirailleurs*: AG: Unités: 26 N 869 and 26 N 871.

⁹ The *originaires* were initially formed into distinct battalions in Senegal. Upon their arrival in France, they were assigned to different battalions in the Colonial Army.

which might be designated as either "non-white" or "white" units. See: AG: État-Major de l'Armée (hereafter EMA), pp. 7 N 144, 7 N 440, and 7 N 2120. See also: Anthony Clayton, *France, Soldiers, and Africa* (London: Brassey's Defence Publishers, 1988), p. 343.

¹⁰ This was the term used to designate the status of the Senegalese training camps, and it is repeatedly cited by French policy makers to characterize their intentions regarding contacts by the soldiers with the metropolitan population. See, for example, AG: EMA: 7 N 440. See also Chapter 6.

¹¹ This practice, which derived from the French Revolutionary tradition of juxtaposing units of "volunteers" with *ancien régime* infantry in a two-to-one ratio, was intended to steady the former in combat while infecting the latter with their offensive ardor. On organizational principles, which varied throughout the war, as well as the role of the Senegalese in combat, see especially the JMO entries for the Senegalese units: AG: Unités: 26 N 869-871; and AG: GQG: 16 N 196. Also see the following official publications: *Histoire des Troupes Coloniales pendant la Guerre, 1915-1918: Fronts extérieurs* (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1931); *Les Troupes Coloniales pendant la Guerre 1914-1918* (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1931); *Histoire militaire de l'A.O.F.* (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1931); and *Les Armées Françaises d'Outre-Mer* (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1931-1932).

¹² AG: EMA: 7 N 444.

¹³ The first two types of alignments were used by the 1st and 2nd Corps of the Colonial Army on the Somme. In general, the 1st Corps of the Colonial Army tended to deploy a higher proportion of its Senegalese troops in larger units (i.e., regiments composed exclusively of "African" battalions) than did the 2nd Corps, which experimented with amalgamation of African and European companies. On types of combat formations, see especially the JMOs of the Senegalese regiments and battalions: AG: Unités: 26 N 869-871. For differences between the 1st and 2nd Colonial Army Corps' patterns of combat organization, see AG: GQG: 16 N 196 and AG: Unités: 22 N 2468.

¹⁴ On the instructions of General Joseph Joffre, Senegalese assault battalions on the Somme were to be constituted from among those races possessing special military aptitudes: AG: EMA: 7 N 1990. In the event, troops from "warrior races" constituted at least a majority and often upwards of two-thirds of the soldiers in the African battalions engaged: AG: GQG: 16 N 196 and AG: Unités: 22 N 2481.

¹⁵ Nine of the 21 Senegalese battalions deployed on the Aisne were grouped in African regiments; the remaining 12 were either added as a fourth battalion to other Colonial Infantry Regiments or formed into "mixed tactical groups," in which the Senegalese predominated by ratios ranging from two-to-one to three-to-one. See AG: GQG: 16 N 100 and AG: Unités: 22 N 2468.

¹⁶ Four of the 21 Senegalese battalions engaged on the Aisne were variegated (*panaché*) with European battalions: AG: Fonds Clemenceau: 6 N 96.

¹⁷ Of the 44 Senegalese battalions engaged in France in 1918, 22 were assigned to the 1st or 2nd Corps of the Colonial Army, while the remainder were loaned to metropolitan formations. On the decision in 1918 to loan Senegalese battalions to metropolitan units, see AG: GQG: 16 N 100. On their use as tactical groups for "determined" attacks, see: Jean Charbonneau, *Les contingents coloniaux: du Soleil et de la Gloire* (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1931), p. 62.

¹⁸ By 1918, French cadres amounted to 22 to 24 percent of the complement of Senegalese battalions: AG: Unités (JMOs): 26 N 869-871.

¹⁹ See Joe Lunn, "'Les Races guerrières': Racial Preconceptions in the French Military about West African Soldiers during the First World War," *Journal of Contemporary History* 34, 4 (1999).

²⁰ These principles concerning the use of Senegalese troops were codified during the immediate prewar period. See: *Centre militaire d'information et de documentation: Outre-Mer* [hereafter *CMIDOM*]: A.O.F.-INT-C III-27-B, "Manuel tactique pour le Groupe de l'A.O.F.: Notions générales" (1910).

²¹ The quotation is that of General Pierre Berdoulat, commander of the 1st Colonial Army Corps during the attacks on the Somme in 1916: AG: GQG: 16 N 196: 9. For the results of surveys conducted by the High Command among officers commanding Senegalese troops about the soldiers' combat performance on the Somme in 1916 and on the Aisne in 1917, see AG: GQG: 16 N 196 and AG: Unités: 22 N 2481.

²² These arguments, voiced by "detractors" opposing the use of Senegalese, appear to have represented a minority viewpoint within the Colonial Army by 1916 and certainly by 1917. For a sampling of these opinions, see: AG: GQG: 16 N 196 and AG: Unités: 22 N 2481.

²³ *CMIDOM*: Publications, "Notice sur les Sénégalais et leur emploi au combat" (no date, but definitely written between May 1917 and September 1918, and most probably either in late 1917 or early 1918 while the Senegalese were in winter quarters). For reactions to the "Notice" by French officers commanding Senegalese combat units in 1918 (all of which were appreciative), see: AG: GQG: 16 N 2094. The description below is drawn from this document.

²⁴ On these distinctions, see: Mamadou Djigo: 4A; Abdoulaye Ndiaye 2B and 4B; Ndiaga Niang: 1B; Boubacar Gueye: 1A; and Ndiaga Niang: 1B.

²⁵ Nar Diouf 3A. Citations from the veterans' oral histories are hereafter grouped together at the end of paragraphs in the order of quotation.

²⁶ Daba Dembele: 4B; Abdoulaye Gassala: 2B; Momar Khary Niang: 1B. Yoro Diaw: 2A; Sera Ndiaye: 2B. Nar Diouf: 3B; Alassane Kane: 1A; Mamadou Djigo: 5A; and Doudou Ndao: 2B. Alassane Kane: 1B.

²⁷ Sera Ndiaye: 2B; Ndiaga Niang: 1A. Mamadou Djigo: 3A; Biram Mbodji Tine: 2B; Ndiaga Niang: 2A and 1A. Demba Mboup: 12B; Doudou Ndao: 2B; Niaki Gueye: 3B and 4A. Momar Khary Niang: 1B. Niaki Gueye 3B; Daba Dembele 4A. Alassane Kane: 4B. Mamadou Djigo: 3A and 4A. Biram Mbodji Tine 2B; Nar Diouf: 3A. Ishmale Mbange: 2A. Alassane Kane 2B; Ishmale Mbange 2A. Alassane Kane: 4B. Alassane Kane 2B; Mbaye Khary Diagne: 5A.

²⁸ Doudou Ndao: 2B. Mamadou Djigo: 3A and 4A; and Doudou Ndao: 2B. Ishmale Mbange 2A. Daba Dembele: 4B and 3B. See also Ndiaga Niang: 1B.

²⁹ Abdoulaye Diaw 3B. Malal Gassala: 3A; Ibrahima Camara: 2B. Alassane Kane: 1B. Abdoulaye Diaw: 1A.

³⁰ Ndiaga Niang: 1B. Alassane Kane 1B; see also: Mamadou Djigo: 3A; Demba Mboup: 13A. Sickh Yero Sy: 1A; Masserigne Soumare: 1B; Abdoulaye Diaw: 2A and 2B. Alassane Kane: 1B.

³¹ Ndiaga Niang: 2A.

³² Abdoulaye Gueye: 2A; Thiecouta Diallo: 2A and 2B. On French concerns over the propensity of the Senegalese to contract frostbite, see: AG: Unités: 22 N 2481, 26 N 869, and 26 N 871.

³³ Sera Ndiaye 4A.

³⁴ Ibrahima Camara: 2B; and Masserigne Soumare: 2A. Nouma Ndiaye: 1A. Giribul Diallo: 1B.

³⁵ Nar Diouf: 5A; and Masserigne Soumare: 1B. On unit rotation, see: Momar Khary Niang: 1B; Abdoulaye Gueye: 2A; and Nouma Ndiaye: 1A. On snipers, see: Daba Dembele: 3B. Nouma Ndiaye: 1A; and Makhoudia Ndiaye: 1A. On casualties incurred during sector occupation compared to attacks in the 45th *Bataillon de Tirailleurs Sénégalais* (hereafter BTS), see also AG: Unités: 26 N 870.

³⁶ On *coups de main*, see, Masserigne Soumare: 1A; and Ndiaga Niang: 1A. For officers' descriptions of them, see the JMOs: AG: Unités: 26 N 869–871.

³⁷ On assault tactics, see: Sickh Yero Sy: 1A and 1B; Antoine Diouf: 1A; Masserigne Soumare: 3B. For especially detailed French descriptions of assault tactics, see also: AG: Unités: 24 N 3027 and the JMOs of the 28^e, the 54^e, and the 61^e BTS: AG: Unités: 26 N 869 and 26 N 871. Ndiaga Niang: 2A; see also: Momar Khary Niang: 1A; Sambou Ndiaye: 1B; and Sickh Yero Sy: 1A.

³⁸ Daba Dembele: 3B. On the effects of high explosives (including the inadvertent but "very frequent" shelling of friendly troops by their own artillery), see also: Ndiaga Niang: 2A; Momar Khary Niang: 1A; Demba Mboup: 5A and 10A; Malal Gassala: 2B; and Nar Diouf: 3A.

³⁹ Diouli Missine 1A. See also: Demba Mboup: 12A.

⁴⁰ Ndiaga Niang: 1B. See also: Abdoulaye Diaw: 1A and 1B.

⁴¹ On flight, see: Nar Diouf: 4B and 5A; Mamadou Djigo: 3A and 4B; and Abdoulaye Ndiaye: 4A.

⁴² Sera Ndiaye: 3B. For other descriptions of storming the trenches, including the use of grenades and bayonets in hand-to-hand fighting, see: Malal Gassala: 2B; Sera Ndiaye: 3B; Momar Khary Niang: 1B; and Mamadou Djigo: 3A.

⁴³ Nar Diouf: 3A. Mbaye Khary Diagne: 3A. On the disbanding and reconstitution of units, also see the JMOs: AG: Unités: 26 N 869–871.

⁴⁴ Biram Mbodji Tine: 2B. On differing levels of anxiety, including indiscriminate seizures of fear by recent recruits and veterans alike, distinctions between the anxiety experienced during attacks and when being subjected to them, as well as that undergone while waiting in depots as opposed to being at the Front, see respectively: Mbaye Khary Diagne: 5A; Giribul Diallo: 1B; and Alassane Kane: 4B. Sera Ndiaye: 3B; and Mamadou Djigo: 5B. Diouli Missine: 1A. Momar Khary Niang: 1B; Souleye Samba Ndiaye: 1B; Sera Ndiaye: 2B. European troops also suspected that the war might never end. See Paul Fussel, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975).

⁴⁵ Mamadou Djigo: 5B. Sera Ndiaye: 3A; and Antoine Diouf: 1B. Ndiaga Niang: 1A. Bara Seck: 1A; Abdoulaye Ndiaye: 5A. These references are to disasters occurring at Verdun and Monastir (in Thessaloniki). See also: Mamadou Djigo: 4A.

⁴⁶ Mbaye Khary Diagne: 1B. See also: Mamadou Djigo: 4A; and Sera Ndiaye: 3B. Bara Seck: 1A. Sera Ndiaye: 4B; Daba Dembele: 5A; and Abdoulaye Gassama: 2A. See also AG: Unités: 26 N 869–871.

⁴⁷ Souleye Samba Ndiaye: 1A. The *Goumbala* was traditionally sung before blood was about to be shed, and particularly before battles. It was also normally sung by *griots*. Bara Seck: 2B.

⁴⁸ Ishmale Mbangé: 2B.

⁴⁹ On the wide variety of charms and the particular perils they were intended to protect against, see: Mody Sow: 1B; Yoro Diaw: 1B; and Abdoulaye Ndiaye: 5B. Momar Candji: 2B. Many European wartime memoirs—including those of Erich Maria Remarque, Siegfried Sassoon, and Robert Graves—attest to soldiers' widespread use of charms. For a discussion of the subject among English soldiers, see: Fussel, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, p. 124.

⁵⁰ For European religious beliefs and the soldiers' perceptions of the relationship between God and their experience in combat, see: Fussel, *The Great War and Modern Memory*. For thoughts of Rog during combat, see: Biram Mbodji Tine: 1B. Malal Gassala: 2A and 2B; Ishmale Mbange: 2B. Abdoulaye Diaw: 1B; Mbaye Khary Diagne: 3A.

⁵¹ Demba Mboup: 5B. For other references to the soldiers' interpretation of dreams, see: Demba Mboup: 9A; and Masserigne Soumare: 3B.

⁵² Nar Diouf: 4B. Sera Ndiaye: 3B. On the progressive deterioration of the psychological mechanisms for coping with combat, based on studies conducted by the United States Army of their troops' performance in the Pacific theater during the Second World War, see: John Keegan, *The Face of Battle: A Study of Agincourt, Waterloo and the Somme* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1976), pp. 290–343.

⁵³ Sera Ndiaye: 3B. See also: Mamadou Djigo: 5B.

⁵⁴ Aliou Diakhate: 1B.

⁵⁵ Diouli Missine: 2B.

⁵⁶ Nouma Ndiaye: 2A and 2B.

⁵⁷ For a sample of such statements, which equated the fighting between France and Germany with that between "Kayor and Jolof" (and reconstructed the German ruling lineage from "William II" through his son "the Crown Prince," or alternatively, his other son, "Hitler"), see: Doudou Ndao: 1A; Demba Mboup: 9B; and Momar Candji: 1A and 1B.

⁵⁸ Aliou Diakhate: 2A. Samba Laga Diouf: 1B. Ndiaga Niang: 3A; and Samba Laga Diouf: 1B. This acknowledgment by the French of their need for African help was remembered by many; see: Nar Diouf: 3A; Sickh Yero Sy: 2A; Yoro Diaw: 1B; and Mamadou Bokar: 1B. Mamadou Djigo: 6A; Giribul Diallo: 2A; Mbaye Khary Diagne: 5A. The particular reference to disparaging African fighting qualities is to the purported vow of a German general to defeat the Senegalese at Verdun and then "drink his coffee in Paris" (see Masserigne Soumare: 1B), which is identical to the story recounted in the memoir of a Guinean veteran. See Joe Harris Lunn, "Kande Kamara Speaks: An Oral History of the West African Experience in France, 1914–1918," in *Africa and the First World War*, ed. Melvin E. Page (London: Macmillan, 1987). Samba Laga Diouf: 1B. Ndiaga Niang: 3A. Sambou Ndiaye: 1B.

⁵⁹ Daba Dembele: 3B. On incidents of flight during combat and subsequent executions, see also: Mamadou Djigo: 4A; Sera Ndiaye: 3B; and Demba Mboup: 11A.

⁶⁰ Nar Diouf: 4B. Similar thoughts occurred to other soldiers after the attacks on the Somme; see: Yoro Diaw: 1B. Yoro Diaw: 1B; see also: Daba Dembele: 3B; and Nar Diouf: 4B. Mbaye Khary Diagne: 3A. On rare incidents of Senegalese desertion in Europe, see also AG: Unités: 26 N 870–871.

⁶¹ German willingness to take Senegalese prisoners was influenced by whether they were wounded (those hurt severely were often killed) and by the reciprocal treatment accorded by Africans to German comrades in their sector; see: Demba Mboup: 5A; and Masserigne Soumare: 2A. African P.O.W.s were treated well in some instances, but were compelled to perform hard labor and were poorly fed in others; see, respectively: Mamadou Bakar (who was a P.O.W.): 1B and 1B; Masserigne Soumare: 2A; and Momar Candji (who recounted stories told to them by other P.O.W.s): 1B. Mbaye Khary Diagne: 5A. On German aversion to taking Senegalese prisoners, see also: Samba Laga Diouf: 1B; and Mamadou Djigo: 6A. On being captured by Germans, see: Thiecouta Diallo: 2A.

⁶² Yoro Diaw: 1B; Nouma Ndiaye: 1A; and Biram Mbodj Tine: 2B; Ishmale Mbange: 2A.

⁶³ On identifying with the French cause, see: Kamadou Mbaye: 1A. Giribul Diallo: 2A. See also: Mandow Mbaye: 2A.

⁶⁴ Mamadou Djigo: 5B. See also: Sera Ndiaye: 4B. For French inquiries into such incidents, see: AG: EMA: 7 N 440. For instructions to French officers to avoid using the term "niggers" in addressing Africans, see: *Notice sur les Sénégalais et leur emploi au combat*, p. 4.

⁶⁵ Masserigne Soumare: 1B.

⁶⁶ AG: GQG: 16 N 196/9.

⁶⁷ AG: GQG: 16 N 85.

⁶⁸ Rapport du Lt-Colonel Debieuvre, 30 April 1917, AG: Unités: 22 N 2481.

⁶⁹ See: Chef de Bataillon Arnaud, "Note au sujet de l'organisation d'unités offensive mixte sénégalaises," 12 February 1917, AG: Fonds Clemenceau: 6 N 96. On the deliberate sacrifice of African troops instead of French ones, also see the summary by the commander of the 28^e Senegalese battalion, who described his unit's role in the fighting at Reims between 28 July and 2 August 1918: "This position had to be held at any price, and it was judged preferable, with good reason, to sacrifice a black battalion instead of Europeans." The 28^e BTS lost over half its soldiers during the fighting: Chef de Bataillon Cros, "Monographie du Bataillon": AG: Unités: 26 N 869.

⁷⁰ Colonel Petitdemange, Commandant la subdivision de Fréjus, à Monsieur Général Petain, Commandant en Chef les Armées du Nord et du Nord-Est, 5 January 1918, AG: GQG: 16 N 100.

⁷¹ Colonel Petitdemange, "Note sur l'utilisation des Sénégalais," 5 January 1918, AG: GQG: 16 N 100.

⁷² This was also true of commanders who opposed using the Senegalese. General Maurice Sarraill, commander of the French expeditionary force at Thessaloniki, as well as several of his subordinates, who vociferously objected to being assigned African troops, reportedly perpetrated intentional "massacres" of them. Ousmane Diagne: 4A; Abdoulaye Ndiaye: 5A; and Abdoulaye Diaw: 1B.

⁷³ Clemenceau's remarks are cited in Charles-Robert Ageron, "Clemenceau et la question coloniale," in *Clemenceau et la Justice* (Actes du Colloque de décembre 1979 organisé pour le cinquantenaire de la mort de G. Clemenceau) (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1983), p. 80.

⁷⁴ On the history of the debate over Senegalese casualties, beginning with the charges leveled by Diagne against Mangin in June 1917, see: Joe Lunn, "Memoirs of the Maelstrom: A Senegalese Oral History of the First World War" (Ph.D. Diss.: University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1993), pp. 299-302.

⁷⁵ Marc Michel, *L'Appel à l'Afrique: Contributions et réactions à l'effort de guerre en A.O.F. (1914-1919)* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1982), pp. 403-08.

⁷⁶ Charles Balesi, *From Adversaries to Comrades-in-Arms: West Africa and the French Military, 1885-1918* (Waltham, MA: Crossroads Press, 1979), pp. 101-02.

⁷⁷ Echenberg, *Colonial Conscripts*, p. 46. It should be emphasized that the respective interpretations offered by Michel, Balesi, and Echenberg differ in fundamental respects. Michel and Balesi focus on casualty rates and offer these as evidence of the absence of malicious intent on the part of French commanders in particular and the comparatively nonracist character of French society in general. Echenberg, on the other hand, is well aware of the impact French race theory had on military calculations and popular perceptions of Africans, which he consistently emphasizes in his work.

⁷⁸ Clayton, *France, Soldiers and Africa*, p. 338.

⁷⁹ This figure is cited by Michel, *L'Appel à l'Afrique*, pp. 407–08, and also by Echenberg, *Colonial Conscripts*, p. 46 (excluding the losses of *originaires*). It accords with the most reliable estimates for combat fatalities (see Table 5.1).

⁸⁰ On the omission of incidental deaths, including those from disease, see Table 5.1.

⁸¹ The precise figures are 15.56 percent to 16.56 percent. The total number of West Africans mobilized during the war (including 31,000 in the prewar army, 161,000 *tirailleurs*, and 7,200 *originaires* subsequently recruited or conscripted between 1914 and 1918) was approximately 199,200. Of these at least 31,000 died during the war. French figures are based on the "Rapport Marin," which was submitted to the French Chamber in 1920 as the definitive assessment of this question. The total number of Frenchmen mobilized during the war was 7,740,000, of whom 1,281,979 perished. See "Rapport Marin," *Journaux Officiel de la République Française. Documents Parlementaires*, 1920, t. 2, annexe 633, p. 44.

⁸² Approximately 140,000 West Africans, including *originaires*, served as combatants, of whom 31,000 were killed, representing 22.14 percent of the total. By contrast, 6,987,000 Frenchmen served as combatants, of whom 1,255,766 are reckoned to have died, or 17.97 percent of the total. Hence, African fatalities were 18.84 percent higher than those among French combatants. "Rapport Marin," *Journaux Officiel*, p. 44.

⁸³ Among French infantrymen, 5,056,900 were mobilized and 1,158,000, or 22.9 percent, were killed: "Rapport Marin," *Journaux Officiel*, p. 66. Although not all West Africans served in the infantry, very few were assigned to "other services" such as the artillery. Since there are no records of the numbers in this latter group, the figures cited for the proportion of losses among all West African combatants (22.14 percent) have been retained. Though representing a small underestimate of the percentage of Senegalese infantry casualties, the discrepancy is slight.

⁸⁴ For examples, see Michel, *L'Appel à l'Afrique*, pp. 337, 405–08, 423–24; and Balesi, *From Adversaries to Comrades-In-Arms*, pp. 101–02.

⁸⁵ According to the *Histoire militaire de l'A.O.F.*, p. 826, out of a total of 29,520 combatant fatalities, 29,224 (or 98 percent) occurred during the fighting in Europe.

⁸⁶ In 1914 and 1915, losses among all *indigènes coloniaux* amounted to 2,900 men. Senegalese losses during the war constituted about 85 percent of this category. If these are distributed proportionately by year, Senegalese losses in 1914 and 1915 amounted to less than 8 percent of their total wartime casualties (2,465 men or 7.95 percent). See "Rapport Marin," *Journal Officiel*, p. 76; see also Table 5.2. Fragmentary contemporary evidence supports this conclusion. Among the approximately 5,000 men who fought in France in 1914, 3,728 were available for active duty at the end of the year. Hence, their losses (including ill and wounded as well as dead) did not exceed a maximum of 1,572 men: AG: EMA: 7 N 444.

⁸⁷ French losses (including dead, missing, and prisoners) between August 1914 and the end of June 1916 amounted to 62.26 percent of the eventual wartime total. See "Rapport Marin," *Journaux Officiel*, p. 74.

⁸⁸ Assuming that at a minimum 90 percent of all West African casualties were sustained after June 1916, some 27,900 men out of 140,000 combatants (or 199 per 1,000 engaged) were killed during the final 29 months of the war. By contrast, estimating French infantry losses for this period at not more than 40 percent of their wartime total, approximately 532,000 casualties were sustained among 5,057,000 combattants, or 105 per 1,000. Hence, African losses were 89.45 percent higher than those incurred by the French infantry after June 1916, or nearly twice those of their European counterparts. On West

African losses, see "Rapport Marin," *Journaux Officiel*, p. 76, which reckoned losses among "indigènes coloniaux" from 1916 onward at 91.75 percent of the wartime total; on French losses, see pp. 44, 66, 74.

⁸⁹ Approximately 18 percent of post-June 1916 French losses were incurred during the periods of *hivernage* between November and March in 1917 and 1918. Hence, the fatalities among French infantry when the Senegalese were deployed in combat from 1916 to 1918 can be reckoned at 436,240, or 8.63 percent of the total engaged. West African losses during this period amounted to 19.93 percent of all combatants. As a result, the probability of their death at the Front was almost two-and-a-half times as great (i.e., 2.31 percent).

⁹⁰ On the use of "military aptitudes" of particular "races" as a basic organizational principle among Senegalese combat units, see General-in-Chief Joseph Joffre's letter of January 1916 to the Minister of War, AG: EMA: 7 N 1990.

⁹¹ West Africans recruited from "warrior races" constituted about two-thirds of the "line" infantry used during the attacks on the Somme and Aisne in 1916 and 1917, while soldiers recruited from "nonwarrior races" were generally sent to communication battalions (*bataillons d'étapes*). Races with special "military aptitudes" probably composed at least one-half of the compliment of "line" infantry during 1918. Some battalions, however, were also composed exclusively of "warriors," while the arrival of reinforcements frequently led to the culling of "nonwarriors" from units in order to replace them with men from ethnic groups deemed warlike. On unit ethnic compositions and proportions, see: for 1916: AG: GQG: 16 N 196 and AG: Unités: 26 N 872; for 1917: AG: EMA: 7 N 2990 and AG: Unités: 24 N 3027; for 1918, AG: Fonds Clemenceau: 6 N 94 and AG: EMA: 7 N 440. On the ethnic composition of particular units at different times, as well as the culling of non-warriors from units to replace them with warriors, see the JMOs: AG: Unités: 26 N 869–872.

⁹² Overall, about 60 percent of the West African formations that were most prominent in the fighting from 1916 to 1918 were drawn from those groups regarded as especially warlike by the French. In Senegal, however, at least 90 percent of all recruits probably belonged to these "races." As a result, it is extremely likely that they were overrepresented—and probably on the order of about one-third again as much—in those units that sustained the heaviest casualties. Although ethnic breakdowns for casualties are lacking, it seems probable that in absolute terms their losses may be reckoned at approximately two-and-a-half times greater (2.46 calculated at 30 percent more) than those of the French infantry during the last 29 months of the war, while their probability of death when at the Front was about three times as great (3.00 calculated at 30 percent more) during this same period.

⁹³ Rapport du Chef de Bataillon Bertault, Commandant le 44^e BTS, 17 September 1918, AG: GQG: 16 N 2094. For similar explanations of these tactical alignments by other battalion and corps commanders, see also AG: Unités: 22 N 2468 and 22 N 2481.

⁹⁴ Senegalese losses appear to have been at least 25 percent higher than those suffered by their French cadres in 1918 during the fighting at Reims and the offensive of the 10th Army between July and August. In the former engagement, among battalions where such breakdowns were recorded, West African fatalities were 26.2 percent greater than those of the French; in the latter, they were 27.0 percent higher. These calculations are derived from figures given in the JMOs: AG: Unités: 26 N 869–872. On Senegalese losses being higher than those of their cadres, see also AG: Unités: 22 N 2481.

⁹⁵ Mbaye Khary Diagne: 1B.

⁹⁶ The deliberate sacrificing of "others"—irrespective of whether such distinctions were defined along racial, ethnic, social, religious, or national lines—is a very old practice indeed. It dates from at least the Punic Wars (when Hannibal deployed Spaniards against the Roman center at Cannae to spare Carthaginians) and was practiced by French, British, and Swedish commanders (among others) during the Napoleonic Wars. During the First World War, the British misused Indian troops (whose proportion of casualties was even higher than those of French West Africans over a shorter period of time), as well as the troops of the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (ANZAC), most notably at Gallipoli. Such practices continued during the Second World War, when Canadian troops were selected by British commanders to test the German continental defenses at Dieppe in 1943.

⁹⁷ The percentage of these soldiers that came from Senegal was 12.89; the colony also furnished a larger proportion of *tirailleurs*—1.73 percent of the total population—than any other colony in A.O.F.

⁹⁸ As a percentage of total recruits, this estimate suggests that between 20 and 25 percent of those enlisting during the war did not return.