

# France

## May June 1940

# France

- To fully understand the impact of these events we must try and understand the mindset of the participants.

# The Great War background

- Everyone in military command and political influence in 1940 had lived through the Great War.
- Most of them had fought in it.
- It was the biggest event of their lives.
- It happened in France.



# The Great War background

The scale of the battle on the 540 kms of France's eastern frontier was astounding.



- Forces
- Allies 15,900,000 of which
- French 7,935,000
- British 5,400,000 of which
- Australian 295,000
- US 2,200,000

# The Great War background

The casualties were appalling.



- Killed
  - Allies 2,041,000 of which
  - Australia 48,900
- Wounded
  - Allies 5,163,000 of which
  - Australia 130,900
- Civilian dead
  - France 37,000
  - Belgium 30,000



# The Great War background

And it went on for years.



- 4 years 3 months - 4 August 1914 to 11 November 1918 of which
- Australians 2 years 8 months - March 1916 to November 1918.

# The Great War background

Even for Australians the fighting in France was much more significant than Gallipoli.

• Australians at	• Gallipoli	• France
• Forces involved	• 50,000	• 295,000
• Killed	• 8,700	• 48,900
• Wounded	• 17,900	• 130,900
• Duration	• 10 months	• 32 months

# The Great War background

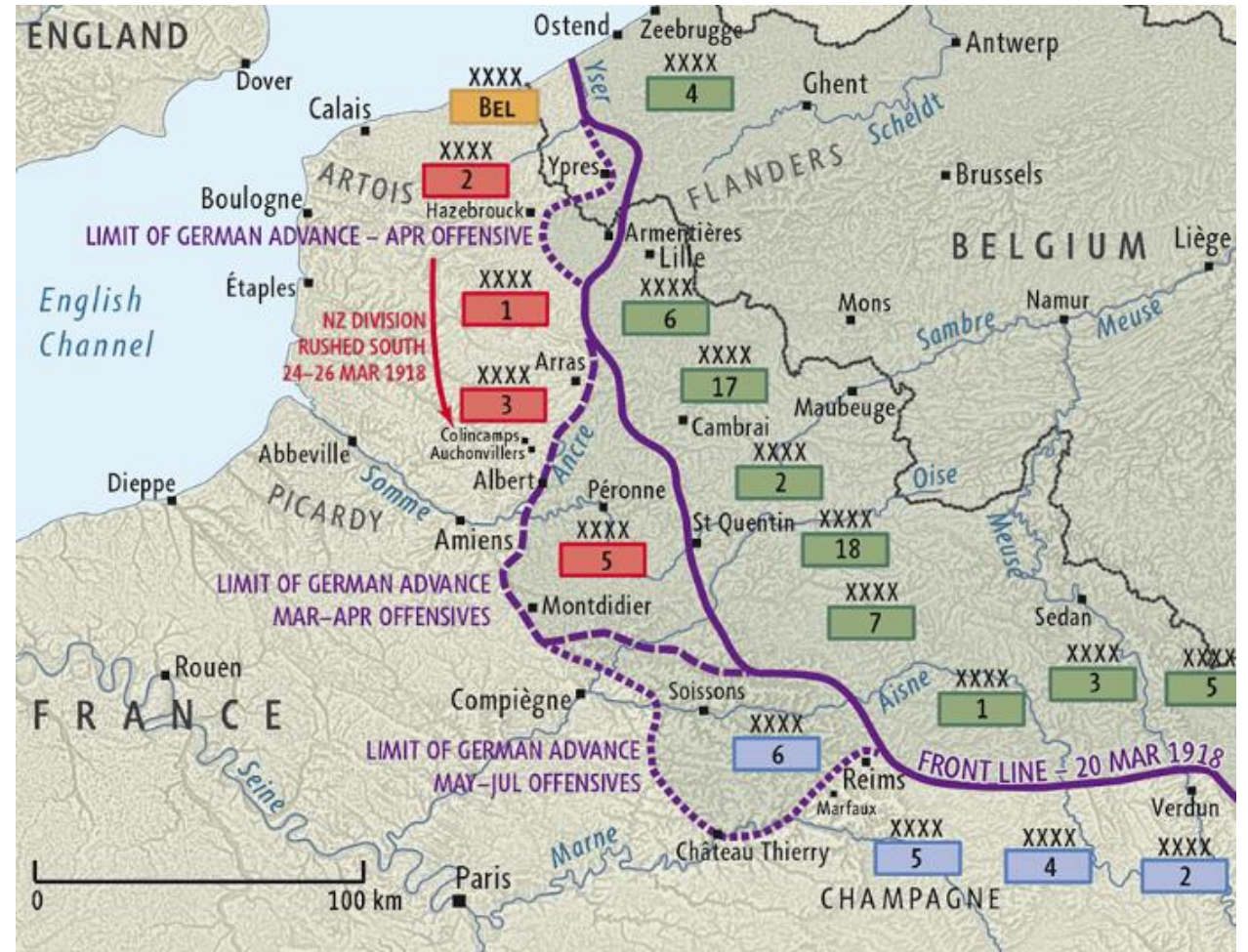
- There were campaigns elsewhere but the German army was fought and beaten and the war was won in France.





# The Great War background

- The trench line stretched from the Swiss border to the North sea and barely moved in four years.
- This map shows the biggest moves achieved during the war by the German attacks in the spring of 1918.
- Even the Allied attacks late in 1918, which defeated the German army and forced the Germans to surrender did not move the front line very far.



# Great War Background

- So the learning about war fighting from the Great War was:
  - Raise the biggest army you can
  - Go to France
  - Grind away for four years
  - You will win
  - But the casualties will be horrendous.

# France

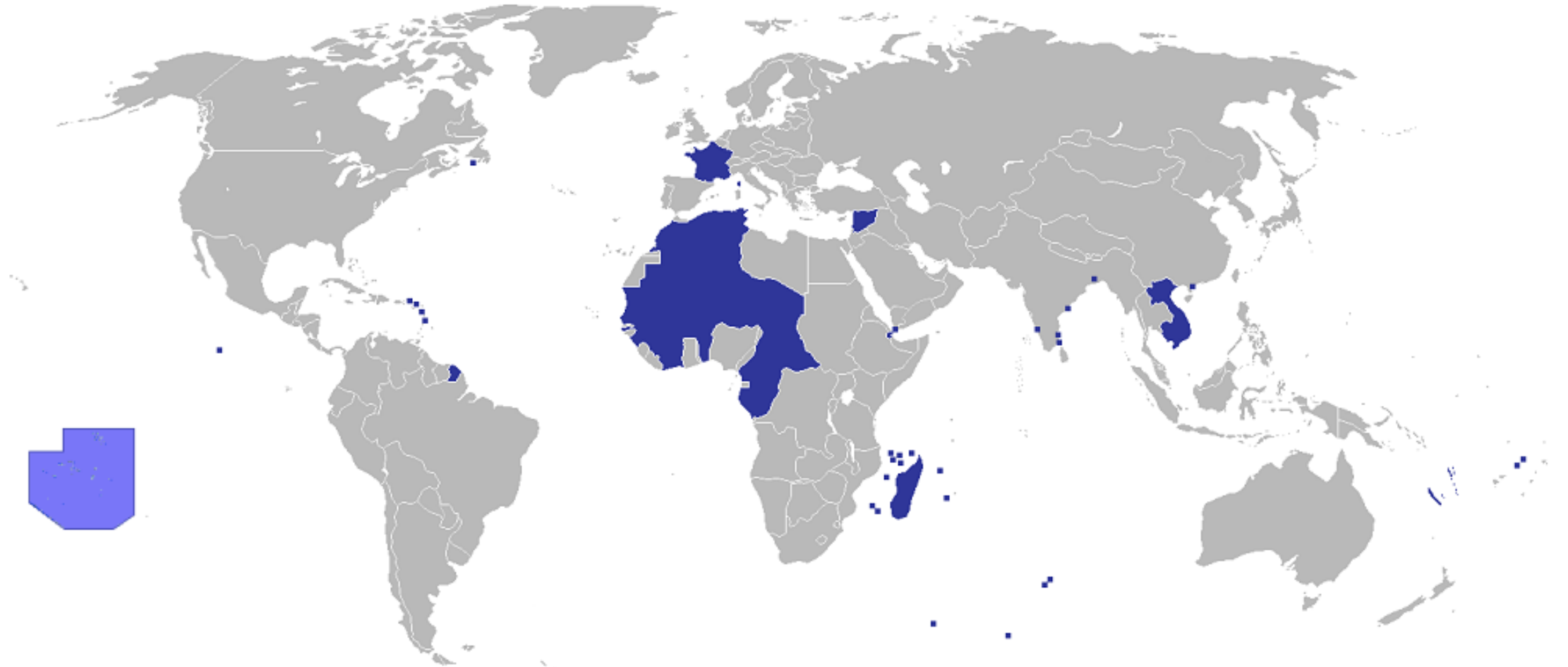
- The French Republic was the leading nation among the victorious Allies in the Great War.
- Although weakened by the war France remained a big, rich power and a leader in world events.





# French Empire 1940

The French Empire was second in size only to the British Empire.



# League of Nations

- The League was formed in 1920 to prevent wars through collective security and disarmament. The league was weakened from the beginning when the American Congress refused to permit America to join the League.
- President Wilson himself had presided over the committee that drafted the Covenant of the League of Nations but was unable to get US membership of the League approved by the Senate.

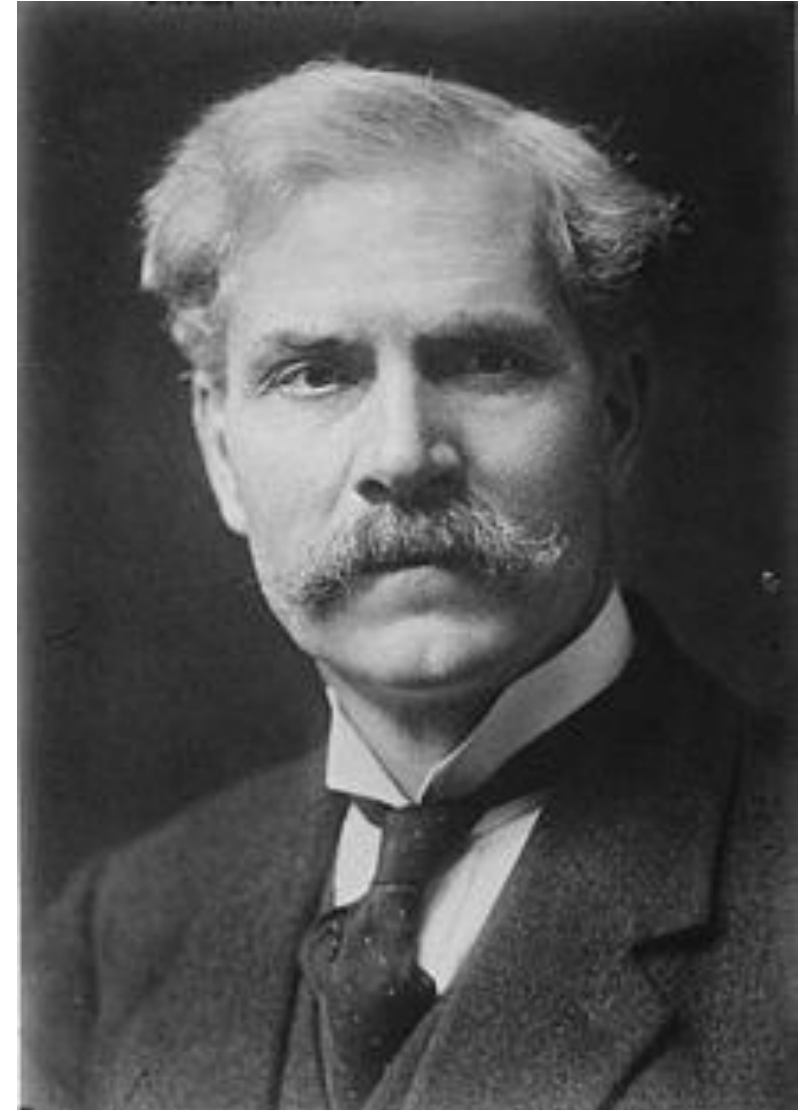


Woodrow Wilson returning from  
the Versailles Peace Conference,  
1919



# Depression and Disarmament

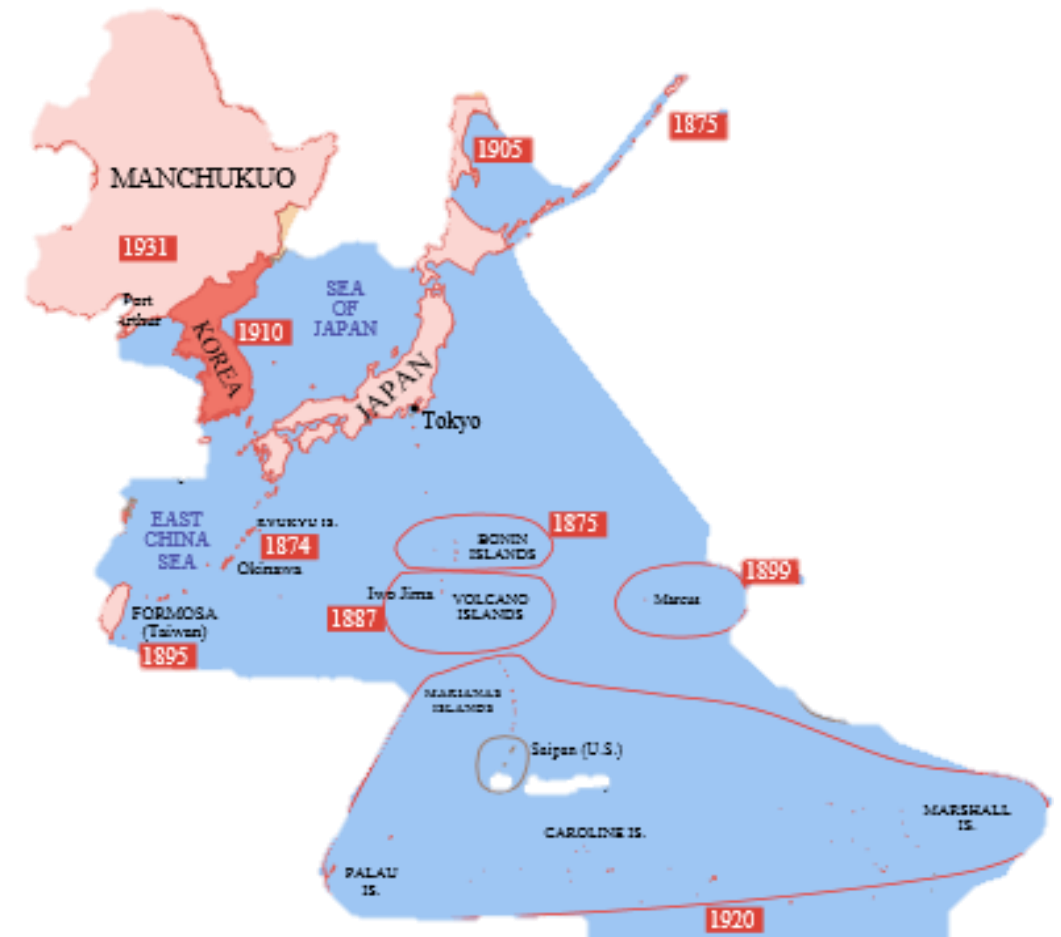
- In May 1929 in England Ramsay MacDonald became Prime Minister for the second time. He had been a pacifist in 1914-18 and was a leader in the international disarmament movement.
- In October 1929 share prices in New York began to collapse and the entire world suffered an acute trade depression.
- The United States, Japan, France, Italy and Britain negotiated the London Naval Treaty in January 1930 to reduce the size of fleets and defer rebuilding. The aim had been economy and security.
- Further significant reductions were made in defence spending in Britain and Australia in 1930, driven by revenue collapse and encouraged by the London Treaty.



Ramsay MacDonald

# 1931 – The Manchurian Incident

- Japanese influence in Manchuria had grown following construction of the South Manchurian Railway.
- In 1931 the Japanese Kwantung army, invaded and occupied the whole of Manchuria after five months of fighting.
- Japan went on to institutionalise its control over Manchuria by installing the last emperor of China, Puyi, as head of the puppet state of Manchukuo.
- Militarily too weak to challenge Japan directly, China appealed to the League of Nations for help.
- The failure to act on the Manchurian Incident weakened the League.



# 1936 - Collective Security

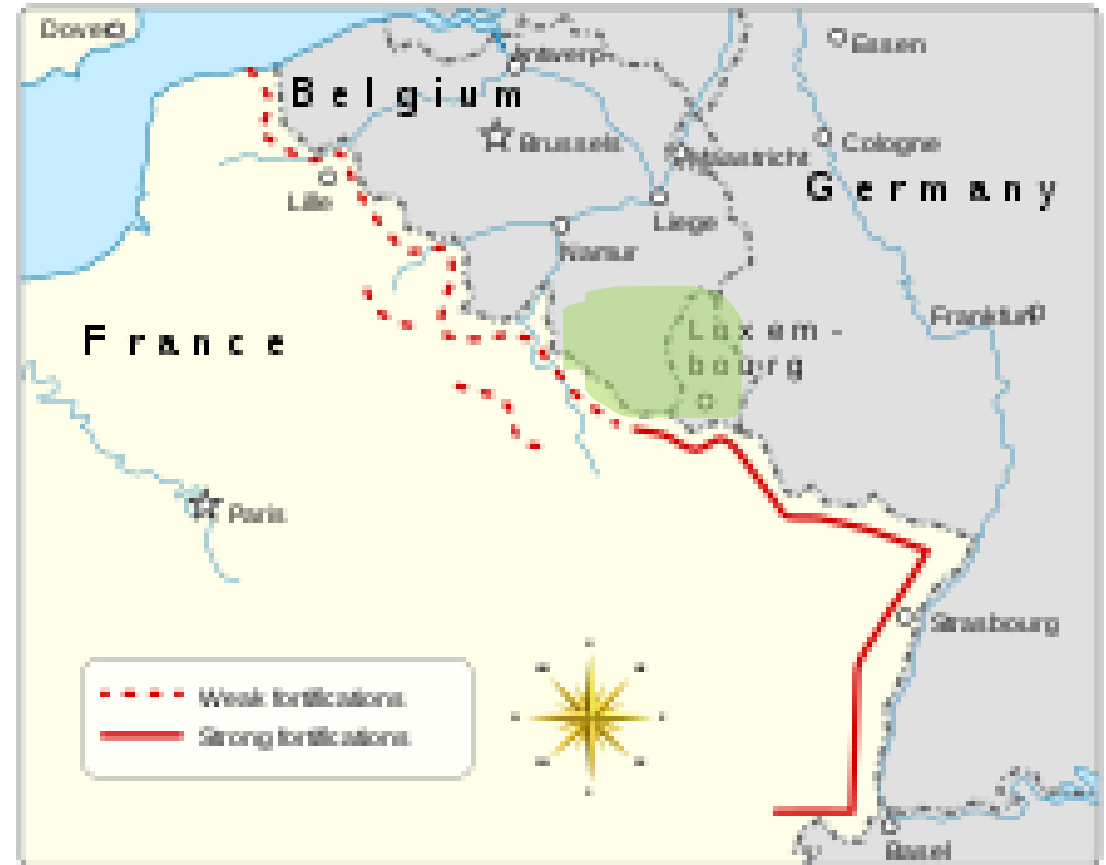
- In October 1933 the failure of the Disarmament Conference became evident.
- In October 1935, Italian dictator Benito Mussolini invaded Abyssinia.
- The League imposed economic sanctions, but they were largely ineffective because without American involvement or a naval blockade they did not cut off oil supplies.
- In June 1936 the British Prime Minister, Stanley Baldwin, told the House of Commons that collective security had
- “failed ultimately because of the reluctance of nearly all the nations in Europe to proceed to ... military sanctions ... [I]f collective action is to be a reality and not merely a thing to be talked about, it means not only that every country is to be ready for war; but must be ready to go to war at once. That is a terrible thing, but it is an essential part of collective security.”



Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin,  
unknown date

# French Strategy

- During the 1930s, the French built the Maginot Line, fortifications along the border with Germany.
- The line was intended to economise on manpower and deter a German invasion across the Franco–German border by diverting it into Belgium, which could then be met by the best divisions of the French Army.
- The war would take place outside French territory, avoiding the destruction of the First World War.
- the hills and woods of the **Ardennes** region were thought to cover the area to the north.
- General Pétain declared the Ardennes to be "impenetrable" as long as "special provisions" were taken to destroy an invasion force as it emerged from the Ardennes by a pincer attack.
- French war games in 1938, of a German armoured attack through the Ardennes, confirmed the impression that the region was still largely impenetrable and that this, along with the obstacle of the Meuse River, would allow the French time to bring up troops into the area to counter an attack.



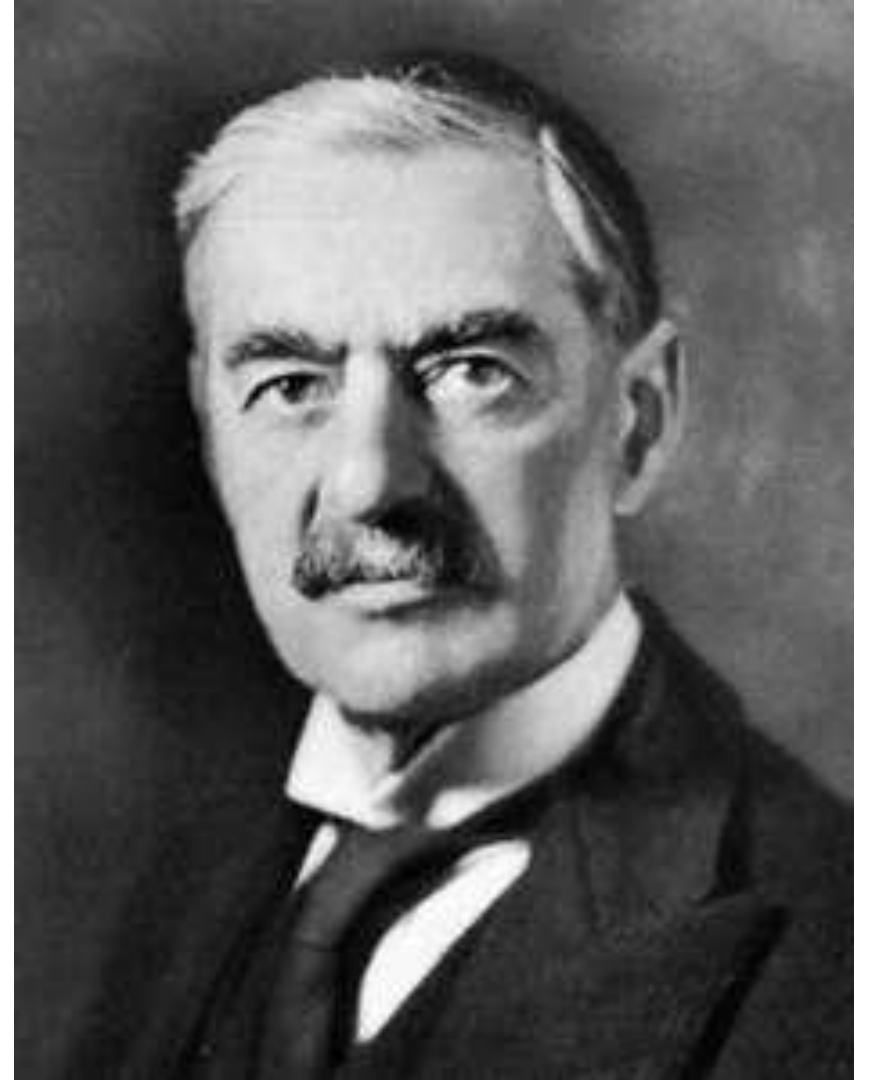
# British Strategy

- During the 1930s, the British government hoped to deter war by rearming from the very low level of readiness of the early 30s.
- By April, 1938, they had decided that in a war with Germany the British contribution should consist mainly of naval and air forces. The army rearmament programme provided considerable increases of coastal and air defences, but a field force of only five divisions, equipped for imperial defence. The French Government was informed that the British initial contribution to Allied land forces could only be two Regular divisions.
- The bulk of the extra money went to the Navy and the Air Force but plans were made to re-equip a small number of Army and Territorial Army divisions for service overseas.
- It had always been clear that if war came Britain and France would fight together.
- A desultory exchange of technical information between the British and French Staffs had been maintained since 1936 but full Staff conversations had been avoided. Such conversations imply a military alliance and involve military commitments, and at that time the Government (and their military advisers) were unwilling to proceed so far while the policy of appeasement was being pursued.



# 1939

- After Munich, Czechoslovakia lost much of its industry and its mountain defenses in the west and was left weak and powerless to resist subsequent occupation.
- On 15 March 1939 Germany invaded the remains of Czechoslovakia.
- The British Prime Minister, Mr Chamberlain, finally recognising the failure of appeasement, expressed the British resolution to oppose further attempts to use the threat of force to oblige independent states to yield up their independence.
- On 31st March Britain and France guaranteed "all support in their power" to Poland in the event of any threat to that country's independence. They also accepted military commitments to Rumania and Greece.



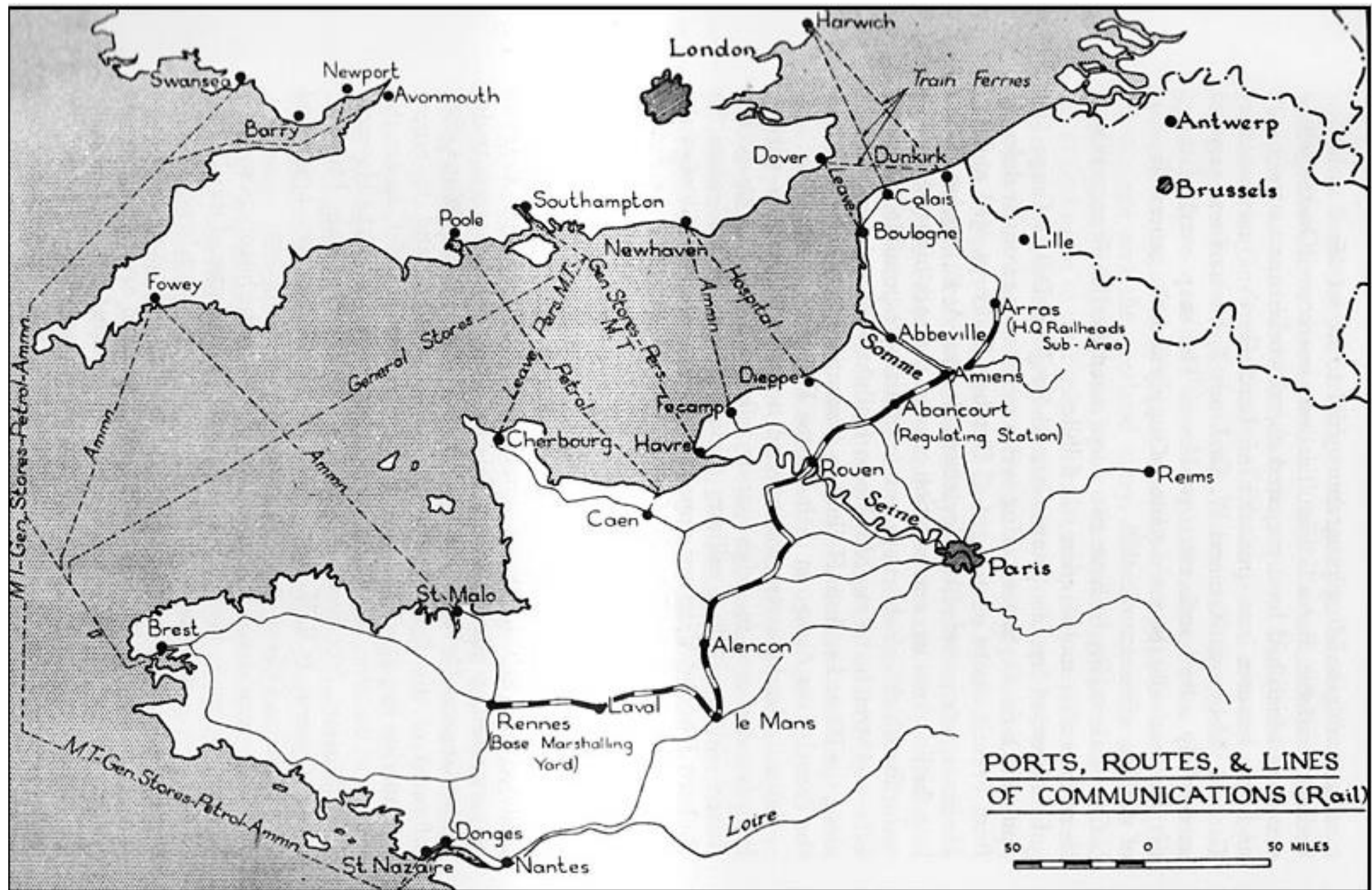
Neville Chamberlain

# British Strategy

- Appeasement now gave place to preparation for the war which now seemed unpreventable; on the 29th March Anglo-French Staff conversations reopened. The French were now told that it would be approximately eleven months before the British could send out two more divisions. The French Staff viewed this with dismay.
- The British Government now abandoned the belief that in a war with Germany the British contribution to Allied strength could be restricted to naval and air force.
- The Cabinet decided to increase British military strength by doubling the Territorial force and on the 27th April to introduce conscription. A programme of expansion was adopted which would eventually provide Great Britain with an army of thirty-two divisions.
- Two corps, each of two Regular divisions, and a component of the Royal Air Force, were now promised for dispatch to France within thirty-three days of the date of mobilisation.
- It was understood that France would have approximately eighty-four divisions, of which twelve would be needed to guard the Italian frontier leaving seventy-two available to garrison the Maginot forts and to operate against the Germans.
- Against this, it was estimated that Germany would be able to mobilise at least 116 divisions by the middle of September.

# British Strategy

- Because of the risk of air attack the main ports of disembarkation in France were to be on the western coast. This meant a longer sea passage, but was thought to be safer than the use of the Channel ports both for shipping and for the landing of troops, equipment, supplies and stores.



# French Strategy

- France's first objective, in a war with Germany, would be the defence of French territory. When this had been secured they intended to remain on the defensive while maintaining an economic blockade of Germany, until sufficient resources for an offensive had been built up.
- They concluded that the enemies (assuming Italy to be involved) would be more fully prepared than ourselves for war on a national scale, who would have superiority in land and air forces but would be inferior at sea and in general economic strength.
- Thus while we were building up our military resources our policy should be to hold Germany, and exercise rigorous economic pressure so as to reduce our enemies' power of resistance.
- It was agreed that the Allies would be unable to assist Holland to repel a sudden assault, but it was hoped that if a similar attack were made on Belgium it might be possible to collaborate in withstanding it.



# 1939 – War in Europe

- **1st September:** Polish cities were bombed and German troops crossed the frontiers of Poland and Danzig.
- **3<sup>rd</sup> September:** A British ultimatum to Hitler expired at 8 p.m. Eastern Australian time. At 8 p.m. short-wave wireless listeners throughout Australia heard the announcement by Chamberlain that Great Britain was at war with Germany.
- At 9.15 p.m. Mr Menzies announced:
  - “It is my melancholy duty to inform you officially that ... Great Britain has declared war upon Germany and that, as a result, Australia is also at war.”



Hitler watching German soldiers marching into Poland  
September 1939.

# The Phoney War

- On 7 September, in accordance with their alliance with Poland, France began the Saar Offensive with an advance from the Maginot Line 5 km (3.1 mi) into the Saar.
- France had mobilised 98 divisions and 2,500 tanks against a German force consisting of 43 divisions and no tanks.
- The French advanced until they met the thin and undermanned Siegfried Line.
- On 17 September, the day the Soviet Red Army invaded Eastern Poland, Gamelin (photo) gave the order to withdraw French troops to their starting positions.
- Following the Saar Offensive, a period of inaction set in between the belligerents.



# The Phoney War

- Germany began transferring her armies to the west as soon as Poland was conquered. By the end of November Allies intelligence estimated that between ninety-seven and ninety-nine divisions were already concentrated on the western front, facing Holland, Belgium, Luxembourg and France.
- Hitler had hoped that France and Britain would acquiesce in the conquest of Poland and quickly make peace. On 6 October, he made a peace offer to both Western powers.
- The Allies settled on a long-war and mobilised for defensive land operations against Germany, while a trade blockade was imposed and the pre-war re-armament was accelerated, ready for an eventual invasion of Germany.



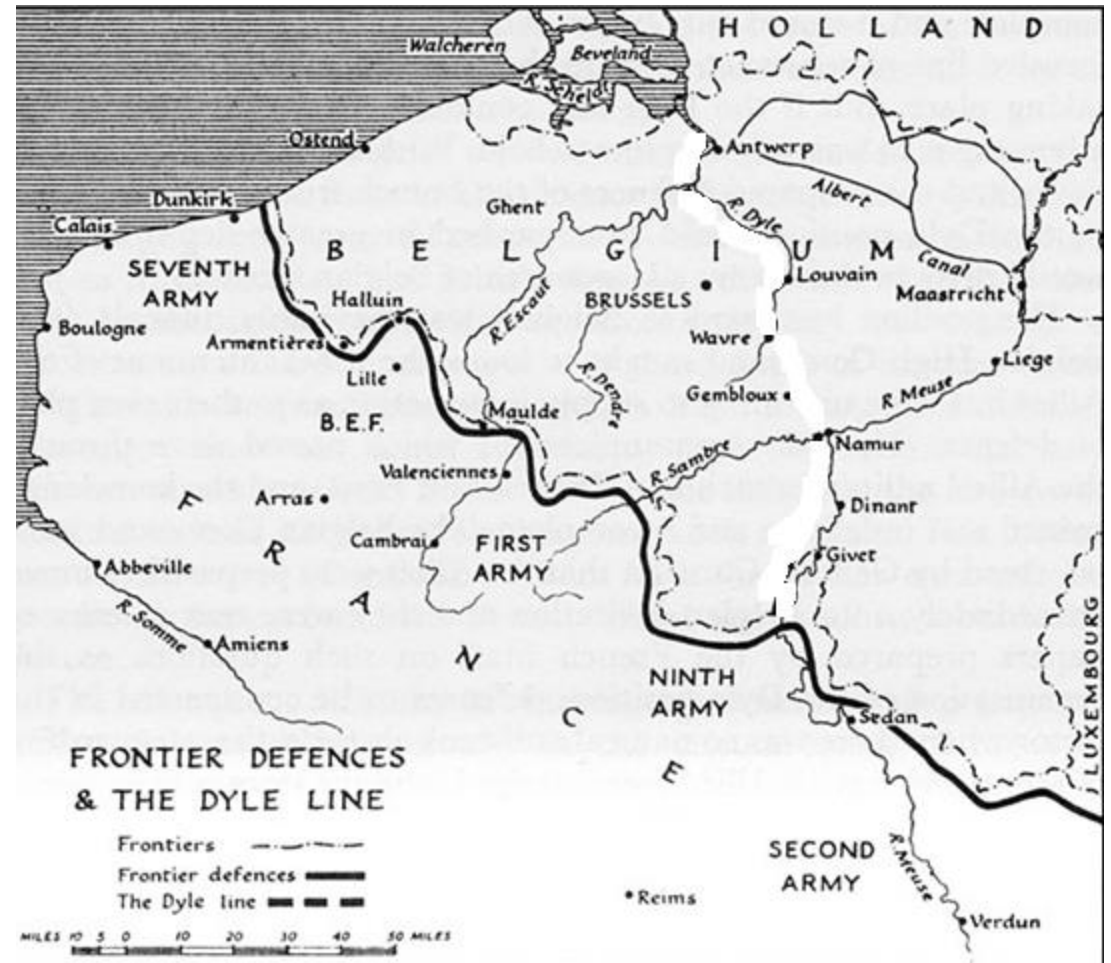
# The BEF

- Britain had an Expeditionary Force of two corps assembled in France thirty-three days after mobilisation.
- The BEF was commanded by General Lord Gort, a Guardsman who had served throughout the First World War, first on the Staff and afterwards commanding in turn the 4th and 1st Battalions of the Grenadier Guards.
- He was four times wounded, nine times mentioned in despatches, and was awarded the Military Cross, the Distinguished Service Order and two Bars, and the Victoria Cross.
- By the beginning of May 1940 the BEF had been increased from four Regular divisions in two corps to ten divisions in three corps and G.H.Q. reserve.



# French Strategy

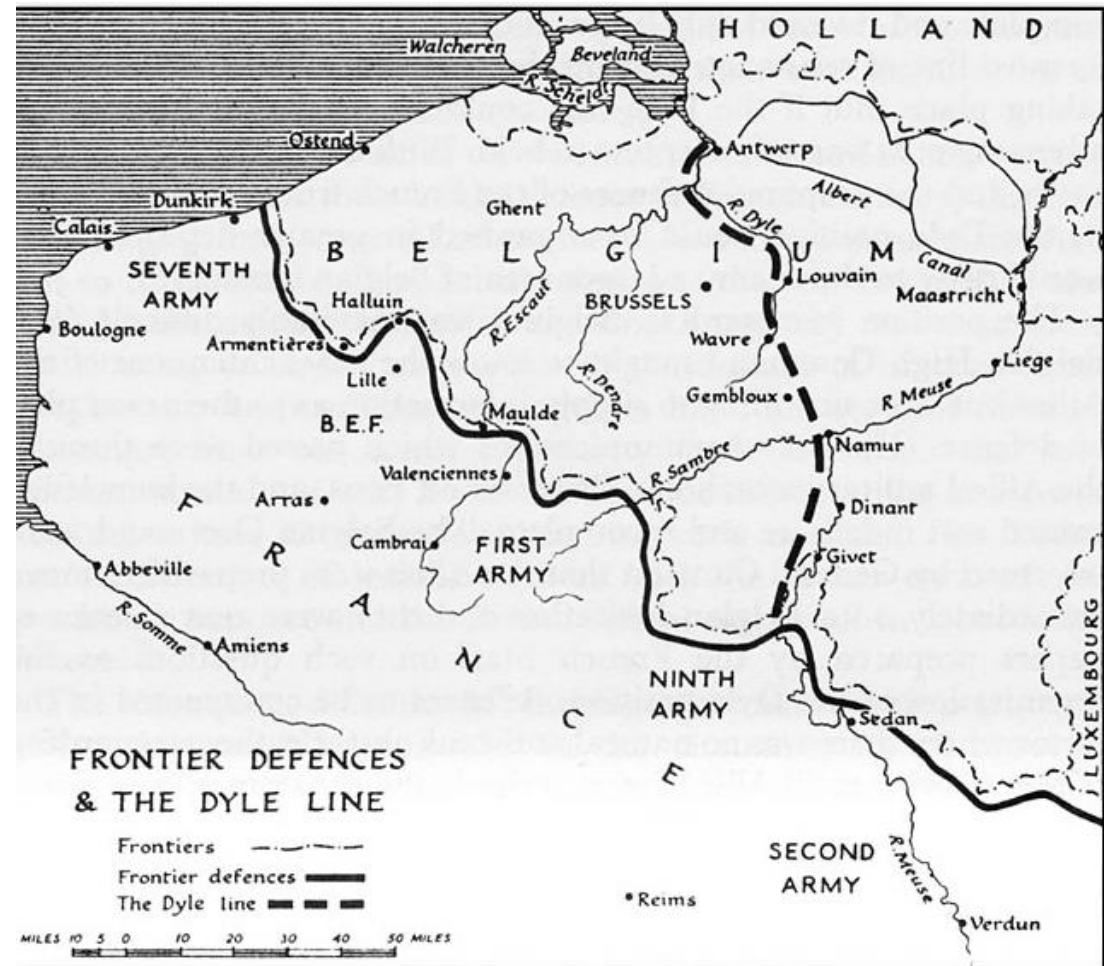
- On 3 September 1939, French military strategy had been settled. The French Army would defend on the right and advance into Belgium on the left, to fight forward of the French frontier.
- As a neutral, the Belgian state was reluctant to co-operate openly with France. By May 1940, there had been an exchange of the general nature of French and Belgian defence plans but little co-ordination against a German offensive to the west.
- The French expected Germany to breach Belgian neutrality first, providing a pretext for French intervention.
- Most of the French mobile forces were assembled along the Belgian border, ready to forestall the Germans.





# French Strategy

- An early appeal for help might give the French time to reach the German–Belgian frontier but if not, there were three feasible defensive lines further back.
  - A line on the Dyle river to Antwerp was 70–80 km shorter than the alternatives.
  - A second possibility was a line on the Escaut river.
  - The third possibility was along field defences of the French border from Luxembourg to Dunkirk.
- By November the Dyle Plan was adopted.
- Gamelin also considered a move towards Breda in the Netherlands; if the Allies could prevent a German occupation of Holland, the ten divisions of the Dutch army would join the Allied armies.



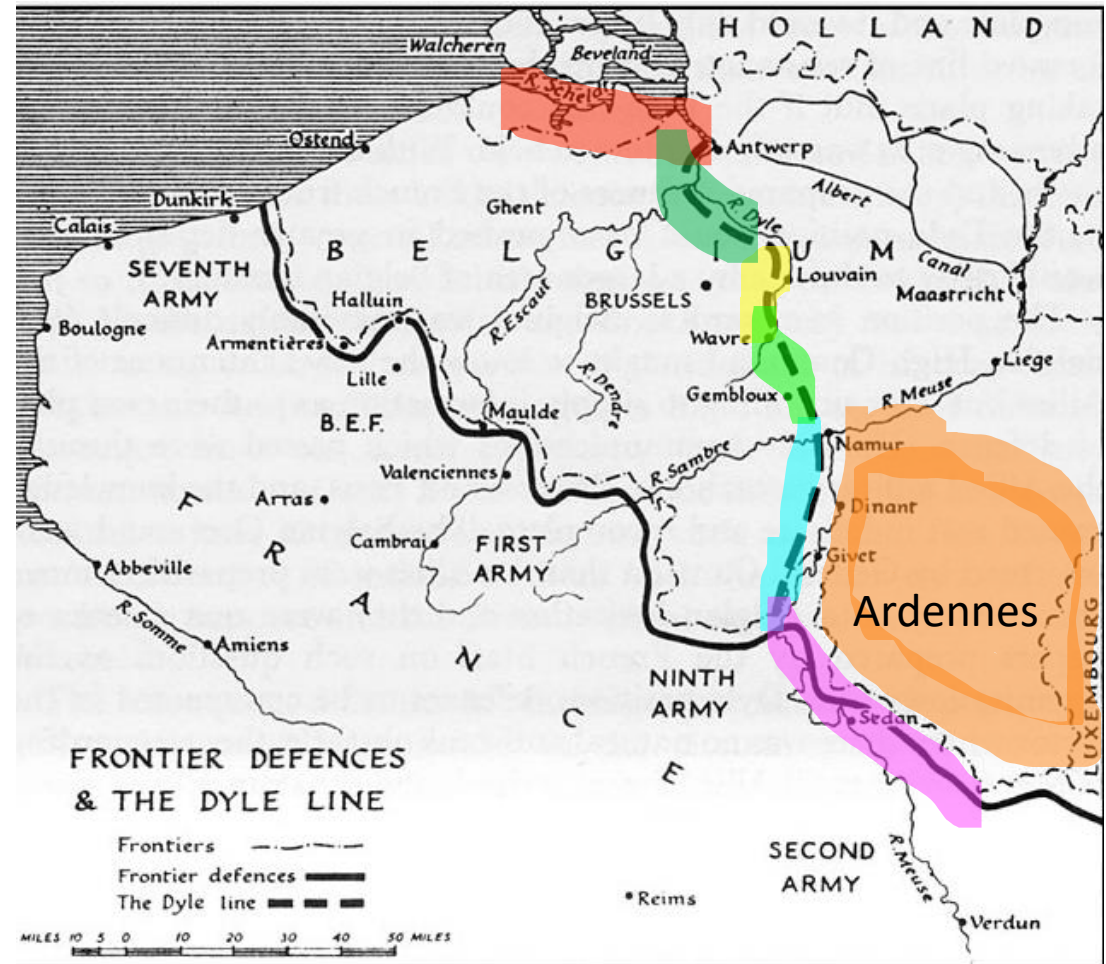
# French Strategy

- In November, Gamelin (photo), the 68 year old Commander in Chief of the French Army, directed that a German invasion of the Netherlands must not be allowed to progress around the west of Antwerp and gain the south bank of the Scheldt.
- The left flank of the 1st Army Group was reinforced by the Seventh Army, containing some of the best and most mobile French divisions, which moved from the general reserve in December.
- The role of the army was to move into Holland as far as Breda to link with the Dutch and protect the Scheldt estuary by holding the north bank along the Beveland Peninsula.
- The Seventh Army had to go 175 km. The German frontier was only 90 km from Breda.



# Plan D

- The 1st Army Group was responsible for the line from the Channel coast to the west end of the Maginot Line.
- The Seventh Army, BEF, First Army and Ninth Army were ready to advance to the Dyle Line, by pivoting on the Second Army.
- the Belgians were expected to retire from the Albert Canal to the Dyle, from Antwerp to Louvain.
- Gamelin considered that the Second and Ninth armies had the easiest task of the army group, dug in on the west bank of the Meuse on ground that was easily defended and behind the Ardennes, a considerable obstacle, traversing which would give plenty of warning of a German attack in the centre of the French front.
- The other armies with further to go were given more mobile and better equipped divisions.



# Intelligence

- On 30 April, the French military attaché in Bern warned that the centre of the German assault would come on the Meuse at Sedan, sometime between 8 and 10 May.
- Similar reports came from neutral sources such as the Vatican.
- French intelligence were informed through aerial reconnaissance that the Germans were constructing pontoon bridges about halfway over the Our river on the Luxembourg-German border.
- French air reconnaissance sighted a 100 km (62 mi)-long line of German armoured vehicles on the Luxembourg border trailing back inside Germany.

# 9/10 May Netherlands

- In the night of 9/10 May the Luftwaffe violated Dutch airspace. One formation traversed it and then disappeared to the west, giving the Dutch the impression that the operation was directed at England.
- Over the North Sea it turned to the east again to stage a surprise attack on the Dutch airfields.
- The bombers hit the naval airfield at De Kooy, destroying 35 aircraft, most of them trainers, Amsterdam-Schiphol, where the Dutch lost a third of their medium bombers, and The Hague airfields where half of the 21 defending fighters were destroyed.



Immediately after the bombardments, between 04:30 and 05:00 local time, paratroopers were landed near the airfields.

The Germans had not declared war or issued an ultimatum.

# 10 May The Hague

- Dutch anti-aircraft batteries shot down numerous Ju 52 transport planes.
- At The Hague the paratroopers were unable to capture the main airfield at Ypenburg in time for the airborne infantry to land safely in their Junkers.
- Armoured cars assisted by machine gun emplacements, destroyed the eighteen Junkers of the first two waves, killing many occupants.
- When the airstrip was blocked by wrecks the remaining waves aborted the landing and tried to find alternatives, often putting down their teams in meadows or on the beach, thus dispersing the troops.



Burning German Junkers Ju 52s at Ypenburg

Dutch forces blocked the advance into The Hague by the scattered paratroopers, the remnant airborne troops taking refuge in nearby villages and mansions.



# 10 May Rotterdam

- At Rotterdam twelve Heinkel He 59 seaplanes (photo), crowded with two platoons of troops, landed in the heart of the city and unloaded assault teams that captured the Willemsbrug, a bridge over the Nieuwe Maas, to form a bridgehead.
- At the same time the military airfield of Waalhaven, south of the city on the island of IJsselmonde, was attacked by airborne forces. Here an infantry battalion was stationed so close to the airfield that a confused fight followed. The first wave of Junkers suffered no losses and the transports continued to land.
- In the end the Dutch defenders were overwhelmed.





# 10 May Rotterdam

- The German troops, steadily growing in numbers, began to move to the east to occupy IJsselmonde and eventually made contact with the paratroopers tasked with occupying the vital bridge at Dordrecht.
- The Royal Netherlands Navy intervened—the torpedo boats *Z5* and *TM 51* attacked the *Willemsbrug* and later the destroyer HNLMS *Van Galen* sailed up the Nieuwe Waterweg to bombard the airfield at short range, but it was attacked by bombers and sunk.
- At the Island of Dordrecht the Dordrecht bridge was captured but in the city itself the garrison held out.
- The long Moerdijk bridges over the broad Hollands Diep estuary connecting the island to North Brabant province were captured and a bridgehead fortified on the southern side.



# 9/10 May Netherlands

- During the night of 9/10 May German commando teams approached the IJssel and Maas bridges: several teams had a few men dressed as Dutch military police pretending to bring in a group of German prisoners, to fool the Dutch detonation teams.
- Some of these "military policemen" were real Dutchmen, members of the Dutch Nazi party.
- Most of these attempts failed and the bridges were blown, in two cases with Germans and all.
- The main exception was the Gennepe railway bridge. Immediately an armoured train crossed it followed by a troop train, both driving right through the defences and unloading an infantry battalion behind the line.



# 10 May Netherlands

- The Dutch released reports of German soldiers in disguise to the international news agencies. This caused a fifth column scare, especially in Belgium and France.
- After the generally failed assaults on the bridges, the German divisions began crossing attempts over the rivers IJssel and Maas. The first waves typically were destroyed, due to insufficient preparatory fire on the pillboxes.
- At most places a secondary bombardment destroyed the pillboxes and the infantry divisions crossed the river after building pontoon bridges; but at some, as Venlo, the attempt was aborted.
- At Arnhem the Germans that day advanced to the Grebbe Line.





# 10 May Netherlands

- Even before the armoured train arrived, the Dutch defenders had already planned to withdraw from the Peel-Raam Position to the Waal-Linge line.
- This withdrawal was originally planned for the first night after the invasion, under cover of darkness, but due to the rapid German advance an immediate retreat was ordered at 06:45, to avoid becoming entangled with enemy troops.
- In the North, by the end of the day, the Germans had reached the line Meppel–Groningen, delayed by Dutch demolition teams blowing up 236 bridges.



# 10 May Netherlands

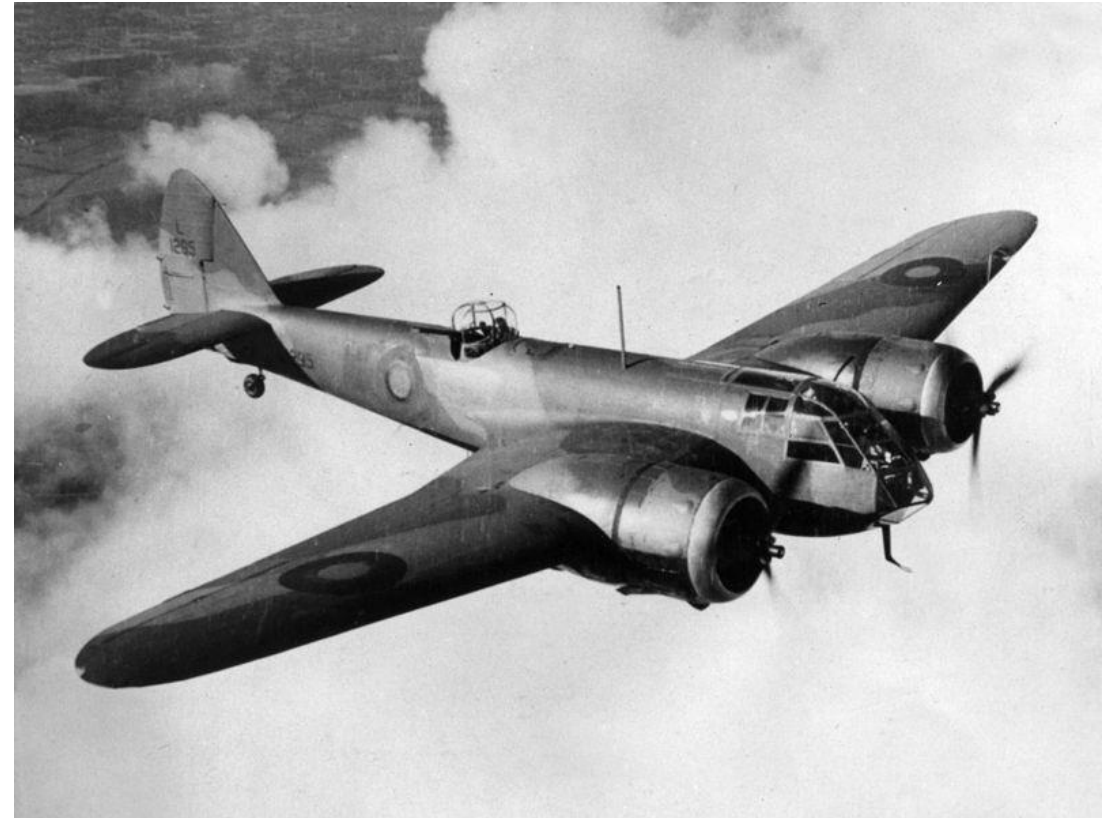
- In the south, the six border battalions in the province of Limburg only slightly delayed the advance of the Germans; before noon the area had been overrun and the strategic city of Maastricht had surrendered, opening the way for the German offensive into Central Belgium. The Germans however, failed to capture the main bridge intact, delaying the crossing until the next day.
- On the evening of the 10th, around 22:00, French reconnaissance units in Panhard 178 armoured cars had started to arrive at the Dutch border, forming a vanguard for the French 1st Mechanised Light Division. This division operated on the northern flank of the French 7th Army; its mission was to ensure contact between the *Vesting Holland* and Antwerp but attempts to contact local Dutch commanders were unsuccessful.
- The Dutch were left with just 70 aircraft by the end of the day (10 May).



Panhard 178 armoured cars

# 10 May Belgium

- At four in the morning (10 May) the Belgian Foreign Minister, M. Spaak, called on the British Ambassador in Brussels and appealed for British help in resisting the German invasion.
- The opening air raids on Belgian airfields destroyed half the Belgian aircraft before they could leave the ground.
- Some of the French airfields and communications had also suffered severely.
- Only one airfield in British use suffered serious damage. At Condé Vraux, the field of No. 114 Squadron, German planes destroyed or rendered unserviceable all eighteen Blenheims.

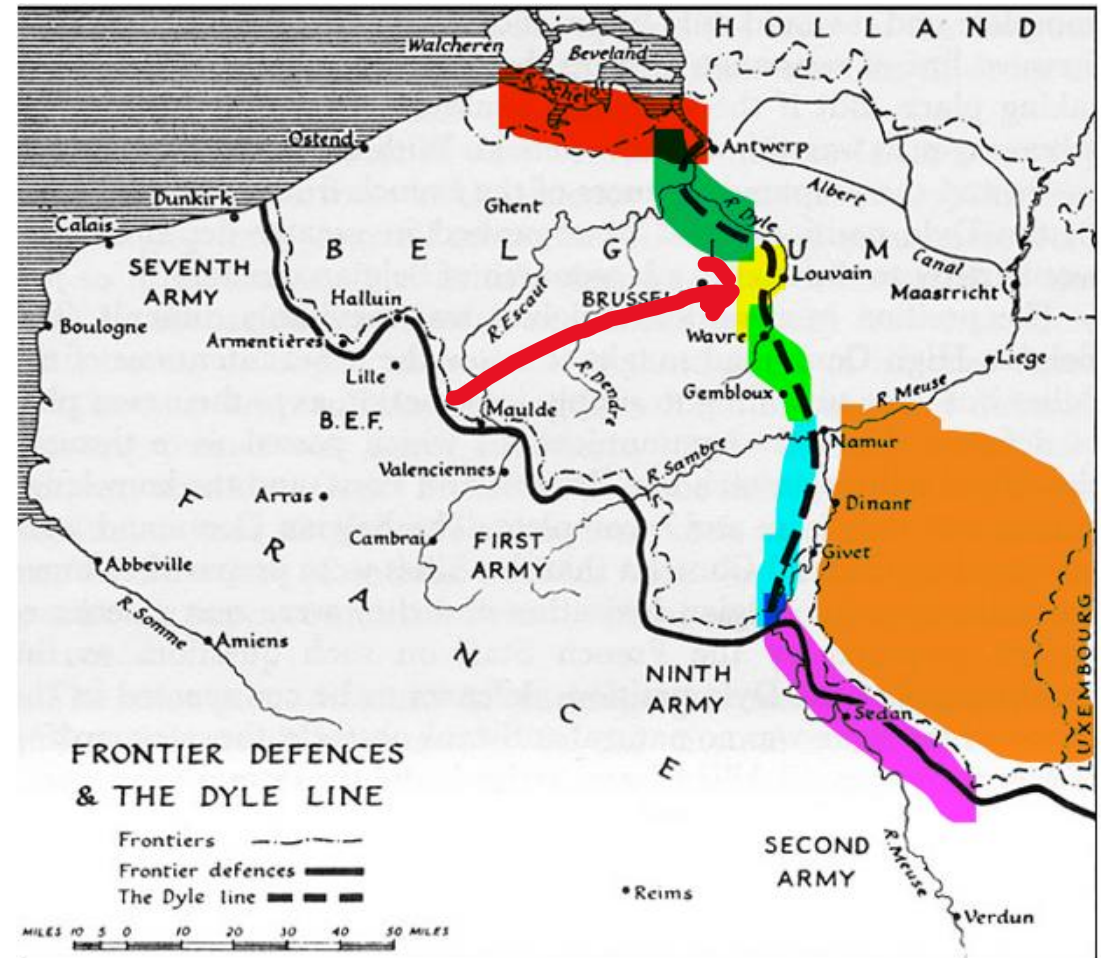


A Bristol Blenheim Mk I



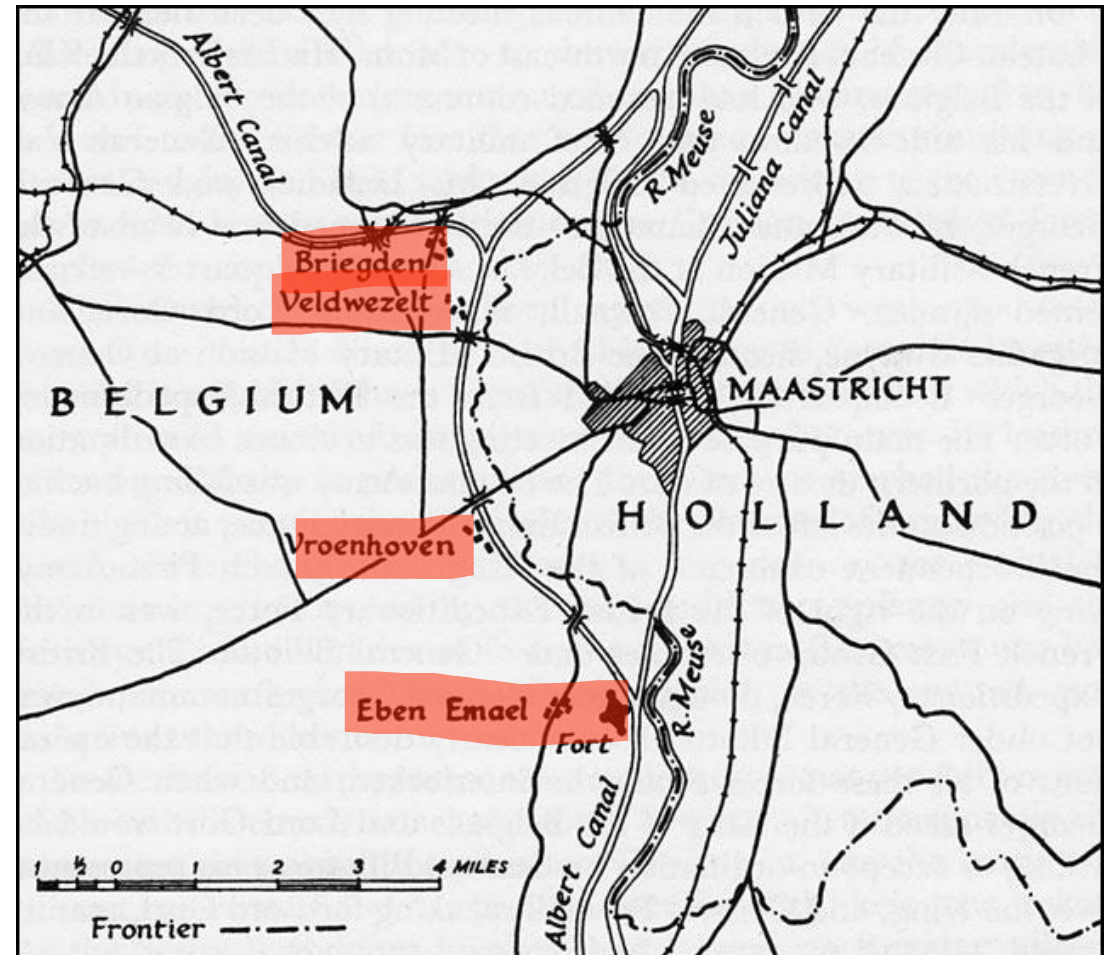
# 10 May Arras

- At BEF GHQ in Arras the stillness of the night was broken just before daybreak on the 10th of May, when German aircraft bombed the neighbouring airfields.
- The raid was part of a general and widespread attack by the *Luftwaffe* on the Allies' airfields, railways, headquarters and key supply points. Except in one or two places it did comparatively little military damage to British installations on the first day, and nothing that affected their plans.
- At about a 06.15, orders were issued by the Supreme Commander for the immediate execution of Plan D[1]—the move forward to the River Dyle.
- At 13.00 the armoured cars of the 12th Royal Lancers crossed the western frontier of Belgium. The armoured car reconnaissance units of the BEF reached the Dyle that night.



# 10 May Belgium

- Early on the opening morning of the campaign (10<sup>th</sup>), before the German forces reached Maastricht.
- Airborne forces, landed in rear of the bridges at Briedgen, Veldwezelt and Vroenhoven, immediately west of Maastricht and on top of the fortress of Eben Emael which was designed to protect them, seized the former and put the latter out of action almost before the defenders realised that the battle had begun.
- The Belgians won back and destroyed the bridge at Briedgen but the others remained firmly in German hands.



# 10 May Belgium

- The German advance through the Ardennes was to be delayed by the Belgian and French light cavalry.
- The Belgians blocked roads, held up the Germans at Bodange for about eight hours then retired northwards before the French had arrived.
- German engineers were undisturbed while dismantling the obstacles.
- The French had insufficient anti-tank guns to block the surprisingly large number of German tanks and quickly gave way, withdrawing behind the Meuse.
- French reconnaissance aircrews reported armoured convoys through the Ardennes on the night of 10/11 May but this was assumed to be secondary to the main attack in Belgium.
- Four waves of RAF Fairey Battles attacked German columns in the Ardennes, which were covered by large fighter forces.
- Six RAF fighters attempted to clear the way while thirty-two Battles attacked at low level in spite of heavy ground fire.
- Thirteen Battles were shot down and all the remaining nineteen were damaged.



Landscape of the Ardennes



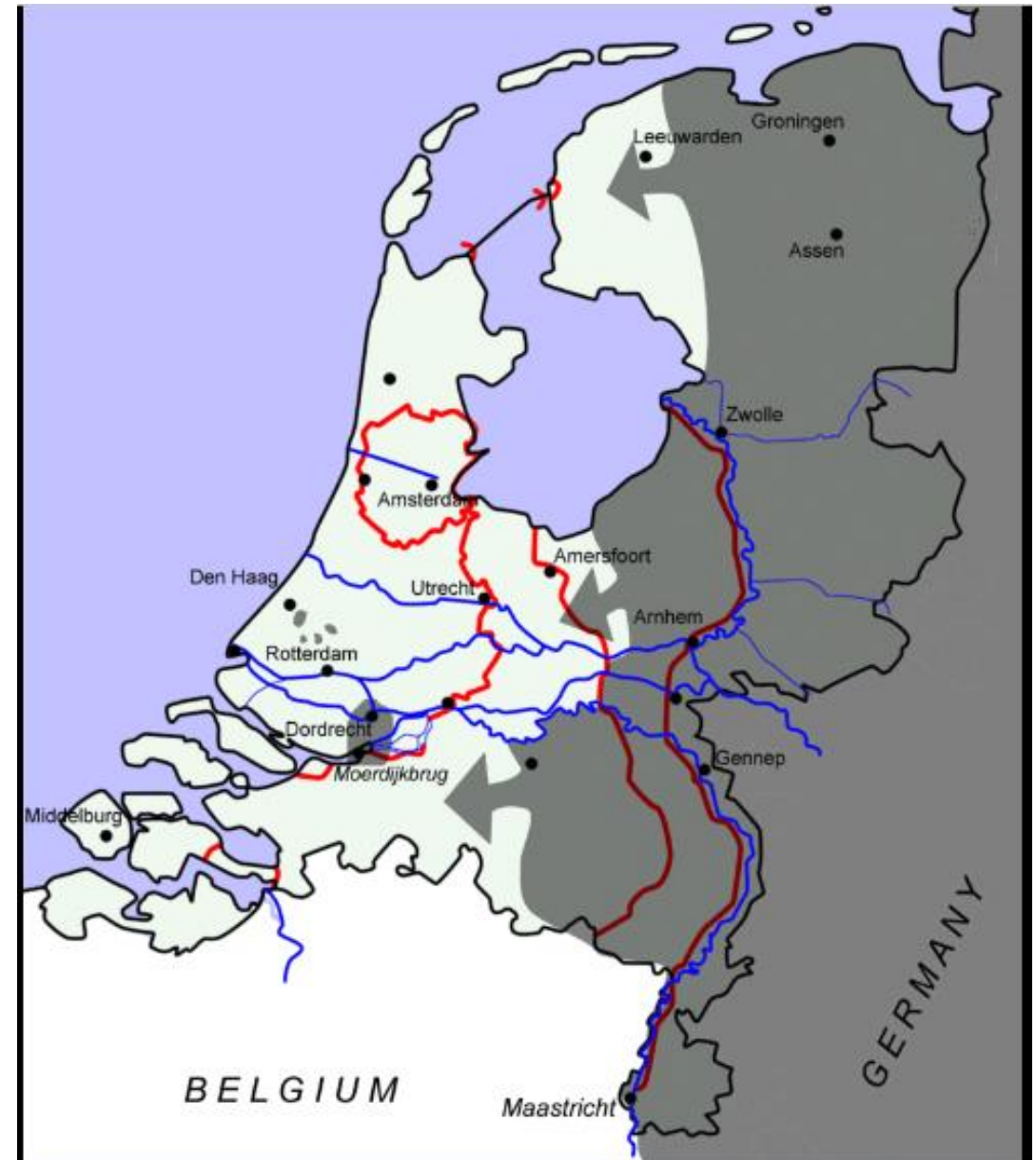
# 10 May Britain

- On May the 10th Mr Chamberlain's Government had resigned and a National Government had been formed by Mr Winston Churchill.
- The Conservative, Liberal and Labour parties were all represented, differences of opinion and conflicting loyalties being, in Mr Churchill's phrase, 'all drowned by the cannonade'.
- In the new Government Mr Churchill was not only Prime Minister and First Lord of the Treasury, but also Minister of Defence.



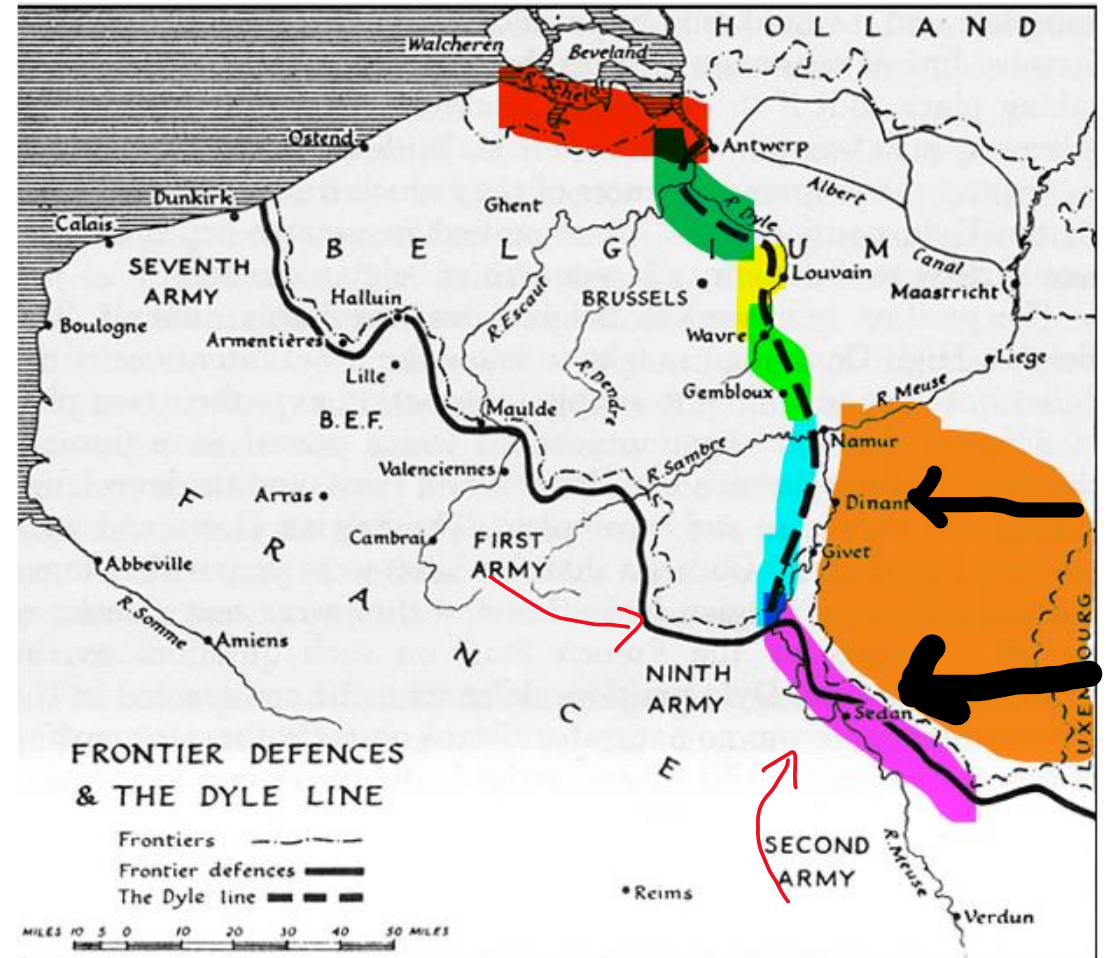
# 11 May Netherlands

- On 11 May the Dutch commander General Winkelman wanted to eliminate the German airborne troops. His second priority was enabling the French army to build up a strong defensive line in North Brabant, to connect the Fortress Holland with the Allied main force in Belgium. In both respects, little was achieved this day.
- The planned counterattack by the Light Division against the airborne troops on IJsselmonde failed.
- Attacks on the western flank of the airborne perimeter by two battalions achieved some initial success but the troops were then surprised by German counterattacks and dispersed with many men being taken prisoner.
- In the afternoon a French reconnaissance unit with the assistance of another Dutch border battalion attempted an attack on the southern Moerdijk bridgehead, but the armoured cars of *6e Cuirassiers* with which it was reinforced were heavily bombed by German Stukas and had to retreat.
- In North Brabant, the situation swiftly deteriorated. The French commanders of the 7th Army had expected that Dutch resistance would have gained them at least four days to build up a defensive line near Breda.
- They were unpleasantly surprised to learn that the best three divisions had been moved to the north and that the remaining forces were already in full retreat.
- The French refused to advance further to the northeast than Tilburg this created a dangerous gap. Winkelman, sensitive to the general Dutch weakness in the region, requested the British government to send an Army Corps to reinforce allied positions in the area.
- in the North the Germans advanced through the province of Friesland towards the final Dutch fall-back line, the Wonsstelling, reaching Sneek in the evening. Most Dutch troops had been evacuated from the north over the Afsluitdijk.



# 11 May Belgium

- The BEF's leading infantry brigades took up position on the river Dyle on May the 11<sup>th</sup>.
- On 11 May, Gamelin ordered reserve divisions to begin reinforcing the Meuse sector. Because of the danger the *Luftwaffe* posed, movement over the rail network was limited to night-time, slowing the reinforcement.
- The French felt no sense of urgency as they believed the build-up of German divisions would be correspondingly slow; the French Army did not conduct river crossings unless assured of heavy artillery support.
- While they were aware that the German tank and infantry formations were strong, they were confident in their strong fortifications and artillery superiority.
- Eight RAF Battles attacked an enemy column on the borders of Germany. Only one returned.
- On the night of 11/12 May, a reconnaissance pilot reported seeing long vehicle columns moving through the Ardennes. Another pilot sent to check reported the same and that many of the vehicles were tanks.





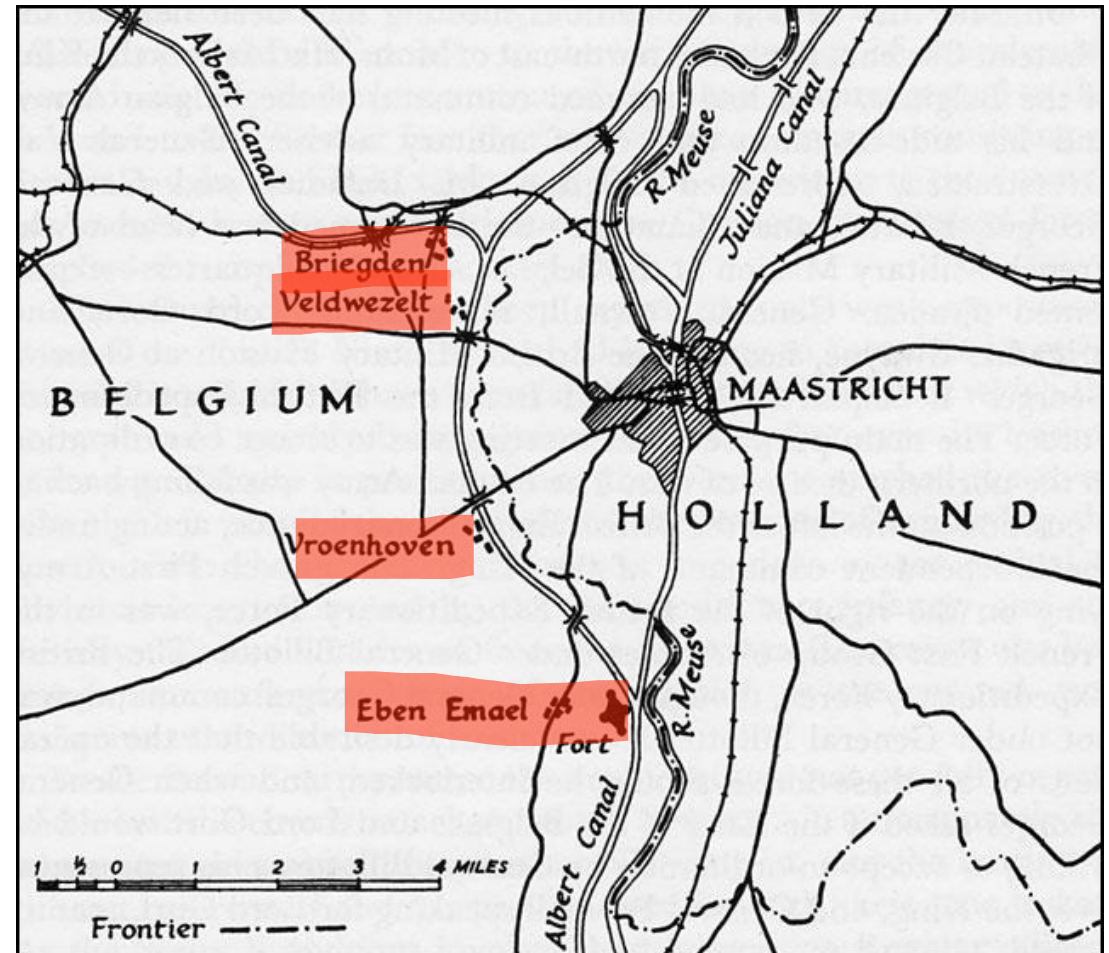
# 12 May Netherlands

- In Rotterdam and around The Hague again little was done against the paratroopers. Most Dutch commanders, still afraid of a presumed Fifth Column, limited themselves to security measures.
- German reconnaissance units exploited the collapse of the Dutch line: at dawn on 12 May, north of Tilburg, near Loon op Zand, they surprised Colonel Schmidt, commander of Dutch forces in North Brabant, and took him prisoner.
- At 13:35 Gamelin ordered a complete withdrawal to Antwerp of all French troops in North-Brabant, who would now limit themselves to rear-guard actions.
- Shortly after noon German armoured cars had penetrated thirty kilometres further west and made contact with the southern Moerdijk bridgehead, cutting off Fortress Holland from the Allied main force; at 16:45 they reached the bridges themselves.



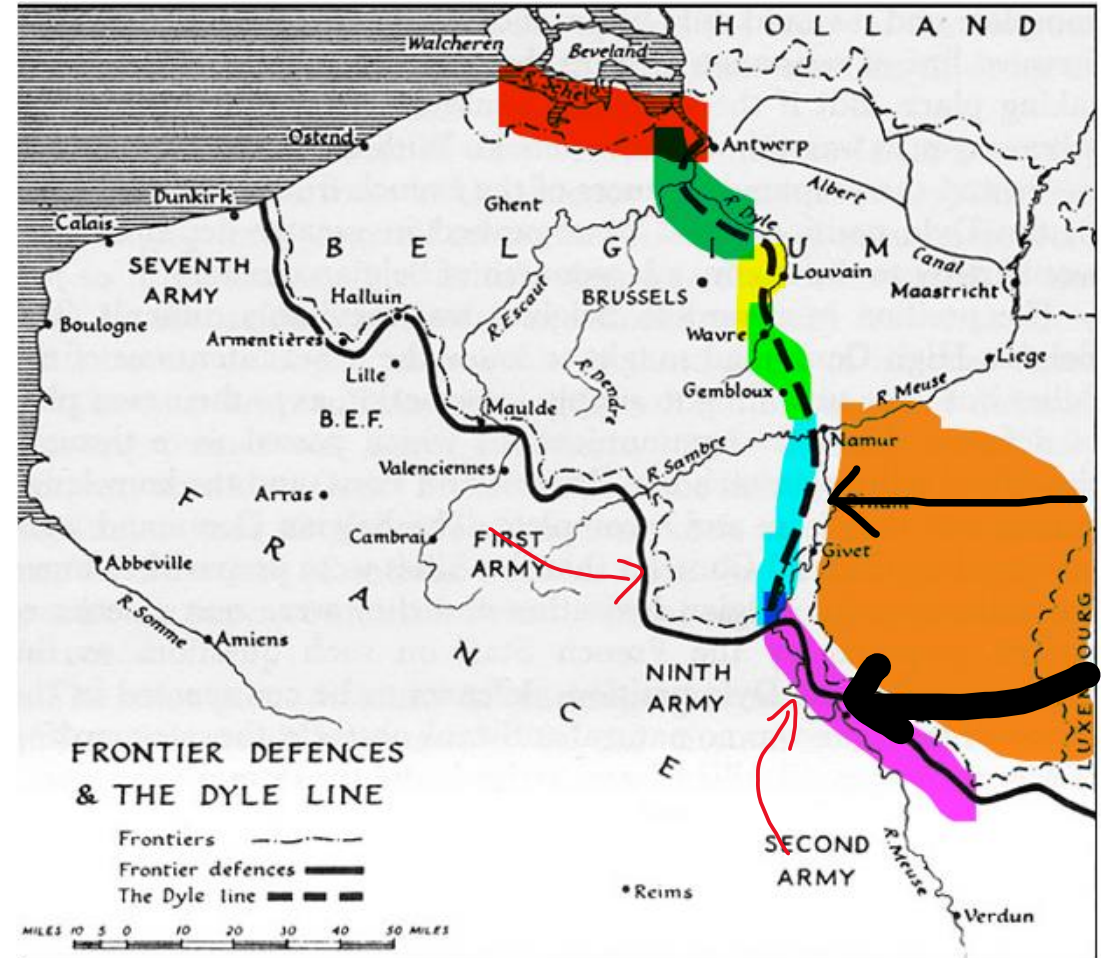
# 12 May Belgium

- On May the 12th the RAF attacked the bridges near Maastricht, over which the enemy was advancing into Belgium.
- The bridges and the advancing columns had been attacked the day before by both British and French bombers, apparently with little success.
- Five Battles were sent; covered by three squadrons of fighters.
- One Battle returned so badly damaged that the pilot ordered the crew to bale out over Belgium; he alone brought it home. Of the rest nothing more was learned. The report of the surviving pilot was somewhat vague.



# 12 May Belgium

- Later that day (12 May) photographic reconnaissance and pilot reports were of tanks and bridging equipment.
- The German advance forces reached the Meuse late in the afternoon of 12 May and all the outposts of the French Ninth Army had retired to the west of the river.
- The French had estimated that it would take the Germans ten days to reach the Meuse, through the Ardennes.
- Even the leading units of the Ninth Army were hardly in position when the Germans reached the river.
- In the Second Army sector the Series B divisions involved had 'almost no Regular officers' and had not had previous contact with the enemy.
- That night advanced German troops crossed the Meuse in rubber dinghies at a number of points.





# 13 May Netherlands

- In the early morning of 13 May General Winkelman advised the Dutch government that he considered the general situation to be critical.
- On land the Dutch had been cut off from the Allied front and it had become clear no major Allied landings were to be expected to reinforce the Fortress Holland by sea; without such support there was no prospect of a prolonged successful resistance.
- However, an immediate collapse of the Dutch defences might still be prevented if the planned counterattacks were successful.
- Therefore, the cabinet decided to continue the fight for the time being, giving the general the mandate to surrender the Army when he saw fit and the instruction to avoid unnecessary sacrifices.
- Nevertheless, it was also deemed essential that Queen Wilhelmina be brought to safety; she departed around noon from Hoek van Holland, on HMS *Hereward*, a British destroyer, and when mines made it too dangerous to try to reach Zeeland, she went to England.



HMS Hereward

# 13 May Netherlands

- The tanks of 9 Panzer division split. Some turned west to pursue the withdrawing French, the others began to cross the Moerdijk traffic bridge at 05:20. In an encounter battle with the Dutch light division the Dutch were stopped and forced to retreat.
- The tanks then supported the airborne troops in attacks on Dordrecht and Rotterdam.
- After hard and confused fighting all day on the Grebbe Line a Stuka bombardment put the defenders to rout and also broke the morale of the reserves.
- Dutch command now suffered such a loss of control that any thoughts to re-establish a continuous front had to be abandoned.
- An 8 km wide gap had appeared in the defences. Fearing that otherwise they would be encircled, at 20:30 three Army Corps were ordered to immediately abandon both the Grebbe Line and the Waal-Linge Position and to retreat during the night to the East Front of Fortress Holland at the New Holland Water Line.



# 13 May Netherlands

- As the Queen constitutionally was part of the government, her departure confronted the cabinet with the choice whether to follow her or remain.
- After heated discussions, it was decided to leave also: the ministers sailed at 19:20 from Hoek van Holland on HMS *Windsor* to form a government in exile in London, having conferred all governmental authority over the homeland to Winkelman.
- Three Dutch merchant ships, escorted by British warships, transferred government bullion and diamond stocks to the United Kingdom.

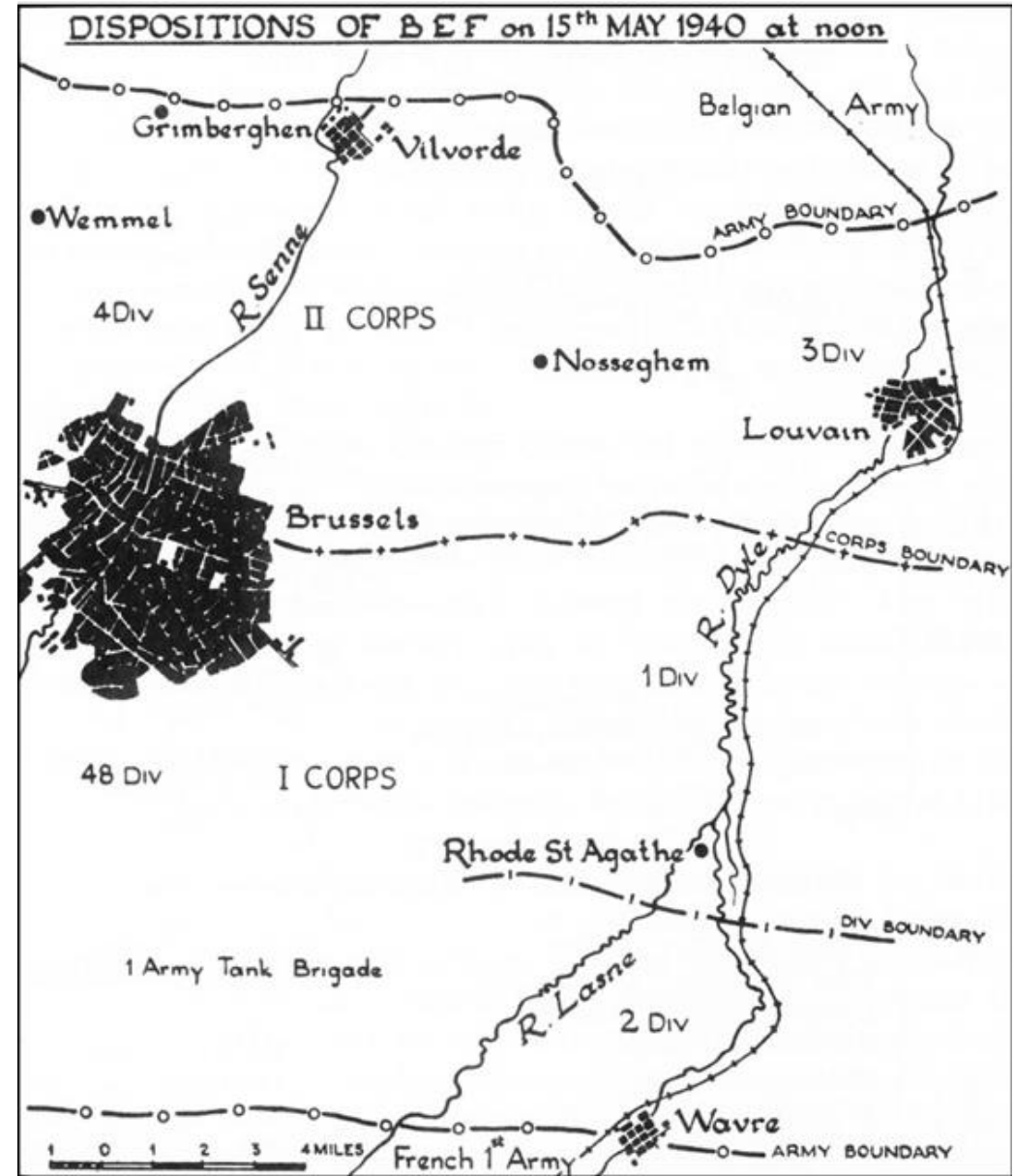


Queen Wilhelmina reading a speech for Radio Oranje in 1940



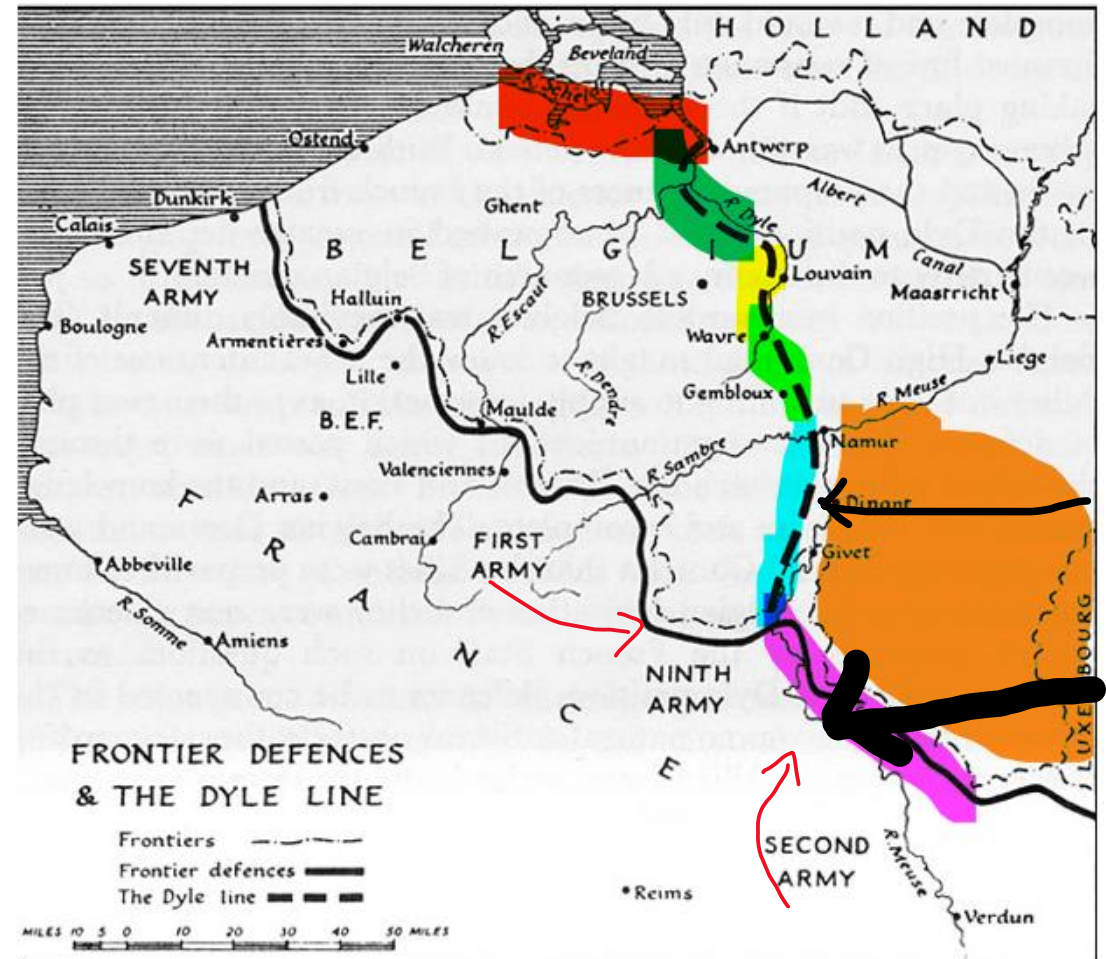
# 13 May Belgium

- East of the Dyle the BEF's cavalry had made touch with the enemy for the first time on the 13th.
- On May the 13th, the British 48th and 4th Divisions moved eastward to support the divisions of I and II Corps on the Dyle.
- By the 13th of May the Belgian Army was conducting a fighting withdrawal towards the northern sector of the Allied front.



# 13 May The Meuse

- By the 13th of May the Germans had formed small bridgeheads on the western bank near Sedan and Dinant but the first attempt to get armour across was frustrated by the defenders.
- The German forces were in a traffic jam about 250 km long from the Meuse to the Rhine on one route through the Ardennes.
- The preliminary bombardment was undertaken not by artillery but from the air. The Germans concentrated 310 bombers, 200 Stuka dive-bombers and 200 fighters over the Sedan sector.
- It was a new experience for the Allies, and in this case it was completely effective.
- The defending troops, their artillery positions, and their headquarters were subjected to heavy dive-bombing and its effect on some of the troops was, in the delicate phrase of the French historian, 'to weaken those reactions necessary for battle'.
- Following quickly, German infantry enlarged the bridgeheads on the western bank and pushed on rapidly the construction of bridges for the armour to cross.



# 14 May Rotterdam

- “A German ultimatum ordering the Dutch commander of Rotterdam to cease fire was delivered to him at 10:30h on 14 May 1940.
- If a positive answer had not been received within two hours the "severest means of annihilation" would be employed.
- hearing that the document had not been signed nor contained the name of the sender, the Dutch CinC sent a Dutch envoy to clarify matters and gain time. At 12:15 the envoy handed this request to the Germans.
- At 13:22h, German bombers set the whole inner city of Rotterdam ablaze, killing 814 of its inhabitants.” The ensuing fires destroyed about 24,000 houses, making 80,000 inhabitants homeless.
- At 15:50 the city capitulated.



The centre of Rotterdam destroyed after bombing. photo taken after the removal of all debris.

# 14 May Netherlands

- Winkelman at first intended to continue the fight, even though Rotterdam had capitulated and German forces from there might now advance into the heart of the Fortress Holland.
- However, he soon received a message from the commander of the city of Utrecht, that the Germans demanded its surrender; leaflets were dropped by propaganda planes announcing that only unconditional surrender could "spare it the fate of Warsaw".
- Winkelman concluded that it had become the German policy to devastate any city offering any resistance; in view of his mandate to avoid unnecessary suffering and the hopelessness of the Dutch military position he decided to surrender.
- All higher-level army units were informed at 16:50 by Telex of his decision and ordered to first destroy their weapons and then offer their surrender to the nearest German units.



Winkelman, centre, leaves the school building in which the negotiations took place.

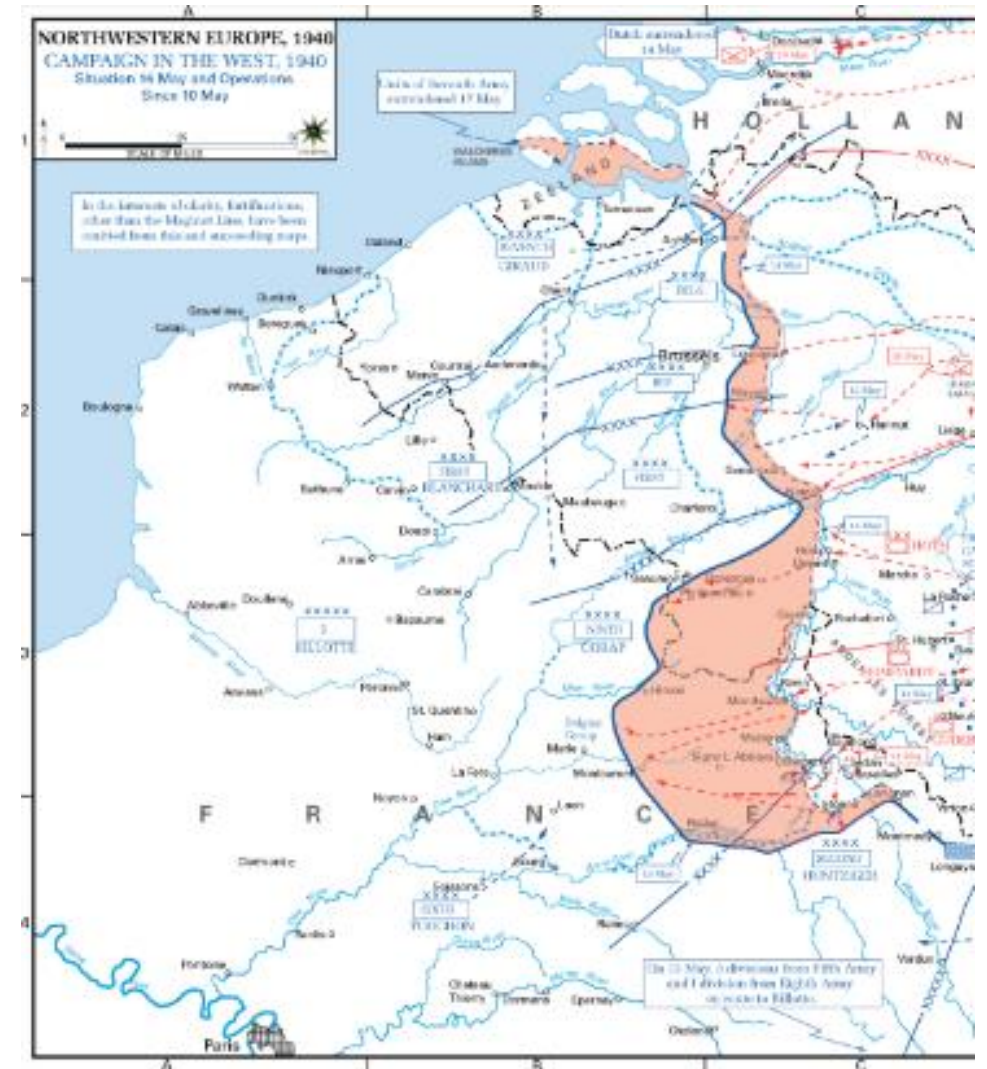
# 14 May Belgium

- The French Cavalry Corps, out in front of the French First Army, were heavily engaged and gradually forced back, fighting hard, till the main position held by the infantry was reached.
- At one point this was penetrated by the enemy, but a counter-attack restored the position.
- The 12th Lancers and the other cavalry units in front of the British sector withdrew in conformity with the French on their right and during the 14th crossed the Dyle. The infantry outposts on the east bank of the river were withdrawn at the same time and bridges destroyed as the enemy approached our main position.
- By the afternoon of the 14<sup>th</sup> the BEF was in contact along its whole front.
- The enemy, at about seven o'clock in the evening, made the first of a series of attempts to capture Louvain where the 3rd Division held the front. The 2nd Royal Ulster Rifles beat them off, but the forward posts on the east bank were forced to draw back to the line of the river.



# 14 May The Meuse

- On the 14th of May, in the words of Commandant Lyet, 'The Meuse position was forced on a front of about twenty kilometres.'
- To restore the position we worked all day to mount a counter-attack towards Dinant but ... the counter-attack could not be launched.'
- 'The situation was very serious, since the complete disorganisation of our routed divisions seemed to offer no hope of their rehabilitation.'





# 14 May The Meuse

- The reserves which General Georges was sending would not be in a position to intervene for several days.
- The German attacks on airfields had declined and their attacks on the communications behind the Allied front increased in intensity with significant results.
- Most of the French Army's mechanical road transport had been allocated to their First and Seventh Armies; to move reserves which were stationed south of the Aisne they relied mainly on the railway system or on horse-drawn transport.
- During these first few days the railways had been interrupted at so many crucial points that repairs could not keep pace with damage, and movement of troops to the battle-zone or to counter-attack became a slow, roundabout and precarious business.

# 14 May Air

- General Gamelin and General Georges both asked Air Marshal Barratt for the maximum support.
- 63 Battles and 8 Blenheims, with all the fighter cover that was available, then attacked bridges and columns in successive waves in the face of strong opposition from enemy fighters and ground defence.
- 35 Battles and 5 Blenheims failed to return, no damage to the bridges was reported.



RAF Fairey Battle single engine bomber.

Later in the evening twenty-eight Blenheims of Bomber Command attacked with stronger fighter protection. Seven failed to return, no damage to the bridges was reported.

# 15 May Belgium

- Throughout May the 15th, attacks were resumed along the whole British front. The Germans made a number of penetrations across the Dyle but counter-attacks restored the positions and completely re-established the front.
- In the afternoon it was learned that the French First Army on the BEF's right had been heavily engaged and that a 5,000-yard breach had been made in their front where there was no river protection.
- General Billotte decided to withdraw the First Army to a line between Châtelet and Ottignies, and the British I Corps had to conform by swinging back its right along the line of the River Lasne to link up with the French in their new position.
- The Wavre sector of the Dyle was evacuated on the night of the 15th/16th under cover of remorseless artillery fire on the enemy's advancing troops.

# 15 May Air

- In view of the heavy daytime losses on May the 15th the RAF Battles were switched to night bombing. Although results by night could not be so effective, all returned safely.
- By May the 15th the density of refugee traffic flooding steadily westwards was a theme which recurred frequently in photo reconnaissance reports of enemy movements. At one time, enemy transport on roads twenty to thirty miles east of Louvain and Wavre appeared to be virtually held up by the dense civilian procession.
- The toll of fighters in France continued. On May the 15th the RAF lost twenty fighters in the battle area and in defence of their own airfields.
- Just before midnight on May the 15th the most northerly units of the RAF were ordered to move to airfields further south.

# 15 May Paris

- On the morning of 15 May, French Prime Minister Paul Reynaud telephoned the new British Prime Minister, Winston Churchill and said "We have been defeated. We are beaten; we have lost the battle."
- Churchill, attempting to offer some comfort to Reynaud, reminded the Prime Minister of all the times the Germans had broken through the Allied lines in the First World War only to be stopped. Reynaud was, however, inconsolable.





# 16 May Paris

- Churchill flew to Paris on 16 May. He recognised the gravity of the situation when he observed that the French government was already burning its archives and preparing for an evacuation of the capital.
- In a meeting with the French commanders, Churchill asked General Gamelin, "Où est la masse de manoeuvre?" ["Where is the strategic reserve?"] "Aucune" [None]
- Churchill asked Gamelin where and when the general proposed to launch a counter-attack against the flanks of the German bulge. Gamelin simply replied "inferiority of numbers, inferiority of equipment, inferiority of methods".



# 17 May Air

- On the 16th the French High Command made further urgent requests for additional air protection.
- The War Cabinet decided that four fighter squadrons should be sent immediately, and they left for France that afternoon.
- This decision had hardly been taken when the Prime Minister, in France, telegraphed urging that six more fighter squadrons should be sent.
- The Air Staff advised that the limited number of airfields and servicing units in France made it undesirable to base further squadrons there, so it was agreed that six squadrons of Hurricanes should be concentrated in the south of England and should fly to France daily for operations over the battlefield.
- The equivalent of ten extra squadrons for which the French had asked was operating from French or English bases by the 17th.



Mechanics servicing the engine of a Hurricane I of 501 Sqn at No. 1 Repair Centre, Reims, Champagne, France

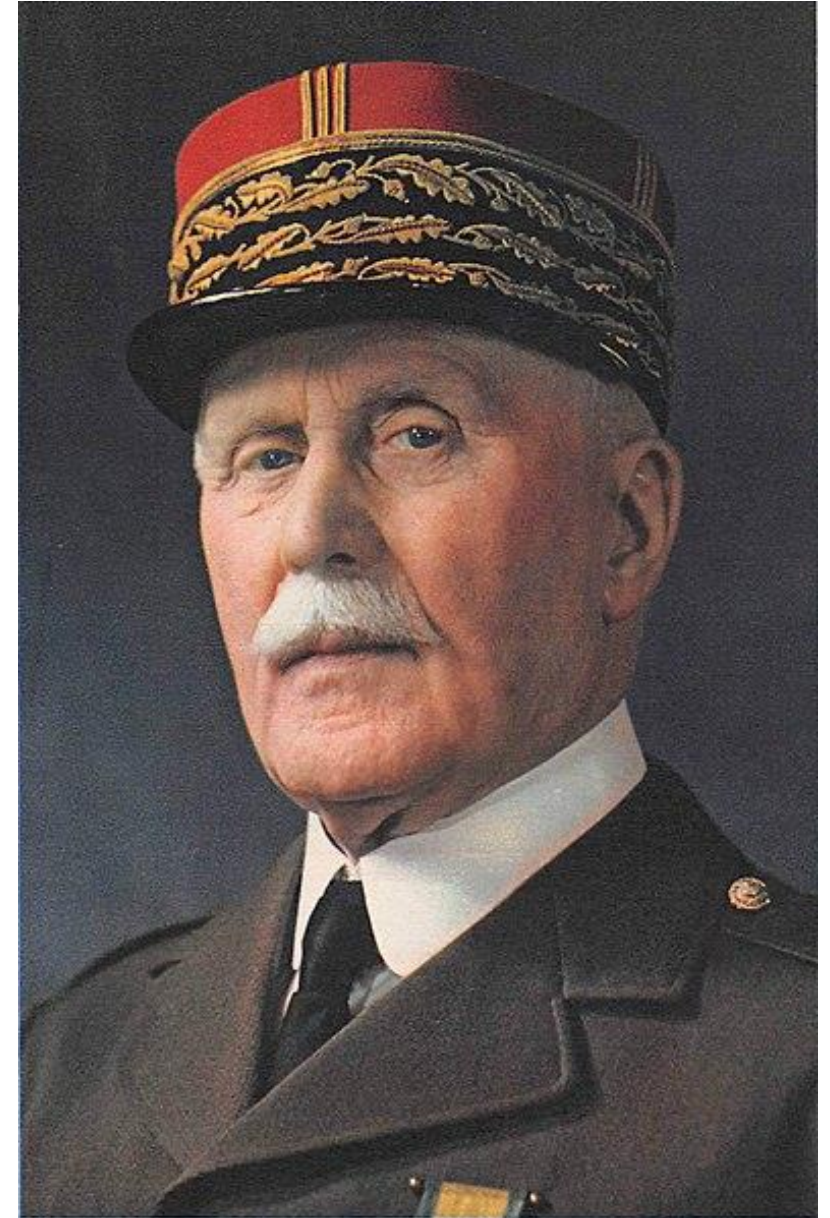
# 17 May France

- The 4th DCr (de Gaulle), attempted to launch an attack from the south at Montcornet.
- During the Battle of Montcornet Germans hastily improvised a defence. Flank pressure from panzer units and dive-bombing by stukas broke up the attack.
- French losses on 17 May amounted to 32 tanks and armoured vehicles but the French had "inflicted loss on the Germans".



# 18 May Government

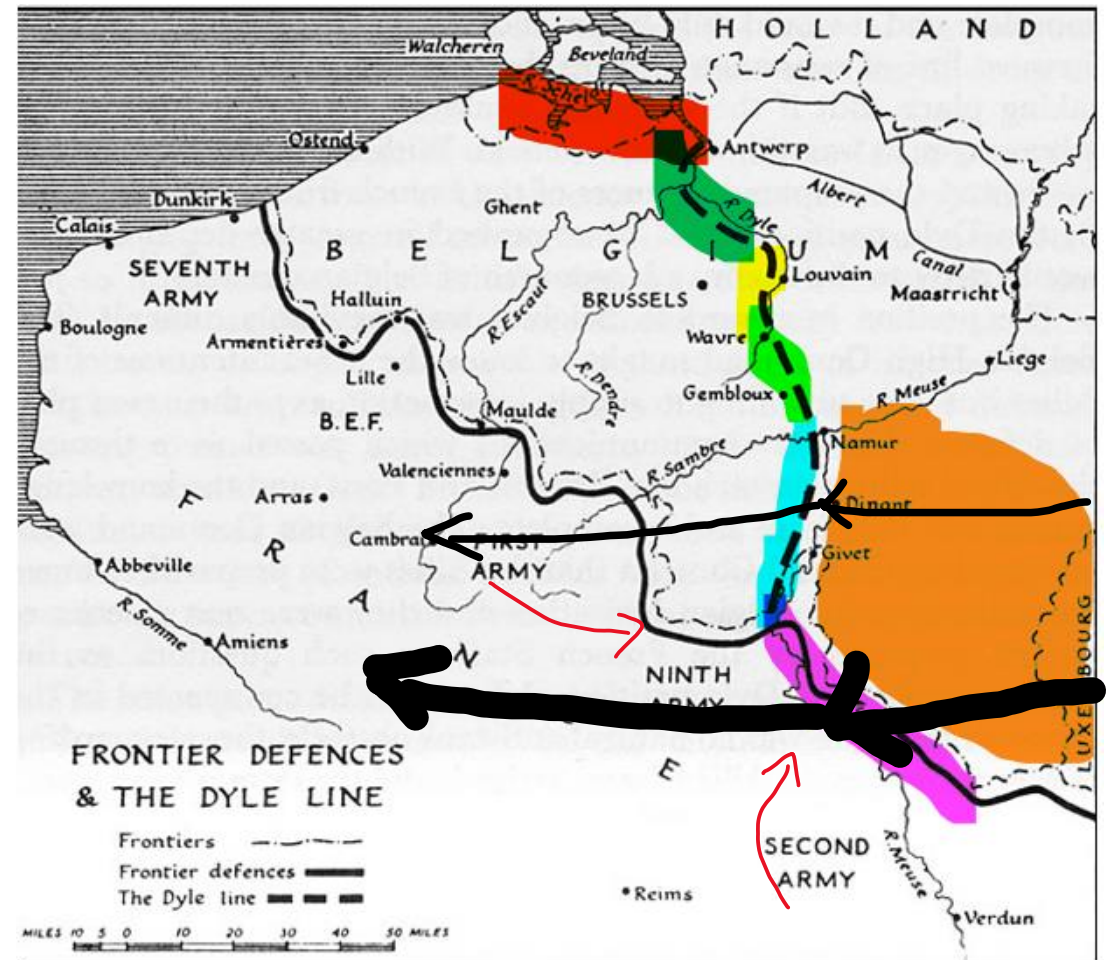
- on 18 May 1940 the 84 year old Philippe Pétain joined the new government of Paul Reynaud.
- Reynaud hoped that the hero of Verdun might instill a renewed spirit of resistance and patriotism in the French Army.
- Pétain had ended the First World War regarded "without a doubt, the most accomplished defensive tactician of any army" and "one of France's greatest military heroes".





# 14 - 18 May The Meuse

- With pontoon bridges over the Meuse complete on the 13<sup>th</sup> the tanks started crossing early on the 14<sup>th</sup>.
- On the 15<sup>th</sup> the tanks with support from the Stukas smashed their way out of the bridgehead and headed west.
- Allied reserve units and odds and sods collected to resist them were smashed or pushed away to the north.
- By the 18<sup>th</sup> they were in Peronne.





# 19 May Belgium

- About midnight on the night of the 18th/19<sup>th</sup> General Billotte visited Lord Gort's headquarters and gave him an account of the overall situation.
- “He also told me of the measures which were being taken to restore the situation on the front of the French 9th Army, though clearly he had little hope that they would be effective.”
- What if the gap could not be closed?
- General Billotte had shown a situation map on which nine, or probably ten, German armoured divisions were marked as operating in the gap to the south. Leading elements had that day approached Cambrai and reached Peronne, and there were now no French troops between them and the sea.
- Withdrawal northwards to the sea seemed the only feasible option. 'It was therefore only prudent to consider what the adoption of such a plan might entail.'
- Contingency planning for the withdrawal of the BEF to the sea started at Arras and in London.

# 19 May France

- On 19 May, after receiving reinforcements, de Gaulle attacked again and was repulsed with the loss of 80 of 155 vehicles. The Stukas again attacked French units massing on the German flanks and prevented most counter-attacks from starting.
- The defeat of the 4th DCr and the disintegration of the French Ninth Army was caused mainly by the Stukas.
- The 4th DCr had achieved a measure of success but the attacks on 17 and 19 May had only local effect.



General de Gaulle.

# 19 May Command

- On 19 May, General Ironside, the British Chief of the Imperial General Staff (CIGS), conferred with Lord Gort at his headquarters near Lens.
- He brought with him an instruction from the War Cabinet, that the B.E.F. was to move southwards upon Amiens attacking all enemy forces encountered and to take station on the left of the French Army.
- Gort replied that seven of his nine divisions were already engaged on the Scheldt and he had only two divisions left to mount such an attack.
- Ironside then asked Gort under whose command he was acting. Gort replied that this was General Billotte, the commander of the French 1st Army Group but that Billotte had issued no orders for eight days.
- Ironside confronted Billotte, whose headquarters was nearby, lost his temper and shouted at Billotte emphasising his points by seizing him by the buttons of his tunic and shaking him. It did no good, Billotte remained apparently incapable of taking action.
- Ironside returned to Britain via Calais, where his room at the Hotel Excelsior was struck by a German bomb as he slept, blowing him out of his bed.
- He was concerned that the BEF was doomed and ordered urgent anti-invasion measures.



left to right, Ironside, Georges, Churchill, Gamelin, Gort outside Gort's headquarters in Arras, France, 13th January 1940.

# 19 May France

- On 19 May, the Germans smashed through the two weak British Territorial divisions on the Somme river.
- The German units occupied Amiens and secured the westernmost bridge over the river at Abbeville.
- This move isolated the British, French, Dutch and Belgian forces in the north from their supplies.
- On the evening of 19 May, the French Prime Minister, Paul Reynaud sacked Gamelin (Age 68) and replaced him with Maxime Weygand (Age 73), who claimed his first mission as Commander-in-Chief would be to get a good night's sleep.
- Weygand had been Gamelin's predecessor as commander in chief until his retirement at the age of 68 in 1935.
- Weygand had mainly served in World War I as a staff officer to Marshal Foch.



Maxime Weygand on the cover of TIME magazine, 10/30/33.

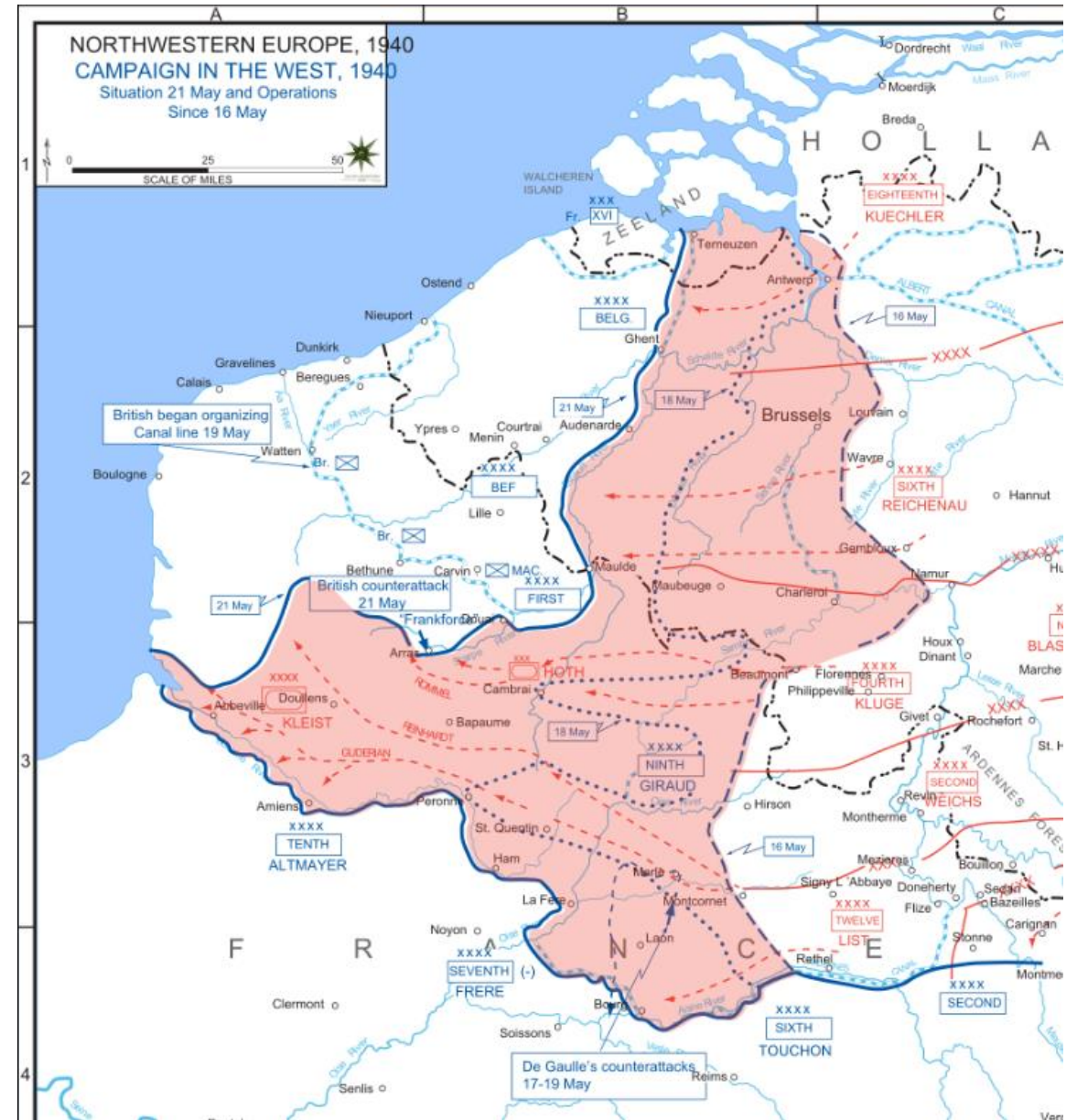
# 16 – 20 May Belgium

- Early in the morning of the 16th General Billotte issued orders directing the withdrawal to the line of the Escaut over three days such that on three successive nights the following lines would be held:
  - the line of the *Senne*).
  - the *Dendre* line).
  - the *Escaut* line).
- The intention was to fight during the day on the 'lines' and retire at night.
- Early on the 15th General Billotte had informed General Gamelin that 'the Ninth Army is in a critical situation: all its front is pushed back'. Now that retirement to the Escaut was ordered, all but two divisions of General Giraud's French Seventh Army were being moved in rear of the British Expeditionary Force towards the gap in the south.
- Fortunately the enemy did not at first follow up very vigorously. With a few minor exceptions all went according to plan.
- By midnight on the 19th/20th the withdrawal of the BEF was completed so that by the early morning of 20 May the BEF was on the Escaut line.



# 20 May France

- On the morning of **20 May**, Gamelin ordered the armies trapped in Belgium and northern France to fight their way south and link up with French forces attacking northwards from the Somme river.
- By 20 May German units reached Noyelles-sur-Mer, 100 kilometres west of their positions on 17 May.
- From Noyelles, they were able to see the Somme estuary and the English Channel.
- A huge pocket, containing the Allied 1st Army Group (the Belgian, British, and French First, Seventh and Ninth armies), was created.



- An effort now started to pull together reserve units and odds and sods of the BEF and French first and Seventh armies to defend the southern flank of the armies cut off north of the Somme.
- Fortunately the Germans, intent on securing the line of the Somme on their left flank were slow to push north.



# 21<sup>st</sup> May Command

- Weygand flew into the pocket on 21 May and met Billotte, the commander of the 1st Army Group, Gort and King Leopold of Belgium.
- Leopold announced that the Belgian Army could not conduct offensive operations as it lacked tanks and aircraft and that unoccupied Belgium had enough food for only two weeks. Leopold suggested the establishment of a beach-head covering Dunkirk and the Belgian channel ports.
- General Billotte had no confidence that the French First Army could do more than hold on.
- Weygand proposed a counter-offensive by the armies trapped in the north combined with an attack by French forces on the Somme front, the new French 3rd Army Group.
- General Billotte, the only French commander in the north briefed on the Weygand plan, was seriously injured in a motor accident on his way back to his headquarters after the meeting and died two days later.

## 20 – 23 May Escaut Front

- The Germans began their attacks on the main Escaut front early in the morning (21<sup>st</sup>) and these were maintained throughout the day.
- On the 22<sup>nd</sup> the BEF held the line on the Escaut all day then under orders withdrew to their original position on the frontier overnight.
- They had been under pressure all day and suffered heavy casualties. Breaking contact and withdrawing at night over roads choked with refugees was a difficult and hazardous operation. Thirty four field guns were lost or destroyed in the process.
- To their right rear the small Arras garrison still held off all the enemy's attacks, as they had done now for four days.
- The Belgians, the main British Expeditionary Force and the French First Army held the eastern front.
- Boulogne and Calais were still held, but both were threatened and between them and the British Expeditionary Force were the advancing divisions of the German Army.
- On May the 23<sup>rd</sup> the BEF was put on half rations as the cut in supply lines started to take effect.

## 21 – 23 May France

- Only two local offensives, by the British and French in the north at Arras on 21 May and by the French from Cambrai in the south on 22 May, took place.
- Frankforce consisting of two divisions, had moved into the Arras area but Franklyn was not aware of a French push north toward Cambrai and the French were ignorant of a British attack towards Arras.
- The Battle of Arras achieved surprise and initial success against overstretched German forces but failed in its objective. Radio communication between tanks and infantry was poor and there was little combined arms co-ordination. German defences (including 88 mm FlaK guns and 105 mm field guns) eventually stopped the attack. The French knocked out many German tanks as they retired, but the Luftwaffe broke up the counter-attacks and 60 British tanks were lost.
- The southern attack at Cambrai also failed, because V Corps had been too disorganised after the fighting in Belgium to make a serious effort.
- South of the German salient, limited French attacks occurred on 23 May near Peronne and Amiens.



# 23 – 25 May France

- In the early hours of 23 May, Gort ordered a retreat from Arras. By now, he had no faith in the Weygand plan, nor in Weygand's proposal at least to try to hold a pocket on the Flemish coast.
- Gort knew that the ports needed to supply such a foothold were already being threatened.
- That same day, a German armoured division had assaulted Boulogne.
- The British garrison there surrendered on 25 May, although 4,286 men were evacuated by Royal Navy ships with RAF air cover.
- Signs of an imminent Belgian collapse were becoming more disquieting all day on the 25th.
- At six o'clock Gort, without waiting to ask authority from his French commander, ordered the 5th and 50th Divisions to abandon preparations for the attack southwards on the 26th and to move at once to the threatening gap between the British and Belgian armies.



# 26 May – 4 June Dunkirk

- The British launched Operation Dynamo to evacuate the encircled British, French and Belgian troops from the northern pocket on 26 May.
- The French First Army – the bulk of which remained in Lille – fought the Siege of Lille owing to Weygand's failure to pull it back along with other French forces to the coast. The 50,000 men involved capitulated on 31 May.
- The Allied position was complicated by Belgian King Leopold's surrender on 28 May. The gap left by the Belgian Army stretched from Ypres to Dixmude. Several British divisions were rushed in to cover the gap.
- About 40,000 French soldiers of the remaining rearguard surrendered after the evacuation ceased on 4 June.



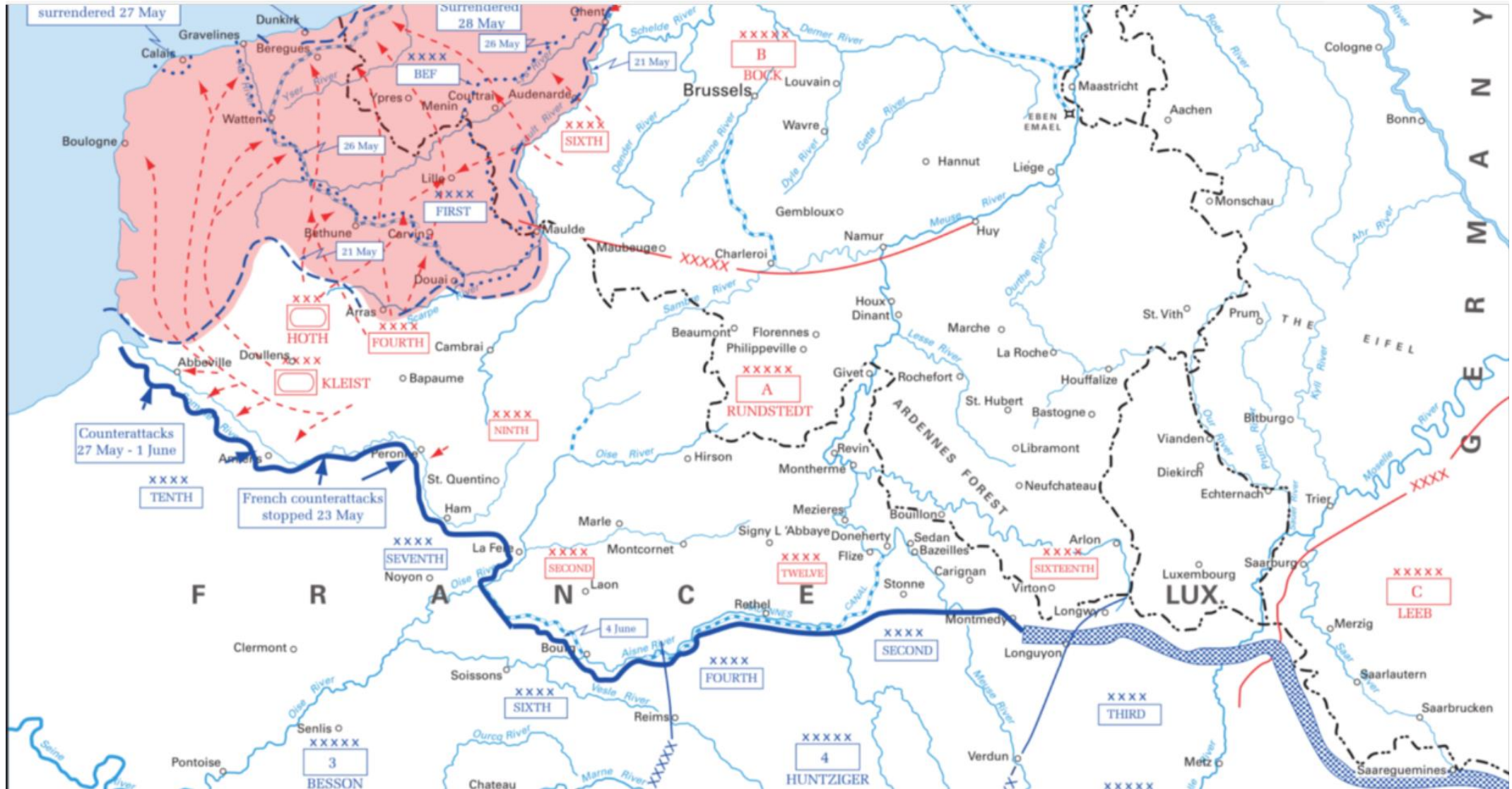
Troops on the beach at Dunkirk awaiting evacuation

The total evacuated by sea across the English Channel from Dunkirk and the beaches to its east was 338,226, including 199,226 British and 139,000 French.

## 26 May – 4 June Dunkirk

- The *Luftwaffe* did its best to prevent the evacuation.
- It inflicted serious losses on the Allied forces; 89 merchantmen (of 126,518 tons) were lost; the navy lost 29 of its 40 destroyers sunk or seriously damaged.
- The Germans lost around 100 aircraft confirmed destroyed and the RAF 106 fighters.

# 4 June France



# 4 June France

- By the end of May 1940, the best and most modern French armies had been sent north and lost in the resulting encirclement; the French had also lost much of their heavy weaponry and their best armoured formations. The Allies had lost 61 divisions.
- Weygand was faced with the prospect of defending a long front (300 km. from Sedan to the channel), with only 64 French divisions and one British division.
- The Germans had 142 divisions and air supremacy except over the English Channel.
- French and British troops had fought the Battle of Abbeville from 27 May to 4 June but failed to eliminate the German bridgehead south of the Somme.



- The French also had to deal with millions of civilian refugees fleeing the war.
- automobiles and horse-drawn carts carrying possessions clogged roads.
- The government had not foreseen such a rapid military collapse so there were few plans to cope.
- Between six and ten million French fled, even while officials stated that there was no need to panic and that civilians should stay.
- The population of Chartres declined from 23,000 to 800 and Lille from 200,000 to 20,000, while cities in the south such as Pau and Bordeaux rapidly grew in size.



# 4 June France

- About 112,000 French soldiers from Dunkirk had been repatriated via the Normandy and Brittany ports, a partial replacement for the divisions lost in Flanders.
- The French were also able to make good a significant amount of their armoured losses and raised the 1st and 2nd DCr (heavy armoured divisions); the 4th DCR also had its losses replaced.
- Morale rose and was high by the end of May 1940.
- Most French soldiers that joined the line only knew of German success by hearsay.

# 5 – 10 June France

- The Germans began their second offensive on 5 June on the Somme and the Aisne.
- That day Prime Minister Paul Reynaud appointed General de Gaulle a government minister, as Under-Secretary of State for National Defence and War, with particular responsibility for coordination with the British. Weygand objected to the appointment, thinking him "a mere child".
- The Germans captured bridgeheads over the Somme but they struggled to get over the Aisne. At Amiens, the Germans were repeatedly driven back by French artillery-fire.
- German progress was made only late on the third day of operations (7 June), finally forcing crossings; the French Air Force attempted to bomb them but failed.
- South of Abbeville, the French Tenth Army was forced to retreat to Rouen and then south over the Seine river.
- After 9 June, French aerial resistance virtually ceased; some surviving aircraft withdrew to French North Africa.
- On 10 June, the French government declared Paris an open city and the government left Paris for Tours.



# 11 June France

- The Germans now deployed against Paris. The French resisted the approaches to the capital strongly but the line was broken in several places.
- Weygand asserted it would not take long for the French Army to disintegrate and now declared that "the fighting had become meaningless". He, Baudouin, and several members of the government were already set on an armistice.
- On 11 June, Churchill flew to the Château du Muguet, at Briare, where he put forward first his idea of a Breton redoubt, to which Weygand replied that it was just a "fantasy".
- Churchill then said the French should consider "guerrilla warfare". Pétain then replied that it would mean the destruction of the country.
- Churchill then said the French should defend Paris and reminded Pétain of how he had come to the aid of the British with forty divisions in March 1918.
- To this Pétain replied quietly and with dignity that he had in those days a strategic reserve of sixty divisions; now, there were none, and the British ought to be providing divisions to aid France. Making Paris into a ruin would not affect the final event.



# 10 June Italy

- Italy entered the war on 10 June 1940 and invaded France over the Alps.
- Italy was not prepared for war and the invasion made little impact. Italian dictator Benito Mussolini (photo) was aware of this and sought to profit from German successes.
- Mussolini (photo) told the Army's Chief-of-Staff, Marshal Badoglio, "I only need a few thousand dead so that I can sit at the peace conference as a man who has fought."





# 12 – 13 June France

- The Germans forced the surrender of the British 51st (Highland) Division on 12 June and then crossed the Seine river to race through Normandy.
- On 12 June the cabinet met and Weygand again called for an armistice. He referred to the danger of military and civil disorder and the possibility of a Communist uprising in Paris. Pétain and Minister of Information Prouvost urged the cabinet to hear Weygand out because "he was the only one really to know what was happening".
- Churchill returned to France on the 13th for another conference at Tours. Reynaud then put the cabinet's armistice proposals to Churchill, who replied that "whatever happened, we would level no reproaches against France".
- At that day's cabinet meeting, Pétain strongly supported Weygand's demand for an armistice and read out a draft proposal to the cabinet where he spoke of "the need to stay in France, to prepare a national revival, and to share the sufferings of our people.
- Several ministers were still opposed to an armistice, and Weygand immediately lashed out at them for even leaving Paris. Like Pétain, he said he would never leave France.
- On 13 June, Churchill attended a meeting of the Anglo-French Supreme War Council at Tours and suggested a Franco-British Union but this was refused.

# 14 June Paris

- On 14 June, Paris fell. Parisians who stayed in the city found that in most cases the Germans were extremely well mannered.
- That day the government moved to Bordeaux, where French governments had fled German invasions in 1870 and 1914.
- Photo “German soldiers marching past the Arc de Triomphe after the surrender of Paris, 14 June 1940.”



# 16 June Bordeaux

- On 15 June, the Germans launched a frontal assault across the Rhine and into France.
- Parliament, both senate and chamber, were at Bordeaux and immersed themselves in the armistice debate.
- At cabinet on 15 June Prime Minister Paul Reynaud (photo) urged that France follow the Dutch example, that the Army should lay down its arms so that the fight could be continued from abroad.
- Pétain was sympathetic and was sent to speak to Weygand (who was waiting outside, as he was not a member of the cabinet) for around fifteen minutes.
- Weygand persuaded Pétain that Reynaud's suggestion would be a shameful surrender.
- Chautemps then proposed a fudge proposal, an inquiry about terms. The Cabinet voted 13-6 for the Chautemps proposal. Admiral Darlan, who had been opposed to an armistice until 15 June, now became a key player, agreeing provided the French fleet was kept out of German hands.

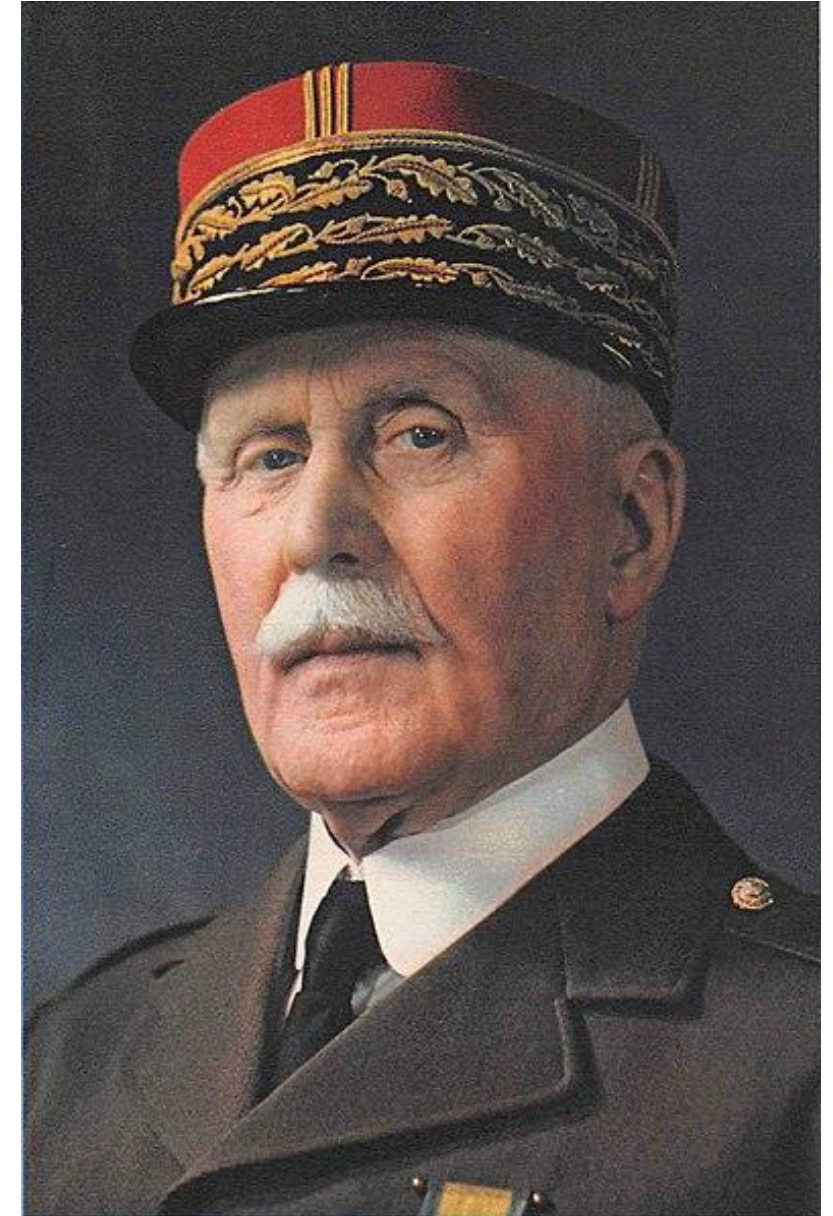


# 16 June Bordeaux

- On Sunday 16 June President Roosevelt's reply to President Lebrun's requests for assistance came with only vague promises and saying that it was impossible for the President to do anything without Congressional approval.
- Pétain then drew a letter of resignation from his pocket, an act which was certain to bring down the government. Lebrun persuaded him to stay until Churchill's reply had been received.
- After lunch, Churchill's telegram arrived agreeing to an armistice provided the French fleet was moved to British ports, a suggestion which was not acceptable to Darlan, who argued that it would leave France defenceless.
- That afternoon the British Government offered joint nationality for Frenchmen and Britons in a Franco-British Union. Reynaud and five ministers thought these proposals acceptable. The others did not, seeing the offer as insulting and a device to make France subservient to Great Britain, as a kind of extra Dominion.

# 16 – 18 June Bordeaux

- Discouraged by his cabinet's hostile reaction to the Franco-British union proposal and believing that his ministers no longer supported him, Reynaud resigned on 16 June.
- President Lebrun felt he had little choice but to appoint Pétain in his place.
- The new Cabinet with Pétain as head of government was formed. At midnight on 16 June 1940, Baudouin asked the Spanish Ambassador to submit to Germany a request to cease hostilities at once and for Germany to make known its peace terms.
- At 12:30 am 17 June, Pétain made his first broadcast to the French people. "The enthusiasm of the country for the Maréchal was tremendous. He was welcomed by people as diverse as Claudel, Gide, and Mauriac, and also by the vast mass of untutored Frenchmen who saw him as their saviour."
- On the same day (17 June), German armoured forces reached the Swiss border and the Maginot defences were cut off from the rest of France.
- The Germans captured the port of Cherbourg on 18 June.

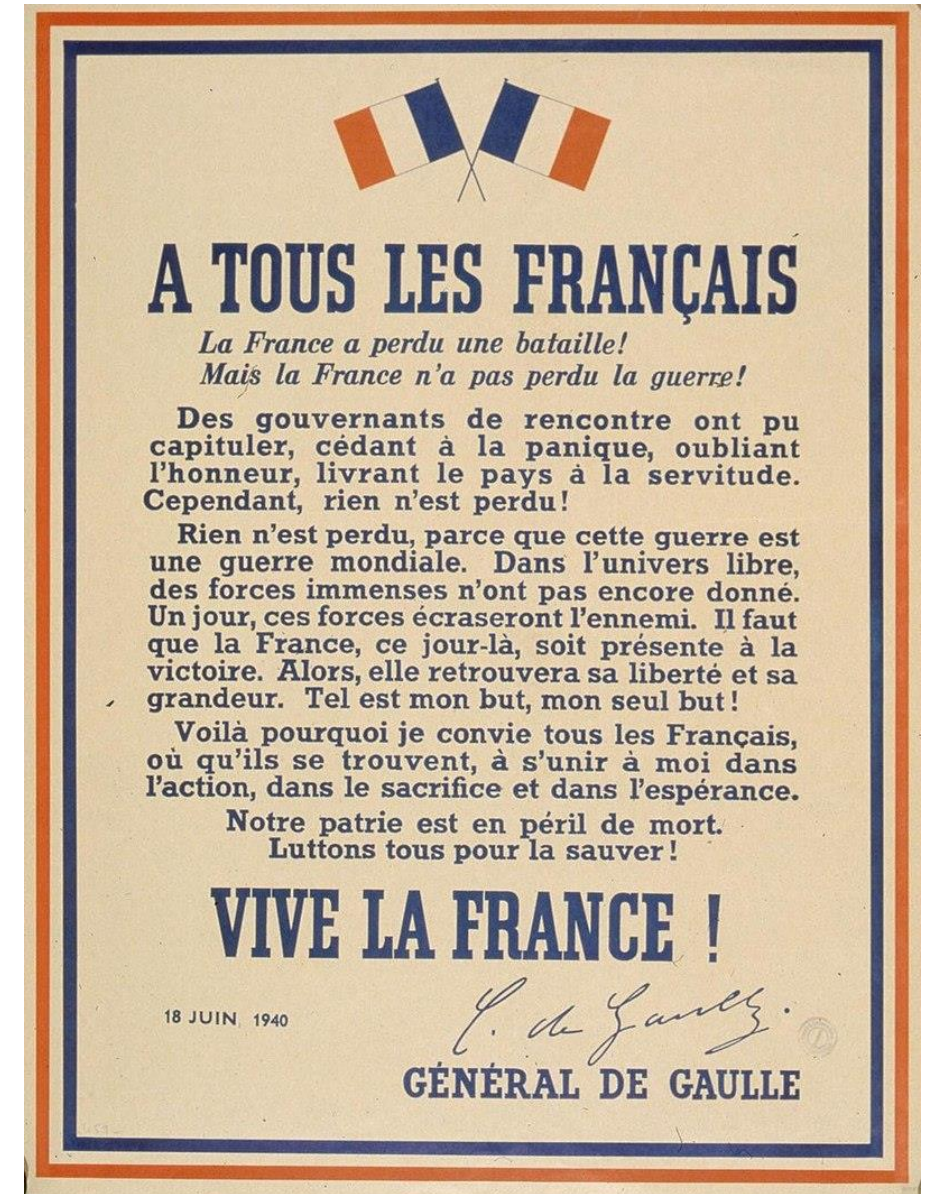




# 18 June London



General de Gaulle, no longer in the Cabinet, had arrived in London on the 17th and made a call for resistance from there, on the 18th, with no legal authority whatsoever from his government, a call that was heeded by comparatively few.



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# 21 June Italy

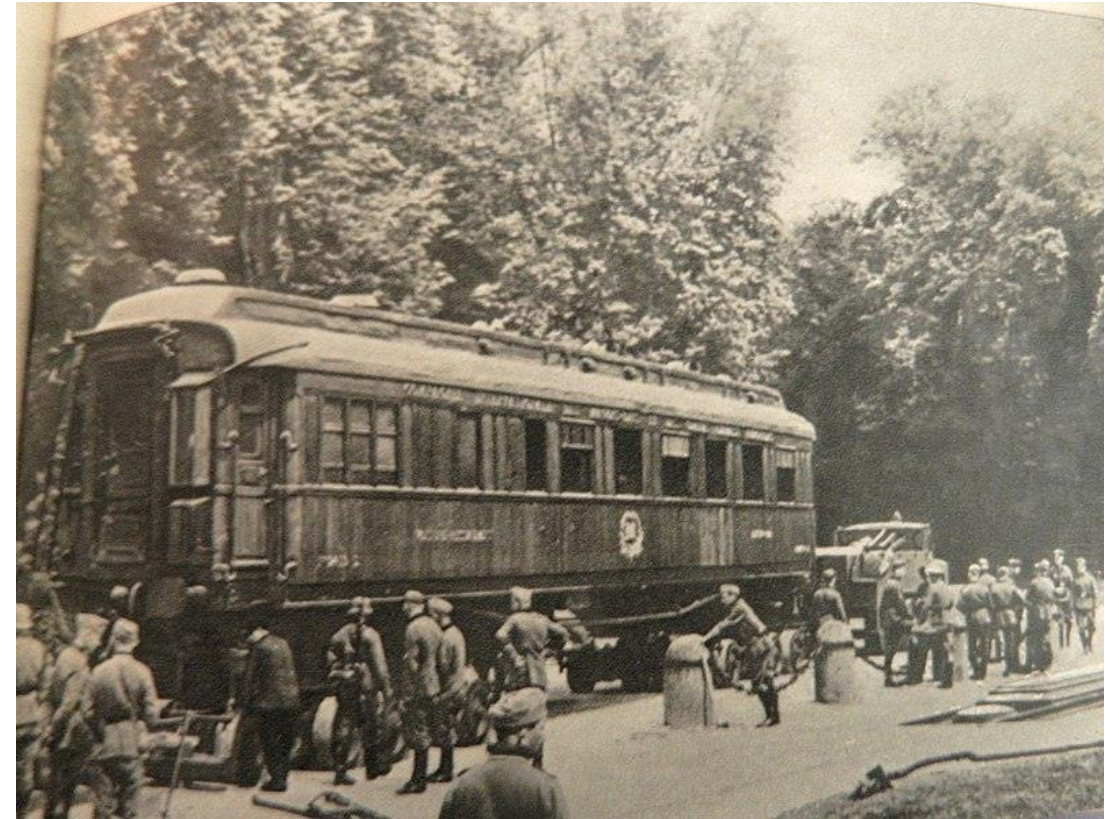
- Benito Mussolini (photo) ordered a full-scale invasion across the Alps to begin on 21 June.





# 20 June France

- Hitler chose Compiègne Forest as the site to sign the armistice due to its symbolic role as the site of the 1918 Armistice that ended World War I with Germany's surrender.
- The signing should take place in the same rail carriage, the Compiègne Wagon, where the Germans had signed the 1918 armistice, removed from a museum and placed exactly where it had been in 1918.
- William Shirer, who was present that day, wrote, "I am but fifty yards from him. [...] I have seen that face many times at the great moments of his life. But today! It is afire with scorn, anger, hate, revenge, triumph."



Ferdinand Foch's Railway Car, at the same location as after World War One, prepared by the Germans for the second armistice at Compiègne, 22 June 1940

# 21 June France

- On 21 June 1940, Hitler sat in the same chair in which Marshal Foch had sat when he faced the representatives of the defeated German Empire.
- After listening to the reading of the preamble, Hitler left the carriage, as Foch had done in 1918, leaving the negotiations to General Keitel.



The German delegation comprised:  
HITLER, General KEITEL, Marshal GOERING, Admiral  
RAEDER, Minister Rudolf HEISS, Minister VON  
RIBENTROP, General VON BRAUTCHICH and General  
JODL



# 22 June France

- Negotiations lasted a day.
- General Huntzinger had to discuss the terms by phone with the French government in Bordeaux, mainly with the new defence minister, General Weygand.
- Huntziger—tried to soften the harsher terms of the armistice, but Keitel replied that they would have to accept or reject the armistice as it was.
- Given the military situation that France was in, Huntziger had "no choice" but to accede to the armistice terms.
- The Armistice of 22 June 1940 was signed at 18:36.



The French delegation comprised:  
General HUNTZIGER, M. NOEL, Vice Admiral LUC and  
General BERGERET.



# 22 June France

- The armistice terms provided for:
- German occupation of three-fifths of France so as to give the German navy access to all French Channel and Atlantic ports.
- French soldiers would remain prisoners of war until the cessation of all hostilities. Nearly one and a half million Frenchmen were thus forced into prisoner of war camps.
- A minimal French Army would be permitted.
- The French Navy was to be disarmed but not surrendered.



French prisoners are marched into internment

# 22 June France

- An unoccupied region in the south, the *Zone libre*, was left relatively free to be governed by a rump French administration.
- The armistice permitted the French to keep the colonial empire and the fleet.
- All occupation costs had to be borne by France, approximately 400 million French francs a day.
- Article 19 of the Franco-German armistice required the French state to turn over to German authorities any German national on French territory.
- Keitel gave verbal assurances that this would apply mainly to those refugees who had "fermented the war", a euphemism for Jews, and especially German Jews who until then had enjoyed asylum in France.



# 23 June Paris

- Hitler tours Paris with architect Albert Speer (left) and sculptor Arno Breker (right).



# 24 June Italy

- The Franco-German armistice signed on the evening of the 22 June, would not come into force until the Italians signed their own armistice.
- His troops unable to break through, Mussolini abandoned his major war aims and signed the armistice on 24 June. It came into effect early the next morning.
- It established a small occupation zone and an Italian Armistice Commission with France in Turin to oversee French compliance.





# 1 -10 July Vichy

- On 1 July, the government, finding Clermont too cramped, moved to Vichy, the empty hotels there being more suitable for the government ministries.
- The Chamber of Deputies and Senate, meeting together as a "Congrès", held an emergency meeting on 10 July to ratify the armistice.
- At the same time draft constitutional proposals were tabled. The presidents of both Chambers spoke and declared that constitutional reform was necessary.
- The Congress voted 569–80 (with 18 abstentions) to grant the Cabinet the authority to draw up a new constitution.
- On the next day, Pétain formally assumed near-absolute powers as "Head of State."

# 11 July Vichy

- Pétain was reactionary by temperament and education. His regime soon took on clear authoritarian and fascist characteristics.
- The republican motto of "*Liberté, égalité, fraternité*" was replaced with "*Travail, famille, patrie*" ("Work, family, fatherland").
- He added that the new France would be "a social hierarchy... rejecting the false idea of the natural equality of men."
- He issued new constitutional acts which abolished the presidency, indefinitely adjourned parliament.
- By January 1941 Pétain held virtually all governing power in France.



Pétain in May 1940

# 21 October London

- Churchill made an appeal by radio to the French people:
- ‘...Now what is it we British ask of you in this hard and bitter time? What we ask at this moment in our struggle to win the victory which we will share with you, is that if you cannot help us, at least you will not hinder us. Presently you will be able to weight the arm that strikes for you, and you ought to do so...
- Do not imagine, as the German-controlled wireless tells you, that we English seek to take your ships and colonies. We seek to beat the life and soul out of Hitler and Hitlerism. That alone, that all the time, that to the end...
- Good night then: sleep to gather strength for the morning. For the morning will come. Brightly will it shine on the brave and true, kindly upon all who suffer for the cause, glorious upon the tombs of heroes. Thus will shine the dawn. Vive la France! Long live also the forward march of the common people in all the lands towards their just and true inheritance, and towards the broader and fuller age.”

- Thanks for your attention.