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Surviving the Second World War: resilience strategies within the French facially disfigured veterans' association

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ABSTRACT

Veterans' organisations boomed in the wake of the First World War, many of their members joined together by a shared experience but also the desire to make this conflict the wars to end all war. Yet only two decades later, a new conflict started. This article examines how one of the best-known and wealthiest organisations, the Union des Blessés de la Face—Association des Gueules Cassées [Union of the Facially Wounded—'Broken Mugs' Association] responded to the outbreak of another conflict. Drawing upon press articles and the bulletins and newsletters published by the Union, this article investigates the impact of the war on a group set up by and for mutilated WWI veterans. Having defended a pacifist agenda in the interwar years, with Pétain as its honorary president and faced with the merger of most veterans' associations into a single Légion française des combattants in 1940, how did the Union adapt to try and survive the new war, the division of France, and the Libération? This study furthers our understanding of the history of veterans' organisations and the history of the Second World War, and it provides insights into organisational resilience within the charitable sector in a historical perspective.

RÉSUMÉ

Rassemblés par leur expérience combattante de la Première Guerre Mondiale et par un désir d'en faire la « der des der » de nombreux vétérans se regroupèrent en associations d'anciens combattants. Seulement deux décennies plus tard, un nouveau conflit se déclencha. Cet article explore la transition d'un temps de paix à une nouvelle guerre de l'une des associations les plus populaires et les plus riches: l'Union des Blessés de la Face – Association des Gueules Cassées. À l'aide d'articles de presse et des bulletins et *Circulaires* publiés par l'Union, cet article analyse l'impact de ce conflit sur un groupe formé par, et pour, les *gueules cassées* de la Grande Guerre. Comment l'Union, qui avait défendu la paix durant l'entre-deux-guerres et dont le gouvernement dirigé par son président d'honneur, Pétain, a décrété la dissolution de la majorité des associations d'anciens combattants en 1940, s'est-elle adaptée à un

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nouveau temps de guerre, à une France divisée et à la Libération? Cette étude aspire à améliorer nos connaissances de l'histoire des associations d'anciens combattants et de la Seconde Guerre Mondiale; elle nous fournit également des pistes d'analyse quant à la résilience collective des associations dans une perspective historique.

The Union des Blessés de la Face [Union of the Facially Wounded, hereafter referred to as 'Union']—also known as Association des Gueules Cassées ['Broken Mugs' Association]—was founded in 1921 by, and for, facially wounded veterans of the First World War. Stressing the uniqueness of the experience of its members, from injury to treatment, to dealing with the lasting consequences of facial disfigurement, it sought to foster a sense of community amongst veterans whose reintegration into civilian society presented many challenges. While membership only reached approximately 9,000, in the interwar period the organisation extended its support to members' families and it also gained considerable fame in interwar France, not least thanks to the help of the press and the charisma of its first president, Yves Picot (1862–1938).

A well-known and prosperous group, the Union supported an anti-war message; a number of *gueules cassées* even participated in pacifist productions such as the films *Pour la Paix du Monde* (1927) and *J'accuse* (1938). A pacifist stance can be observed throughout the interwar years, and the importance of commemoration in the organisation's activities is also visible through its participation in reviving the 'flamme du souvenir' on the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. This regular event was articulated as a solemn occasion, and Union members perpetuated the tradition even during the Vichy years. As an organisation committed to commemorating the Great War and to preserving peace, how did the Union respond to the outbreak of a new war?

Whilst existing research has largely focused on the inception and interwar development of veterans' associations in France (Prost 1977; Gorman 1992; Millington 2012), this article focuses on the Second World War and aims to identify challenges faced by the Union des Blessés de la Face as well as the dynamics of adaptation at play. Scholarly research centred on facially injured combatants has developed in the last two decades, although works have tended to focus on First World War veterans (Bate 2021; Boyle 2019; Fitzharris 2022; Gehrhardt 2015). Delaporte's follow-up to her seminal 1996 study on French disfigured veterans, *Visages de Guerre* (Delaporte 2017), analyses disfigured servicemen from the First World War, the Indochina War and Afghanistan, but the Second World War is largely overlooked. This article examines the survival of an association d'*anciens combattants* born out of the First World War, during the Second World War; as such it contributes to our understanding of the history of veterans' organisations, and more specifically the relationships between veterans of both world wars in France. The disfigured 'enfants de la Patrie' of the First World War took on, we argue, the role of fathers of the facially wounded of the Second World War.

This article focuses on the discourse around facially injured servicemen and their organisation, whether emanating from contemporary observers or the Union in its role as representative of disfigured (ex-)combatants. Sources used include newspaper

articles,¹ official documentation and the Union's bulletins and newsletters published between the late 1930s and the mid-1940s. As such, the material under scrutiny largely represents an 'official', published (and on occasion censored) discourse. As noted by Delaporte, 'la parole des défigurés de guerre' is largely missing, at least on an individual level.² The discourse put forward by the Union, however, provides insights into collective challenges and responses; it also enables us to analyse the resilience of this particular charity, at a time when it faced significant obstacles. Financial hardships abounded as Secours National (and to some extent the Red Cross) became the primary organisation coordinating and fundraising for philanthropic efforts in WW2. On a practical level, the occupation of areas in which the Union had its headquarters (Paris) and main residence (Moussy-le-Vieux, near Paris), as well as the pillages and bombings that affected properties including Le Coudon (Var), compromised its assets and operations. The mobilisation of a number of members and advisors (especially medical) affected the services on offer. On an ideological level, the Union's identity, its origins narrative founded in the Great War and many members' commitment to preserving peace, were challenged. The duration and type of military operations, and the underground nature of resistance activities for the majority of the Second World War, did not lead to as many registered casualties as had been observed in the First World War, raising the question of the relevance of the Union. This issue was made more acute in the legal and political context in which it was operating: in late August 1940, most veterans' associations in Vichy France merged into a single Légion française des combattants.

In the face of these practical, ideological, legal and economic challenges, how did the Union survive and to what extent did it maintain its independence? This article seeks to contribute to the analysis of organisational resilience through the case study of this particular charity. 'Resilience' is usually understood as 'the ability of people or things to recover quickly after something unpleasant' (Oxford dictionary), and existing literature highlights two key 'forms': 'While some definitions promote a proactive engagement and adjustment of a system in relation to change (active resilience), others highlight the ability to withstand or absorb disturbances (passive resilience)' (Burnard and Bhamra 2019, 17). This article argues that the Union displayed characteristics of both active and passive resilience to cope with transitions from peacetime to wartime, from the phoney war to Vichy and the Occupation, and through the Liberation and return to peacetime.

This article first explores the discourse on facial injuries in the Second World War, as found in the press and in the association's publications. This section shows that despite the lower number of casualties and the advances in maxillo-facial surgery achieved since the previous conflict, there was continuity in the ways in which facial wounds and disfigured combatants were portrayed. The challenges highlighted by the Union in its publications emphasised the persisting need for support beyond medical treatment, and therefore its ongoing relevance. The second section focuses on the Union's relations with the authorities in charge of France during the conflict and examines the Union's response to the new war, when it had been advocating peace in the interwar period. It analyses how it negotiated its survival when veterans' associations merged into the Légion and during the subsequent tumultuous years. While its regular *Bulletin* took the form of much shorter *Circulaires* in 1941 before shedding this 'camouflage' (*Bulletin* 62, September 1944) again in 1944, the Union had to adjust its discourse in order to survive under Vichy and during the transition from Vichy to the Liberation. Lastly, this article discusses adaptations

in the Union's activities in the light of practical and financial issues. It considers how it sought to promote inclusivity, welcoming the facially wounded of this new conflict when its identity had previously been founded on a shared experience of the Great War. Approximately 2,000 combatants on the French side were facially injured during the Second World War, considerably fewer than in the First World War, and their experience was different from their predecessors (*La Dépêche de Brest*, 18 October 1943; *L'indépendant des Basses-Pyrénées*, 15 October 1943).³ Nevertheless, the Union opened its doors to them, implicitly asserting that their common mutilation surpassed their different wartime experiences.

Emphasising the need: the discourse around facial injuries and facially wounded soldiers during the Second World War

The experience of the First World War meant that facial injuries did not take armies by surprise in 1939. Specialist and mainstream publications argued that French military medical services were better prepared, with Lefebvre, Giudicelli and Didelot (1990) noting that the Service de Santé included 3,500 stomatologists amongst other specialists initially mobilised. The key aim of 'conservation des effectifs' (*Le Concours médical*, 24 September 1939; *L'Ouest-Eclair*, 24 November 1943) persisted, although lengthy reconstructive treatments would remain common for extensive facial injuries. An article on 11 November 1939 in *L'Intransigeant* praises the progress in maxillo-facial surgery made since the start of the Great War and highlights the lessons learnt, including the importance of early treatment to prevent delays in the reconstructive phase, and a close collaboration between surgeons and other specialists. This led Professor Barrieu to optimistically declare 'Nous pouvons être ainsi assuré [sic] que les gueules cassées de 39 ne seront plus des mutilés de la face'. Thus, while maxillo-facial injuries were expected, advances in their treatment meant that they would be, it was hoped, less permanently disfiguring.

This better understanding of injuries and treatment shows through the prompt creation of dedicated wards, including some set up by surgeon Maurice Virenque. Drawing upon his experience in the First World War, he reportedly opened specialised maxillo-facial clinics in Beauvais, Lisieux, Rennes and Paris, where he served as head of the Paris region maxillo-facial centre at Marie-Lannelongue (*Journal officiel de la République française*, 12 December 1942). The local press also reported on the presence of facially injured servicemen in Lyon's Desgenettes hospital and at the Barbier-Hugo hospital in Algiers, where a New York surgeon presided over the maxillo-facial clinic from 1943 onwards, his presence further evidence of not only interdisciplinary, but also international collaborations (*La Dépêche algérienne*, 22 July 1943).

Virenque and his peers were a source of inspiration for the press, being portrayed, like Hippolyte Morestin in the previous war, as 'miracle'-makers able to restore disfigured men to a 'human' appearance (*Paris-Midi*, 9 March 1942; *Ambiance*, 18 July 1945). The de-humanising effect of facial injuries is often stressed in contemporary publications, and contrasted with the re-humanising work of the surgeon, as in this 1 January 1946 *France Croix-Rouge* article:

Certains visages épouvantent, dans lesquels on ne retrouve aucun trait humain, et puis on revoit un autre visage apaisant, à côté, le même, après l'opération. La Guerre de 1914–1918

d'abord, celle de 1939–1945 ensuite, ont provoqué ces affreuses blessures de la face et amené les Médecins à une chirurgie spécialisée devenant chaque jour plus efficace au fur et à mesure des progrès de l'art chirurgical.

This artistic dimension of facial reconstructive surgery, which has been analysed in existing scholarship in relation to First World War surgeons in France (Gehrhardt 2015) and Britain (Helmerts 2010), is also stressed in a 1943 report, which praises 'l'art et le mérite des chirurgiens' at Barbier-Hugo in Algiers (*L'Echo d'Alger*, 25 July 1943). This emphasis on the surgeon as an artist and a miracle-maker, restoring their patients' humanity, echoes the focus on the redemptive powers of medicine in publications centred on facial injuries during the First World War (Gehrhardt 2015). Unlike the years 1914–1918, however, commentators tend to express more confidence in the outcome of reconstructive surgery. A Christmas eve article on Virenque, published in 1943 in *Le Matin*, announces 'Ici, les "Gueules Cassées" retrouvent des visages et reprennent confiance ... grâce à un ensemble chirurgical unique au monde'. This article reveals the faith patients, including one female patient, have in their surgeon, and the hope his care has given them.

However, despite the measures implemented and the optimistic discourse on surgical treatment, not all facial injuries could be fully repaired. An article in *L'Humanité* on 27 July 1946 thus mentions 'les autres, ceux que leurs terribles blessures ont fait réformer', suggesting that some patients did not achieve a full reconstruction. The journalistic articles analysed reveal the persistence of concerns around facial wounds and disfigurement, in continuity with fears expressed by patients and society as a whole during the First World War and its aftermath (Gehrhardt 2015). Thus, a 1943 article suggests that facially injured servicemen will forever bear the scars of the war:

Voici les blessés de la face et du crâne. Non, je ne décrirai pas. Il ne faut pas décrire les visages pour lesquels, après la dernière guerre, a été inventée l'appellation pathétique de « gueules cassées »; il ne faut pas les décrire aujourd'hui mais il faudra, quand on les rencontrera demain, dans nos rues et ensuite, quand le temps de la paix sera revenu, les saluer avec un immense respect. (*L'Echo d'Alger*, 25 July 1943)

This 'indescribable' dimension is reminiscent of First World War depictions of facially disfigured men: be they pitiful victims or heroes worthy of 'immense respect', they are outside the bounds of normality (Gehrhardt 2015). A *Paris-Midi* article (9 March 1942) describes disfigured veterans of both wars as a 'dantesque et glorieuse phalange', highlighting their terrifying appearance as well as their heroism. The term 'phalange' stresses the military dimension of the injuries and the closeness between members: through their injuries, Second World War disfigured servicemen are united with their predecessors injured in the First World War. Similarly, an October 1943 *La Dépêche de Brest* article describes disfigured ex-servicemen of 1939–1940 as 'phalange poignante et magnifique de jeunes gars, frappés en pleine face et en pleine force', who are, however, expected to benefit from Virenque's skills. The terms used stress the life-changing dimension of facial injuries, describing the faces as having only one half that remains 'vivant' and later calling the wounded 'spectres infiniment nobles'. Such references to death and comparisons with ghosts further emphasise the scale of the transformation while also hinting at the effect on the onlooker, as discussed by Helmerts (2010) in the context of First World War portraits of disfigured patients by British artist Henry Tonks.

Continuity can also be observed in terms of concerns over disfigured veterans' social reintegration, as implied in a 1947 discussion on the 1946 legislation that outlawed brothels. One participant thus declared: 'Oublierait-on que ceux qui, blessés de la face ou mutilés, ne peuvent plus qu'exceptionnellement prétendre à se créer un foyer familial [...] et ont cependant comme les autres des besoins physiologiques qui doivent être satisfaits?' (*Bulletin municipal officiel de la ville de Paris*, 3 April 1947). Brothels are defended based on the assumption that they offer opportunities for sexual intercourse for disfigured veterans, who are not routinely expected to have a partner and a family.

Thus, despite the significant medical advances achieved during and since the First World War, optimistic assessments of surgical possibilities were nuanced by the persistence of de-humanising depictions of facially disfigured combatants and concerns over their reintegration. In the face of these challenges, the Union positioned itself as a uniquely placed organisation able to offer specialised support, as will be discussed later. While advances in maxillo-facial surgery were one major difference between 1914 and 1939, the very existence of a dedicated support and advocacy group was another key change, and one that veterans were not willing to see disappear during the upheavals of Second World War.

'Pourtant l'essentiel, en ce moment, est d'exister' (Union des Blessés de la Face Circulaire, August 1942): negotiating relations with wartime authorities

While Union members, like many other anciens combattants, denounced war prior to 1939 (Gorman 1992; Prost 1977), when the conflict broke out gueules cassées supported what they saw as a fight against oppression and to finally secure peace. In the first wartime *Bulletin* (November 1939), the continuity between 'guerres de libération 1914–1918, 1939 ...' is highlighted, as well as their defensive nature. Negative terms such as 'affreux cauchemar', 'calice amer' and 'geste criminel' help justify supporting the war, the article concluding with 'vive la France'. Veterans' 'volonté de servir encore' is articulated as a response inspired by patriotic duty: 'Notre devoir est tout tracé: nous devons accroître notre activité en nous penchant sur les nouvelles misères nées de la guerre, en apportant à ceux qui nous ressembleront notre aide affectueuse et fraternelle' [italics in the original]. Thus, even before the war started affecting its workings or causing new casualties, the Union anticipated future needs, displaying features of active resilience.

The fact that no *Bulletin* was published in 1940 exemplifies the disruption brought about by the war. This was the first long-term interruption since the organisation's foundation in 1921 and corresponds to the period of the Battle of France and the first few months of the Vichy government. The *Bulletins* were the main means of communication between members who were spread across the French (and overseas) territory, they were also a source of information regarding support available and events organised by the Union. The first *Circulaire* was sent out in February 1941 and its shortened format, amended name and contents testify to significant changes. While no new bulletin was published before February 1941, press articles reveal that before the Armistice, individual Union members expressed criticism against Germany. *La Charente* (29 February 1940) reports on a meeting of local Union members and quotes local delegate Daras describing the war 'voulue par Hitler' as threatening the integrity of the French territory: 'Aucune paix n'était plus possible; après l'envahissement de l'Autriche et de la Tchéco-Slovaquie, les

Allemands auraient revendiqué, tôt ou tard, un nouvel espace soit disant [sic] vital, en France'. Daras waxes lyrical in his portrayal of France's 'destinées immortelles', his Manichaean depiction reminiscent of the rhetoric used during the Great War and later on, by Vichy as well as nationalist movements. The Union's official rhetoric would, however, soon depart from Daras's condemnation of Germany, as it negotiated its survival post-Armistice.

Millington shows that an authoritarian reform was not an inconceivable idea for veterans' organisations pre-WW2, and that inter-organisational cooperation was considered, leading to the creation of the Légion des Combattants français by the UF and the UNC in 1939 as a 'formal framework for cooperation' (Millington 2012). A 29 August 1940 legislation effectively merged the majority of veterans' associations into a Légion française des Combattants; this group was intended to be, as Niessel (1941) put it, an 'outil puissant d'union et de rénovation nationale', through which Pétain and his government could 'spread the values of the National Revolution at the grass roots level' (Millington 2012). Article 7, however, created exemptions:

Les associations ayant pour objet de soigner ou de rééduquer des invalides de guerre, et dont le maintien aura été reconnu nécessaire par arrêté du secrétaire général aux combattants, ainsi que les associations destinées à venir en aide aux veuves, orphelins ou ascendants de soldats morts pour la France, continueront à subsister, sous réserve qu'elles se groupent en une fédération nationale des œuvres de guerre. (*Journal officiel de la République française*, 30 August 1940)

Press articles reveal that the fédération had not been set up by April 1941 (*La Légion: organe officiel de la Légion française des Combattants*, April 20) but a 'Comité d'entente', authorised by the occupier and based in Lyon, is mentioned in February 1941 (*Informations générales*, February 25). The injury-specific nature of the Union, while it limited its membership, also permitted its survival in both zones:

Le caractère nettement philanthropique de notre organisation lui a épargné d'être touchée par le décret prononçant la dissolution de certains groupements d'Anciens Combattants et de mutilés. D'autre part, les Autorités d'occupation, dans un geste heureux qu'il convient de souligner, ont autorisé le fonctionnement de quelques associations dont le Comité d'Entente des Grands Mutilés, dans lequel les "Gueules Cassées" sont naturellement inscrits. (*Circulaire* 1, February 1941)

The positive tone towards Vichy and the occupier is nuanced in another article, in which services in the occupied zone are described as running smoothly, while the free zone is in chaos. In this first *Circulaire*, the Union also holds unnamed individuals responsible for 'les douloureux événements du printemps dernier' and the authors express their hope to see them held accountable for their mistakes. While no names are mentioned, the Union could be aligning itself with Vichy and echoing its blaming of Communists, Freemasons and Jews for corrupting the Third Republic. In contrast, Pétain is described favourably:

Nous avons confiance – une confiance absolue – dans la volonté ferme et sereine de notre Grand Chef, le Maréchal PETAIN. [...] Il saura bien venger tout un peuple plongé dans la misère. [...] le Maréchal PETAIN qui, dans sa magnanimité de soldat, a fait don à la France de sa personne, rassemblera les morceaux épars de cette Terre qu'il sut défendre et qu'aujourd'hui il protège. [...]

Like many WW1 veterans, Gueules cassées trust Pétain's leadership and his ability to restore unity; the reference to a 'vengeance' may also suggest the belief that Pétain would turn against the occupier in due course and that he was, in fact, covertly supporting a Resistance agenda. Union members are called to follow him: 'nous répondrons présent à l'appel du Président d'Honneur des GUEULES CASSEES'. This support is steadfast, with the Marseilles delegate sending Pétain a telegram of thanks and support in June 1940 (*Le Petit Marseillais*, June 23), a toast in his honour in 1941, and thanks expressed to the 'Chef du gouvernement' for understanding veterans' pension concerns (*Circulaire* 2, December 1941; *Circulaire* 3, August 1942). Likewise, during a visit by Vichy officials in 1943, the Union's general secretary stated that 'la plus grande reconnaissance allait au chef de l'Etat, pour tout ce qu'il fait pour notre pays' (*La Dépêche de Brest*, 18 October 1943); the Union's use of its connection with Pétain may have been self-serving; this statement can however, also be interpreted as denoting a form of Giraudisme, or at least a belief in Pétain's patriotism and his possible covert Resistance agenda.

Furthermore, the Union received several visits from Vichy officials, especially in relation to the treatment of soldiers injured in 1939–1940, in the context of thanksgiving services for its first two presidents, and of pension-related discussions. For instance, Vichy officials Chapuis, Bailly and de Chabot (representing Pétain, Darlan and Huntziger) attended the remembrance service for Union President Rollet in Vichy in 1941 (*Le Petit Journal*, 21 April 1941). Even after 1942, visits carried on, with Secrétaire Général aux Anciens Combattants Musnier de Pleignes received with 'joy' in January 1943 and a toast to Pétain given on this occasion (*Circulaire* 5, January 1943).⁴ In March 1943, Musnier de Pleignes visited the Paris 'Centre de restauration maxillo-faciale' and the 'Centre d'appareillage maxillo-facial' (*Circulaire* 6, March 1943). On this occasion, Union co-founder Jourdain 'fit distribuer, de la part du maréchal Pétain, de nombreuses cigarettes qui furent reçues avec la joie que l'on devine aisément'. As late as the end of 1943, Defence Secretary Bridoux (who was later sentenced to death for his participation in the Vichy government), and Musnier de Pleignes, Demange and Le Provier, representing local and Vichy authorities, visited Moussy-le-Vieux (*La Dépêche de Brest*, 18 October 1943). Union co-founders Jugon and Jourdain hosted and Bridoux reportedly assured residents 'de la sympathie et de la particulière sollicitude du Chef de l'Etat à leur égard' (*L'informateur de Seine-et-Marne*, 19 October 1943). The apparently clash-free relations between Pétain and the Union can thus be viewed as helpful to Vichy in trying to maintain support for the regime amongst veterans, and, from the Union's point of view, in ensuring it was allowed to survive.

While no evidence of a visit by Pétain to the Union has been found, upon visiting patients at Desgenettes hospital (Lyon) Pétain is described as paying particular attention to facially wounded and severely disabled patients: 'il s'attarde au milieu des blessés de la face et des grands invalides, s'enquérant du lieu où ils furent blessés et leur prodiguant des mots de réconfort' (*Informations générales*, 26 November 1940). An earlier article reported Pétain assuring disfigured veterans that 'Les blessés ne seront pas oubliés. Ils n'auront pas à se plaindre de la Patrie à laquelle ils se sont sacrifiés' (*Le Midi socialiste*, 20 November 1940).

While it remained somewhat subdued, the Union also criticised Vichy authorities. The 'difficultés que nous éprouvons pour "trouver" du papier' are mentioned (*Circulaire* 3), the use of inverted commas suggesting political rather than practical reasons are to blame for this shortage. Likewise, a 'Commission consultative des Pensions' is denounced as

a 'machine à perdre le temps' (*Circulaire 2*), as members are informed rather than consulted. Jugon's appointment on a new 'Commission consultative de la législation concernant les Anciens Combattants et Victimes de Guerre' is welcomed in *Circulaire 5* and shows the Union's willingness to work with the authorities to defend veterans' rights. It also highlights the fact that veterans' rights continued to be an issue during the Second World War, even though the Vichy regime was counting on veterans' support.

Further criticism focused on Vichy authorities not making much use of Union premises for the convalescence of facially injured servicemen. While in the occupied zone authorities promptly sent disfigured patients to Moussy-le-Vieux, Vichy authorities are denounced for not facilitating the creation of a single dedicated maxillo-facial centre, and for hardly using Le Coudon (*Circulaire 1*; *Circulaire 3*). The Union's resilience thus partly drew upon proactive engagement with relevant authorities and attempts to complement state provisions; while this shows willingness, the remit seems restricted to supporting *gueules cassées*. In contrast, the use of Le Coudon's summer camp infrastructure for a 'Camp de Jeunesse' and an 'école des cadres des Camps de Jeunesse' from 1940 until at least 1942 points to the Union's assistance with one of the key facets of the 'Révolution nationale' programme (*Circulaire 1*; *Circulaire 3*).

Lastly, significant but short-lived outrage was sparked by reports of disabled veterans being requisitioned for forced labour or to watch railway lines, again reflecting veterans' criticisms of some of the measures implemented by Vichy and the occupier. An article in the March 1943 *Circulaire 6* on 'Travail obligatoire ... garde des voies ... vers l'Allemagne ... ou d'autres lieux ...' reports that veterans with a disability percentage as high as 100% are forced to work and accuses an unidentified administrative authority ('ON') of not taking into account the sacrifices already made by disabled veterans:

Les circonstances actuelles, conséquences douloureusement prolongées des réalités méconnues de 1939, imposent à chacun des sacrifices, c'est entendu.

A-t-on pensé qu'il est, dans la nation, une certaine catégorie de citoyens qui portent dans leur chair certaines traces visibles, ou non, du grand sacrifice consenti à la Patrie en des temps pas tellement reculés?

A cette question. Il faut répondre par la négative. L'on n'y a pas pensé!

Et parce que l'ON n'y a pas pensé, c'est un DOUBLE SACRIFICE que l'on réclame de quelques-uns. C'est ainsi que des 100%, des 75%, des 60% d'invalidité sont appelé à des titres divers.

"Nous n'avons pas voulu cela", répondent les administrations intéressées. Possible, mais, alors, pourquoi ne donne-t-on pas des instructions précises aux organismes d'exécution? Cela ne doit pas être plus difficile que de "penser" à rédiger une circulaire sur la réglementation du pain nécessaire au "chien-chien à sa mémère"!

Beyond this generic denunciation, affected readers are also invited to contact the Union for help. The March 1944 *Circulaire 7b* includes official statements confirming that the war-disabled pensioned at a rate over 50% are exempt from taking part in the STO, and those over 85% from guarding railway lines as well. While it remained a source of concern, the factual tone of this later article suggests that the Union had received sufficient reassurance, or was refraining from further criticism.

Despite occasional criticisms, the Union avoided antagonising the Vichy regime and the occupier and continued to operate legally in both free and occupied France. Its

attachment – similarly to that of many *Légion* members (Guillon 2004) – appears to have largely been to Pétain. After the Liberation, though, bulletins emphasised the Union's efforts to 'resist'. The first post-Liberation *Bulletin* (September 1944) follows the same format as pre-Vichy bulletins and is numbered 62 (the last bulletin published prior to the Armistice was 61), suggesting that the *Circulaires* parenthesis (February 1941–March 1944) is now closed. This desire to see the years 1940–1944 as null and void is consistent with the official discourse put forward by De Gaulle. The lead article on the first page celebrates the change in regime and forthcoming peace. An article titled 'Notre bulletin n'était pas mort!' also reviews the previous period:

Camouflé depuis 1940, affectant la forme d'une « *Circulaire* » pour échapper aux rigueurs des lois nouvelles, notre *Bulletin* reparaît aujourd'hui dans sa présentation traditionnelle.

Son « camouflage » aurait pu être évité, sa parution assurée. Comment ? Simplement en sollicitant les « autorités d'occupation », ainsi que l'on disait alors. Nous ne l'avons pas voulu. Pourquoi ? Parce que l'autorisation de paraître n'aurait été accordée qu'après un « remaniement » de notre Conseil d'Administration, c'est-à-dire l'abandon de quelques Camarades. Nous ne nous sommes pas inclinés ... [...]

La « *Circulaire* » était courte car il ne fallait pas songer à demander un « bon papier ». [...] en ce mois de septembre 1944, nous éprouvons une certaine satisfaction à ne pas avoir dans notre collection des « Bulletins » revêtus de l'exéquatur abhorré (2).

While paper shortages had been mentioned, the refusal to reshuffle the Board had not been previously disclosed. The authorities' motivations are not specified but the Union's decision not to 'abandon' members is described as proof of its integrity. In a note at the bottom of the same page, readers are reminded that 'L'union fraternelle est la tradition de notre oeuvre, elle en constitue la force. Dans les circonstances tragiques que nous traversons, resserrons-en plus que jamais les liens'. The list of regional delegates published in September 1944 is besides very similar to lists published until November 1939, suggesting continuity in terms of leadership, while only two members (including Mousy's ex-caretaker Paul Hervo) are said to have been struck off (*Bulletin* 63, January-February 1945). The 'purge' within the Union thus seems to have affected a small number of members only.

Resistance efforts amongst Union members and relatives are stressed, such as 'AUBRY qui, sous la menace de la Milice, avait dû « gagner la campagne »' (*Bulletin* 63). Likewise, the role played by Union Vice-President Brunschwig is celebrated: in the Summer of 1940, Brunschwig helped found US-based 'France Forever' to support de Gaulle's efforts and post-Liberation he was 'chargé par le Général de Gaulle d'une importante mission près des armées alliées' (*Bulletin* 62). In recognition of his services, Brunschwig was made 'Grand officier de la Légion d'Honneur' in 1945, an honour described as well-deserved (*Bulletin* 66, February 1946).

From early 1945, bulletins include the names of 'déportés', 'fusillés par les Allemands', 'morts pour la France', and 'quelques enfants de Gueules Cassées qui se sont signalés par leur brillante conduite pendant la période troublée que nous venons de vivre' (*Bulletin* 63; *Bulletin* 64, June-July 1945). Both WW1 and WW2 combatants and their relatives are put forward, and their achievements include fighting with the FFI, participation in resistance activities (including maquis), and taking part in Allied landings and the liberation of France. Furthermore, the January-February 1945 *Bulletin* invites readers to share their

wartime experiences with a view to publishing a special *Bulletin*: ‘nous demandons à nos camarades de nous faire connaître, succinctement, les accidents, sévices etc., dont ils auraient pu être victimes, et aussi les actions auxquelles ils auraient pu prendre part (sans entrer dans le détail), eux, ou leurs enfants’. The focus is thus on celebrating resistance and condemning the crimes perpetrated in previous years, consistently with the emergence of a ‘mythe résistancialiste’. Furthermore, by criticising ‘ceux qui font tant de volume depuis le 32 août 1944 ...’ [italics in the original], *Bulletin* authors set themselves apart from last-minute *résistants* and imply that the Union and its members genuinely and lastingly supported the resistance (*Bulletin* 66).

From 1945, praise for de Gaulle and his administration, alongside open criticism of the Germans, feature in the bulletins, while criticism of the Vichy regime remains more subdued. The June-July 1945 issue rejoices in the fact that ‘Voici, disparue de la surface de notre France et de son Empire, la horde verdâtre avec son sinistre bagage d’exactions, de pillages, de déportations, d’atrocités et de tueries ...’. In contrast, de Gaulle is described as ‘Celui qui incarna, pendant les années d’oppression, l’espérance de tout un peuple’, the Union having previously expressed satisfaction with the new government’s approach to veterans’ pensions (*Bulletin* 63). Good relations with the provisional government are also visible through the presence of prominent government members and Resistance figures at events, for instance Alexandre Parodi and General Koenig attended the memorial service in honour of late Union presidents Colonel Picot and General Rollet (*La Croix*, 26 April 1945).

Adapting the support on offer: Union activities in WW2

If the Union secured its (legal) existence throughout the war, it still faced significant disruption in its operations, and it had to display passive resilience in order to ‘withstand disturbances’ and develop ‘the capacity to maintain the structure and function during periods of adversity’, in this case a host of political, social and economic challenges (Burnard and Bhamra 2019, 18). The slightly delayed publication of the first wartime *Bulletin* (61, November 1939) as well as the censorship applied (p. 7 and the top of p. 8 are blank) are evidence of the early impact of the conflict on this essential means of communication. However, the authors highlight the organisation’s foresight and the steps taken early on in the war to secure assets, such as the creation of ‘wartime headquarters’ in La Chaumette. The Union’s approach to the new war is also made clear: far from downsizing its activities, it proposes to extend its support to soldiers injured in this latest war. This new ‘mission’ gives veterans a sense of purpose and an opportunity to help, even if not on the frontline: ‘Puisque nous ne pouvons pas songer à reprendre un “flingot” et à monter Là-Haut, du moins pouvons-nous donner “nos pauvres restes” pour SERVIR nos Camarades et en même temps notre Pays’ (*Bulletin* 61).

Despite the desire to maintain and expand activities, the impact of the war is already visible in November 1939, with disruptions to the 1939 summer camps mentioned: the ‘entertainment’ programme of some of the camps had to be amended and some of the children were not able to return home as planned. In addition, several support services run by the *Association* are on hold due to the mobilisation of key advisors: the majority of the surgeons, general practitioners and maxillo-facial specialists who worked with and

advised *gueules cassées* are gone and only the legal advice team seems to be functioning normally. The traditional gathering at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier by Union members is also expected to be complicated by the lack of available transportation.

In other areas, the outbreak of the war seems to have initially positively affected the running of the Union; indeed, the national lottery scheme is portrayed as enjoying renewed favour. While the pre-WW2 years had seen its ethics and existence questioned, the new conflict led the Finance Minister to redirect its profits to a wartime solidarity fund, rather than cancel it, a decision welcomed by veterans (*Bulletin* 61). The Union thus endeavoured to take advantage of any opportunities created by the conflict, as well as mitigating the impact of the war on its work and refocusing on 'core' activities, as will be discussed in the rest of this article.

During the 'drôle de guerre', the Union continued to offer support to its members, although it had to make adjustments to its workings. The bulletin continued to inform readers and the November 1939 issue flagged up some of the relevant legislation changes, especially regarding allowances, rent payments and marriages *in absentia*. Beyond members, the Union offered advice to war victims more broadly, for example through taking part in drop-in sessions in Lille, where veterans, orphans and widows of the First World War and of the more recent conflict could learn about their rights, and where mobilised combatants' wives could ask for information (*La Croix du Nord*, 26 April 1940).

Further evidence of the disruption brought by the war include the already mentioned interruption and changes to the Bulletin, as well as the opening of new headquarters in Vichy, a decrease in the number of regional representatives and the appointment of a new 'temporary representative for the French Free zone', based in Vichy. Different provisions were made in the occupied and free zones, but a common point seems to be the use of the organisation's fame and connections to campaign for better care for the facially injured servicemen of 1939–1940, both during and after the war. The Union thus claims to have helped bring together facially wounded patients in a dedicated unit led by Virenque at Neuilly-sur-Seine originally, thus sparing them the difficulties First World War servicemen experienced, being initially transferred from ward to ward (*Circulaire* 1). The Union also intervened in 1942 when patients' treatments were put on hold following their transfer from Neuilly to the ill-equipped Foch hospital (*Paris-Midi*, 9 March 1942). The Union was called upon to intervene, Jourdain visited the premises and stepped in, obtaining a 'promise' from the Service de Santé that the issues would be remedied within eight days. While the Union did not solve the matter fully and immediately, its attitude is described as fatherly and caring. Furthermore, Jourdain is reported to have gone to Vichy to ask Pétain to help move the treatment of facially injured combatants back to Neuilly. The Union thus did not hesitate to intervene to support new facially injured combatants, and to use their existing relationship with Pétain as the Association's honorary president to help their comrades. This shows the Union's willingness to use its connections with Pétain as its honorary president to serve the cause of facially wounded veterans; in turn, the respected and powerful Union des Blessés de la Face could prove a useful vehicle for Pétain to secure the support of veterans and achieve his programme of Révolution Nationale.

The Union also opened the doors of its Moussy residence to facially wounded soldiers injured as early as 1940: 'En leur domaine de Moussy-le-Vieux près de Meaux, les Gueules

Cassées 1914–1918 ont reçu le 4 novembre leurs jeunes camarades Gueules Cassées 1939–1940. Les jeunes blessés de la face y viennent achever leur convalescence’ (Ministère de l’Intérieur, *Informations générales*, 11 November 1941).⁵ This integration of Second World War veterans within the Gueules Cassées community is also made visible through decisions to involve them equally in important events, such as the wake for Union president General Rollet. *Paris-Midi* thus reported on 17 April 1941: ‘Aux angles du lit mortuaire veillent quatre blessés de la face, deux de 14–18 et deux de 39–40. [...] C’est la garde d’honneur du grand soldat’. Rollet being a veteran of the First World War, and First World War gueules cassées making up a larger proportion of the membership, the equal split was not a given; however, the symbolic choice was made to give veterans of both conflicts equal representation. Likewise, the participation of 1914–1918 and 1939–1940 veterans in lighting the flame on the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier is recorded in 1941 (*Circulaire* 2) and 1943 (*Circulaire* 5).

Despite the fact that the wartime experiences of the wounded of 1939–1940 were different from those of the gueules cassées of 1914–1918, they are portrayed as belonging to the ‘family’. The February 1941 *Circulaire* 1 explicitly welcomes them: ‘Vous pouvez compter sur nous, chers Jeunes Camarades, blessés en pleine figure, en accomplissant courageusement votre devoir. Nous sommes fiers de vous et nous souhaitons la plus cordiale bienvenue parmi nous’. The December 1941 *Circulaire* 2 goes further in referring to new members as ‘frères de souffrance’ while *gueules cassées* from both wars present at an award ceremony in 1943 are described in *Circulaire* 5 as ‘camarades des deux guerres unis dans une communion d’idées et de pensées’. If the Union encouraged equality, it also underlined the additional difficulties faced by combatants of the previous war, as there was no group to help advocate for and support them, as highlighted by the Union General Secretary in Bulletin 65, published in October–November 1945:

Il n’y a pas de différence entre les faces ravagées qui sortent de Bir-Hakeim ou de Verdun, de l’Artois ou du Vercors. Lorsqu’ils se sont rencontrés, ILS se sont reconnus ! Unis dans la souffrance, ils connaissent les mêmes déceptions mais aussi les mêmes espoirs: les blessés de la face forment une même famille ! [...]

Notre génération de 1914–18 a conservé le souvenir attristé de grands désespoirs. C’est que rien n’avait été prévu. Aujourd’hui, c’est avec une sorte de fierté que nous disons à nos jeunes amis: Une œuvre d’entraide a été créée par vos anciens, afin que l’on ne revoie plus des désespérés, des misères, dans les rangs de ceux qui ont combattu pour sauver leur patrie.

Indeed, even during the war, the Union continued to offer not only moral support, but also practical help to disfigured combatants and their families. After some interruptions early on in the conflict, services such as ‘Services médico-légaux’, ‘Contentieux’ and ‘Pensions’ resumed (*Circulaire* 1, 4), showing the Union’s passive resilience through its capacity to maintain its core activities. Allowances continued to be given out and children’s summer camps restarted, albeit on a smaller scale (*Circulaire* 3). The *Circulaire* took over from the bulletin, informing members on aspects such as pension updates or adjustments to rationing cards (the adapted diet of facially injured soldiers gave them access to some exemptions as noted in *Circulaire* 2).

The Union also sought to help veterans and war victims beyond disfigured veterans. A 1943 article suggests that support extended to civilians ‘sauvagement défigurés par les bombardements anglo-américains’, who were welcomed at the Union centre in Moussy-le

-Vieux (*La Croix d'Auvergne*, October 31). Beyond the facially wounded, on 19 March 1940 an article in *Le Radical de Marseille* reported that the Union had received parcels from the United States and that the then President, Rollet, went with a few other Union members to the frontline to hand out these parcels to combatants. At a meeting of the Union's Charente branch earlier in the year, the participation of the Union in 'la journée nationale du vin chaud', a fundraising day, had been announced, as well as 'une vente de poupées fétiches' (*La Charente*, 29 February 1940). These events are based on well-established fundraising strategies, with sales being well-documented since the nineteenth century and fundraising 'days' being frequently organised during the First World War. Fundraising strategies therefore followed well-established practices. The Union also donated the profits (25,177 francs) from a fundraising evening 'au profit des œuvres d'entraide dans l'armée' held on 7 February 1940 at Cinema Marignan to French Prime Minister Daladier (*La Croix du Nord*, 5 March 1940).

In addition to these traditional fundraising methods, the Union also carried on its involvement in the national lottery, with the sale of 'Dixièmes des gueules cassées' (fractional, more affordable tickets). In 1939–1940, purchasing tickets was described as a patriotic act and a way to support French veterans in the war: 'Le dixième des "GUEULES CASSÉES" n'est pas l'émission d'une banque ou consortium au profit de X ou Y. [...] C'est la seule émission des Associations de Grands Mutilés et Combattants. Votre devoir est de les aider' (*Le Radical de Marseille*, 31 March 1940). Once the phoney war was over, *Gueules Cassées* lottery tickets continued to be positively described, the Union clearly adjusting its 'sales pitch' to the new circumstances: 'Souscrire aux dixièmes "Gueules cassées", c'est donc venir en aide à toutes les misères nées de la guerre et c'est avant tout, une bonne œuvre' (*La Charente* (Angoulême), 31 January 1941). The Union's link with Pétain is occasionally highlighted in adverts, this connection a useful 'selling point' (*Le Petit Provençal*, 23 November 1940). In Union publications, lottery tickets were described as a tangible reminder of the Union's survival: 'ces petits billets multicolores sont pour nos camarades éloignés comme de bons messagers qui clament notre existence' (*Circulaire* 3).

For the Union, the lottery became crucial: while it had relied on a range of fundraising methods during the interwar years, new wartime legislation restricted charities' ability to fundraise. Le Crom (2013) notes that a decree published on 29 November 1939 required charities to obtain a special authorisation to fundraise through 'quêtes, collectes, ventes sur la voie publique etc.', while the 4 October 1940 law gave Secours national a monopoly on public fundraising for civilian victims of war, the Red Cross retaining some room for manoeuvre in relation to combatants and prisoners of war (38). While the Union was able to continue raising money through the sale of *Dixièmes* lottery tickets, it also donated—perhaps as a sign of goodwill—some of its profits to Secours d'Hiver, as was widely reported in 1941 (see for instance *La Charente* (Angoulême), 31 January 1941). Lottery-based fundraising thus became the key to survival, and the Union regularly pushed the sale of *Dixièmes*, highlighting their symbolic and patriotic value as well as their importance as a financial resource. The Union's engagement in a variety of fundraising strategies beyond traditional methods thus contributed to its financial resilience throughout the Second World War; the adjustments in the discourse around lottery tickets and the emphasis on their patriotic dimension and the relief they bring to contemporary war victims are also evidence of adjustments to try and take advantage of an otherwise very challenging national crisis.

The Liberation, while welcomed by the Union, also caused renewed disruptions, with the September 1945 *Bulletin* acknowledging that contact with the temporary headquarters in Vichy was interrupted and that no news had been received from any but two regional delegates. In addition, wedding, death and birth announcements are missing due to the absence of communications with Joué-les-Tours. Activities, however, soon resumed, with casual 'réunions mensuelles' advertised in 1945 and the duplicate, Vichy headquarters closing down on 31 August 1945 (*Bulletin* 64). The period following the Liberation was also a period of material reconstruction, Moussy and Le Coudon having been occupied at various points in the war, and Le Coudon having been almost entirely destroyed in June 1944. While the Coudon destruction is described as a significant blow, its rebuilding is articulated as a symbolic reconstruction project that mirrors the rebirth of the country as a whole: 'Le Coudon sera relevé de ses ruines. Notre Coudon, comme la France, renaîtra!' (*Bulletin* 62).

Conclusion

The outbreak of a new war and the political, economic and social changes that followed during the years 1939–1945 posed significant challenges to the *Union des Blessés de la Face*, even jeopardising its existence. By the time peace returned, it had endured losses amongst its members and their families, but also on a material and symbolic level with the destruction of Le Coudon. It was, however, still operating, with new members joining and a renewed sense of purpose. This article suggests that, to negotiate its survival during the war years, the Union benefitted from, and encouraged, a discourse on facial injuries that, in line with narratives already present during the First World War, continued to emphasise their distinctiveness, thereby stressing the need for dedicated and specialised support that the Union was uniquely placed to offer. In doing so, it demonstrated its continued relevance through changing times.

Despite the rather pacifist stance it had taken in the interwar years, it supported the war effort when the conflict broke out. As suggested by Millington (2012), the 'marshal's men' (i.e. veterans) were not alone in supporting Pétain's plan in 1940 and some of them may have expected him to step down once France had recovered from defeat. While the Légion was officially created to serve Pétain's regime, its members as well as the handful of associations allowed to survive outside its confines did not necessarily embrace Vichy's values; describing the Union as a supporter or an opponent to the Vichy regime would therefore fail to acknowledge changes in its publicly declared positions (especially before and after the defeat, and before and after the Liberation) as well as the challenges involved in trying to continue to serve its members—new and old. The tensions and changes in operations and discourses discussed in this article reflect wider trends within French society, although the Union's position may be partly seen as one of privilege, close enough to its honorary president Pétain during the Vichy years to survive, but not so close as to condemn it after the Liberation. It sought to maintain good relations with the authorities, including during the occupation and the Vichy years, and used its links with Pétain while keeping a narrow focus on matters specifically concerning gueules cassées. This focus is what enabled the Union to be exempted from joining the Légion française des

combattants. Despite the absence of overt resistance against Vichy's and the occupier's policies, it continued to enjoy respect and support from governments that led France following the Liberation, thanks in part to a strong emphasis on the Resistance achievements of members and their families. In doing so, it ensured its survival from a legal point of view and remained allowed to function throughout the Second World War, its divisions and changes of regimes. This article thus brings new insights into the fates of veterans' organisations during the Second World War.

Finally, the Union managed to continue offering moral and material support to members and their families. Despite significant disruptions, many services continued to operate, including legal and medical advice, providing a temporary or permanent home for veterans, summer camps for children (on a smaller scale) and keeping members informed about matters of interest and updated on family news through the *Bulletins/Circulaires*. Although the identity of the Association des Gueules Cassées was initially closely linked to 1914–1918, the Union survived the new conflict through adopting and publicising an inclusive approach, welcoming newly facially wounded veterans and extending practical and psychological support to them. The wounded of WW2 were explicitly welcomed and the shared sufferings of these 'deux générations sacrifiées' are highlighted, including similar difficulties in dealing with Centres de réformes (*Bulletin* 67, September 1946). Shared challenges would arise after the end of the war, with gueules cassées of both wars participating in protests for better pensions in the late 1940s and until at least 1950 (*La Bourgogne Républicaine*, June 26). Nevertheless, the *Bulletin* consistently positions the wounded of 1914–1918 as pioneers whose struggles and achievements paved the way and ensured that the next generation, if it still faced challenges, did not have to face them alone. In doing so, it stresses shared challenges but also the importance of the lasting legacy of the First World War on the veterans' movement.

The Union, it appears, displayed the characteristics identified by Burnard and Bhamra (2019, 22–23) as key to organisational resilience: it developed both passive and active resilience features, and combined different levels of resilience: organisational but also individual (with some continuity in the leadership and local delegates) and infrastructural (through engagement with communities beyond the association's membership). Throughout the Second World War, the Union adapted and evolved, while also remaining faithful to core values such as patriotism and unity. Its resilience, we argue, was based on this combination of adaptability and consistency, as well as carefully navigating political, economic, social and ideological challenges. In doing so, it remained relevant in a changing context, authorised to operate, and able to offer support to facially disfigured veterans of both the old and the new war.

Notes

1. A systematic search for keywords 'gueule(s) cassée(s)', 'blessé(s) de la face' and 'mutilé(s) de la face' was carried out on the Bibliothèque nationale de France's digitised newspaper archives for the years 1939–1950, including both freely accessible results on Gallica and paid-for Retronews archives.

2. With a few notable exceptions, such as Richard Hillary and Simon Weston in the UK.
3. A figure of 1,200 was later published in *Bulletin municipal officiel de la ville de Paris* (11 April 1946).
4. Musnier de Pleignes held the position until 1944; his trial for 'indignité nationale' resulted in a 'non-lieu pour faits de résistance' (Jaffré 1963, 347).
5. See also *La Croix*, 7 November 1940, and 'Les "Gueules Cassées" reçoivent 20 grands blessés de 40', *Paris-Soir*, 11 May 1941.

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