



0. THE FALL of FRANCE - Story Preface

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When Hitler's military planners engineered the fall of France, in the spring of 1940, German forces moved with incredible speed, forming a kind of "spearhead." Allied defenses crumbled. A defensive attack, led by General Charles de Gaulle, was like a "pin pricking the side of a rhinoceros." This still-shot, from American historical newsreel footage, depicts a U.S. intelligence officer describing the fall of France.

The film, *Inglourious Basterds*, is set in France during Germany's occupation of that country. How did such a catastrophe occur? How could Paris, a city beloved by people the world over, have fallen into Nazi hands?

Adolf Hitler, a foot soldier fighting for Germany during World War I, was extremely upset with the harsh terms of the 1918 Armistice and the Versailles Treaty. He vowed to spend the rest of his life "erasing the shame" which those conditions had imposed on Germany.

He made good on that promise after he became Germany's leader. Following his attack on Poland (during September of 1939), Hitler ordered his troops to invade Belgium, a neutral country. Britain and France came to the aid of their ally.

Deploying fast-moving forces, with Blitzkrieg ("lightening war") tactics, Germany also crushed Holland, forcing a Dutch surrender. Erwin Rommel, the German general, believed he could keep moving west, with little difficulty. He, and many other Germans, believed the war would be quickly over. Who could stand in their way?

Britain had a different opinion. Despite the optimism expressed in UK newsreels, however, the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) was in serious trouble by May of 1940. So was the French army.

Forcing a fifty-mile-gap in the French lines, Germany continued a string of victories. Pushing British troops where they didn't want to go, and breaking French lines almost at will, Germany had the upper hand. Allied forces were gathering at Dunkirk - with no way out but the sea.

If nearly 400,000 soldiers had not been plucked from certain death at Dunkirk - through the boats and ships of Operation Dynamo - Britain would have lost critical resources needed to oppose Hitler. France, meanwhile, was still in deep trouble.

By the middle of June, 1940, French leaders differed on the best way to resolve their country's crisis. Some people, like Marshal Philippe Petain (France's greatest WWI hero) believed surrender to Germany was the best option. On the 22nd of June, that is exactly what France did.

It wasn't enough for Hitler, however, that France capitulated. He wanted a ceremony at the very place where Germany had been humiliated 21½ years earlier. Ordering his engineers to break down the walls of the museum, housing the 1918 Armistice railway carriage, Hitler planned to get his revenge.

When French officials arrived at the surrender site, they knew exactly what Hitler had in mind. This time the tables were reversed. Hitler sat in Foch's chair, for a time, then left the railcar in disdain. He allowed his underlings to handle the formal surrender.

Thereafter, for a period of four years, Hitler's forces occupied two-thirds of France - including Paris. A new French government, based in Vichy and loyal to Germany, was established in the south.

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/THE-FALL-of-FRANCE-Inglourious-Basterds>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/THE-FALL-of-FRANCE-Inglourious-Basterds>

When Does Surrender Make Sense?

A highly respected war hero, who helped his country immeasurably during World War One, Philippe Petain believed that surrendering France to Germany, in 1940, was the best option the French people had.

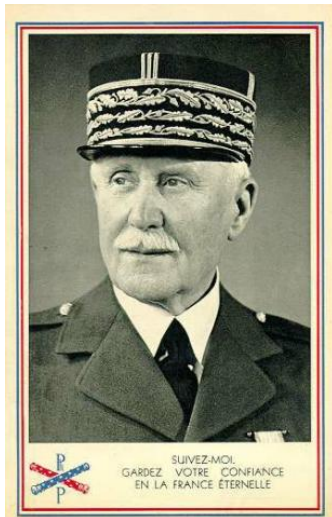
Charles de Gaulle, on the other hand, believed that surrendering France to Germany was neither smart nor needed.

Why do you think a man who was once a war hero believed surrendering his country to Germany made any sense at all?

If an invasion force came into your country, with the intent of occupying the land and running the country to suit its own purposes, how do you think your fellow citizens would respond? What are some of the resistance options they could employ?

Would you support resisting a foreign invasion of your country? What could you do to help the resistance?

Media Stream



Marshal Philippe Petain - President of Vichy France

Image online, courtesy [National Archives of France](#).

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Marshal-Philippe-Petain-President-of-Vichy-France>

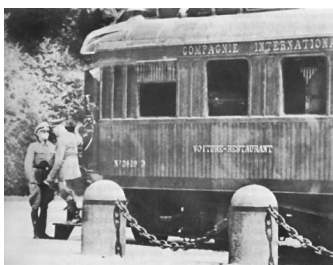


1918 Armistice Train - Germans Break Museum Walls

Photo online, courtesy National Archives of Australia.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/1918-Armistice-Train-Germans-Break-Museum-Walls>



Fall of France - Surrender at Compiegne

Photo online, courtesy the National Archives of Australia.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Fall-of-France-Surrender-at-Compiegne>



Armistice Railway Carriage - 1918 and 1940

Photo online, courtesy Armistice Museum (*Le Musée de l'Armistice*).

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Armistice-Railway-Carriage-1918-and-1940>



Hitler in Paris - June 23, 1940

Photo online, courtesy U.S. National Archives and Records Administration. Image 242-HLB-5073-20.

View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Hitler-in-Paris-June-23-1940>



THE FALL of FRANCE

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Hitler Invades Belgium - German Newsreel Reports

German Weekly Newsreel - UFA Ton Woche No. 506 - for the week of May 15, 1940. Clip online, courtesy Skoblin's channel at YouTube.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Hitler-Invades-Belgium-German-Newsreel-Reports>



German Blitzkrieg - The Fall of Holland

German Weekly Newsreel - UFA Ton Woche No. 506 - for the week of May 15, 1940. Clip online, courtesy Skoblin's channel at YouTube.

View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/German-Blitzkrieg-The-Fall-of-Holland>



Disaster Looms at Dunkirk

Historical footage, online courtesy BBC.

View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Disaster-Looms-at-Dunkirk>

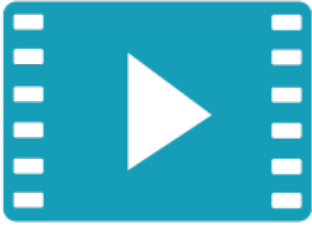


Operation Dynamo - The Miracle of Dunkirk

Historical footage, online courtesy BBC.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Operation-Dynamo-The-Miracle-of-Dunkirk>



Germany on the Offensive - Invasion of the Low Countries

UK Newsreel, 15 May 1940, online courtesy Google Video.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Germany-on-the-Offensive-Invasion-of-the-Low-Countries>