The nation inscribed on gravestones. Cemeteries, especially large public ones such as the famous Montparnasse Cemetery in Paris, might serve as rough chronological markers of national consciousness. The vast majority of grave markers do not attribute any specific purpose to the dead person's life or death. They may list family ties, honors, and/or put forth a reassuring message (e.g. "Rest in peace") or a blessing. But a small number of markers contain the somewhat audacious words, "S/he died for ________." This being a French cemetery, the typical inscription would be "Mort(s) pour ________." The overall question: at what point did "France" become something for which people (consciously) died? The answer suggested from the graves in this cemetery is: not until the twentieth century.

This answer is slightly skewed, however, because it was not until this time that military casualties were commonly buried in family cemeteries. It is likely, for example, that some of the deaths of the 1870-71 Franco-Prussian War would also have been "for France" had their gravestones appeared in cemeteries like Montparnasse. So, even though people "died for France" somewhat earlier than the twentieth century, the overall point is that national consciousness--which today we often regard as obvious and natural--is a recent phenomenon in human history.
"Died for Liberty" in 1830

"For Honor," "For Liberty," "For the Glory of God," and other such abstractions and principles--people sometimes died for these things (or at least those who had their tombstones made said they did). But they did not die for France--not yet.

Above: Justice, moral independence, liberty, but not for France (1875)

It was at about this time that soldiers began to die "for France" but such military deaths would likely have resulted in burial in a military cemetery. During the twentieth century, however, military deaths made their way into family cemeteries.
ABOVE:
Gave his life for France in 1915
The First World War was, of course, an opportunity to die "for France" on a large scale.

LEFT:
(Bottom of the list of names)
Died for France in 1918
TOP:
Died for France in 1958 at a young age
Which war?
----------

LEFT
(Bottom of the list of names)
Died for France in 1918
The ultimate logic of the nation . . .

Died "for France" in peacetime at a ripe old age

This grave is especially interesting because it extends the concept of "dying for France" to its logical conclusion. If one lives for one's nation and serves one's nation, then it only makes sense that one dies for one's nation even if by natural causes in peacetime.