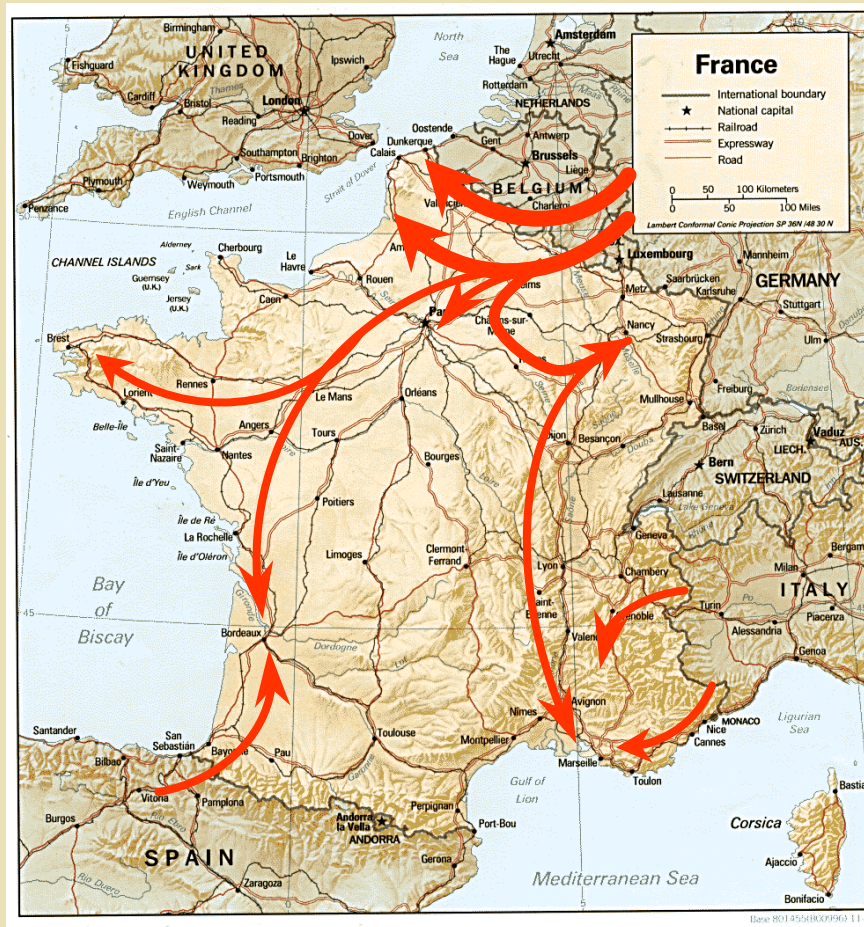




# France 1940

The German offensive in the west





# Case Yellow



## Battle of Ardennes Forest

German ground attack aircraft, mainly the dreaded “Stuka” flew around-the-clock missions over the Ardennes, escorted by 2 wings of Messerschmitt fighter planes. French D.500 and D.510 intercepted. The fighters fought a fierce battle, and each side lost over 150 aircraft in the combat. However the Germans managed to protect their bombers, which wreaked havoc on the ill-protected French ground troops and permitting a steady advance of the ground forces, which at that time already had a smashing superiority in numbers.

In the morning of May 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1940, the German Army Group B crossed the border to Belgium with three armies. 27 German divisions cut a wedge into the 12 French divisions defending the area with proper ease. A tank duel was fought between 3 German and 3 French armored corps near Arlons. The German tanks chose to evade from the superior French guns and thrust further west. The French tanks could not follow and were faced with masses of German infantrymen with close support by Stukas, antitank, anti-aircraft guns in ground combat mode and many field howitzers. 1<sup>st</sup> French tank corps, under the massive fire and steady advance of both foot and motorized infantry, retreated southwards to Verdun.

Loss comparison. France: 6 infantry and 1 armor divisions (plus 3 routed and disrupted). Germany: 1 infantry division.



# Tearing down the walls



## Battle of Liège

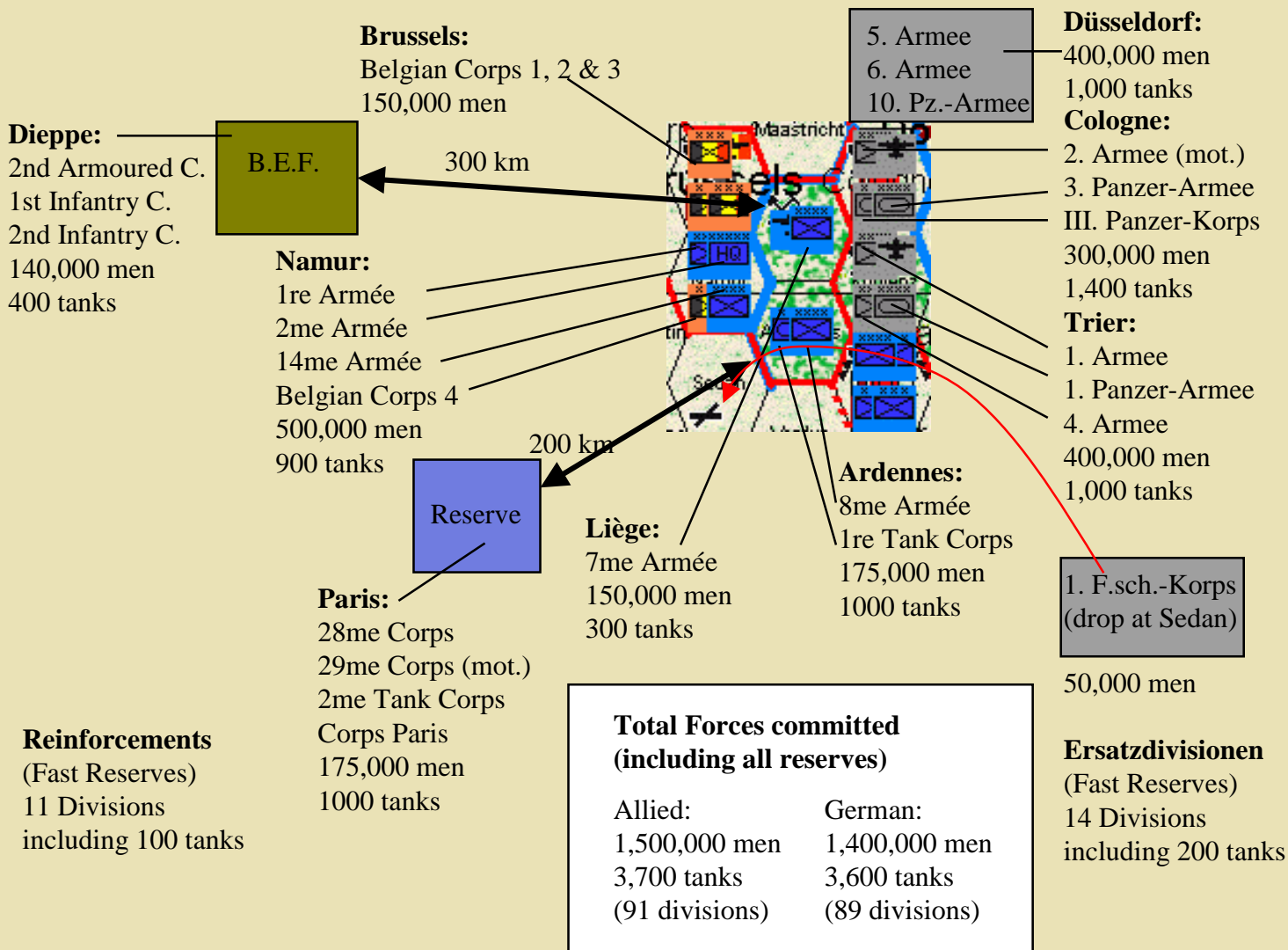
Despite an unlucky start of Luftwaffe missions (the new French D.510 fighters achieved an air victory over a wing of Me 109 and also protected French ground troops from Stuka attacks. The Germans gave it another try with a group of Me 110 but the French 2<sup>nd</sup> Fighter Wing maintained an edge over Liège) in the operations zone of Heeresgruppe (army group) A under colonel-general Ewald von Kleist, the German motorized troops of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Army, 3<sup>rd</sup> Tank Army and another independent tank corps very successfully assaulted the positions of French 7<sup>th</sup> Army. The clear superiority in numbers allowed the German attackers to brush away the French resistance. Armored formations broke through at Seraing and following infantry mopped up the remaining French force. France lost 9 infantry divisions, most of them surrendered, Germany 2 infantry divisions.

## Battle of Namur

The German echelons, reinforced by 6<sup>th</sup> Army, pressed on towards Namur. The supply and communications situation was already deteriorating with the French and Belgian units, that just switched from extensive combat practice to facing a real enemy. The French commander decided to retreat with the bulk of the force, while 2<sup>nd</sup> Army and the Belgian Ardennes corps fought a withdrawal battle against superior enemy forces. The German tank formations clashed through the defenders almost unstoppable. Miraculously the Germans halted after securing the Namur area, allowing an orderly retreat of the French armies. Airfields were captured with French elite 2<sup>nd</sup> Wing. France lost again 3 infantry divisions, Belgium 3 and Germany 2.

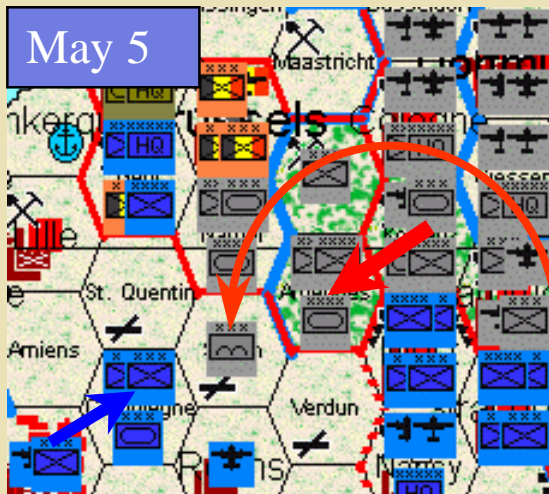


# The Weak Spot





# Decision at Sedan



## Para Assault

German Ju-52 transport planes, escorted by Me-110 twin engined fighters were intercepted by two wings of French D.500 fighters. The German fighters only managed to protect one wing of transports, dropping two divisions of paratroops. The others were shot down over the target. The landing of German paratroops coincided with the attack on the Ardennes. The Germans seized the bridges over the Meuse. A French armored formation on the march towards Belgium immediately engaged. A fierce battle ensued. The paratroopers defended ferociously and grabbed to every inch of soil.



## Across the Meuse

When the spearheads of 1. Panzer-Armee appeared to join in, the paratroops were decimated to a few battalions. But this was only the beginning of a very hot battle fought between several thousands of tanks on each side. The three French corps inflicted severe losses on the German Panzer force and sold their skin very well, but eventually were overcome by supporting infantry and massive air support. The skies were filled with Stukas, and French fighters could not match up against their escorts, and Germany again had a strong numerical advantage in terms of manpower.

Loss comparison. France: 2 Armored divisions, 2 Mechanized Divisions. Germany: 2 Paratroop divisions, 3 Panzer divisions, 2 Infantry divisions.



# The Counterattacks



## The British advance

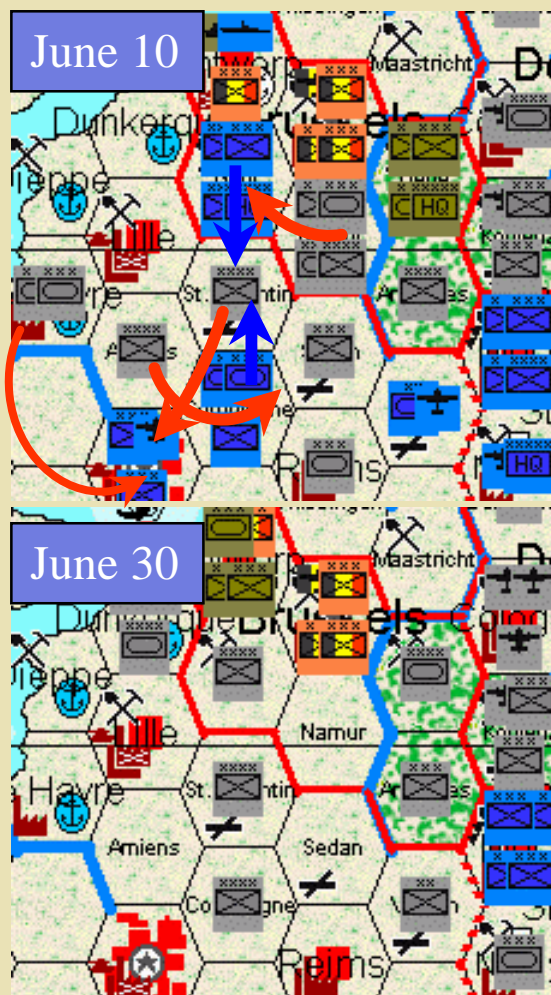
B.E.F. with 2 infantry and 1 Arm corps launched a right-wheel assault on the German flank at Liège after our successful advance to Namur. The defending XXXVI. Korps had only little air support and the Brits managed to defeat them after a short but intense battle with almost 3:1 superiority. When 10. Panzer-Armee started a counter-counteroffensive in the first days of June, without visible success from the French, the B.E.F. retreated to Antwerp.

## The French counterattack

The 13me and 14 Armée attacked the German 5. Armee at Ardennes with support of 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Bomber Wing. 2<sup>nd</sup> Bomber Wing ran into a wing of Messerschmitt 109 fighter planes, and despite air escort, was driven off target and damaged. German Stuka planes attacked the advancing columns all the way between Metz and Ardennes, almost causing their breakdown. The dive-bombers strafed roads and bombed crossings and bridges and supply trains. When reaching the German frontline, the French could barely bring superior numbers to bear on the enemy. Luftwaffe fighters sporadically turned away attacking bombers and exchanged a good deal of fire with the French escort wing but the air remained open for both sides until the French airbase at Verdun was lost. The expected support of 1<sup>st</sup> Tank Corps failed to materialise due to being attacked itself surprisingly from two sides. Nevertheless the French troops highly motivated. Defending fiercely the forest rims, the German army received damage but not enough damage to shake their morale. Not having to defend their northern flank any more, they stood firmly in place As losses began exaggerating, the French attack collapsed.



# Destruction of Groupe Armée 1



## Battles of St. Quentin and Compiègne

Weyand began to realize the hopeless situation, but decided to retain initiative if only to disturb the enemy and protect the British retreat. Mid-June the French troops attacked into the assembly of German 1. Armee at St. Quentin with elements of the 2e Tank Corps, 4e Tank Corps, St. Quentin' and 1e Motorized Corps. After achieving initial surprise, the southward attack collapsed rapidly under a German attack against Compiègne, hopelessly cutting the French forces from supply, encircling them and quenching them between the arms of 1. and 4. Armee.

The all-out assault conducted by 2me Groupe Armée with three armies, one of them at half strength, in the Belgian cauldron almost resulted in the largest bloodshed since the Somme battle 1916. 400,000 French soldiers, low on supply but hoping for victory assaulted some 200,000 Germans at overstrength equipment with full supply. The tragedy started when, exactly at the same time, another German assault of 3. Panzer-Armee, 6. Armee and attached units (400,000 men including over 1000 panzers) rolled directly into their flank with massive air support and mechanized speed. This time French morale prevented a disaster for the entire people of France. After having spent all their carried bullets, inflicting respectable damage on the defending German 1. Armee, the Germans still held the frontline and Heeresgruppe A wiped freely across Gent, Lille and Dunkerque, thoroughly destroying French railroad and supply centers, headquarters and airbases, mopping them up from behind and completely disrupting the French assault. In the end, 300,000 French soldiers looked through their empty barrels, said 'c'est la vie', and marched into POW camps.



# Paris falls



Two German Panzer Korps, I. and VII, attacked Paris from the west and north. Defended by two French army corps, a fierce battle took place in the streets of Paris. Elements of the 4. Armee pinned down part of Paris's force north of the city, while the bulk swept over Compiègne to relieve 1. Armee. In the ensuing battle both armies were help up considerably in time, so that the main load of the Paris assault was borne by the armored formations. There, despite superior weapons, the German tank force proved to have difficulties in the city without sufficient infantry support. Furthermore, the French had air support but often it only served to turn Parisian buildings into rubbles, the tanks below the ruins remaining largely unscathed, at least for their anti-personnel combat role. The 31re Corps ignored the orders to defend Paris at all costs. Crying at the destruction of their beloved city, the French surrendered after inflicting severe losses on the German tanks, but finally admitting their superiority in marksmanship and soldiery. When the German victory northeast of Paris became obvious, the corps commanders ignored the orders to defend the city at all costs any longer. After the defeat, many French officers, soldiers and civilians alike were puzzled at their own high command's decisions. They began to realize that the French army was long before beaten in the field, that their sacrifice would not save the country, only bring more death and destruction through senseless resistance. The people cried for peace, and Marshal Pétain was the man to relieve the embattered nation. That part of the armed forces, however, under tight control of the de Gaulle faction, did not lay down arms but run for the colonies.



# Destruction of Groupe Armée 2



## Breakout!

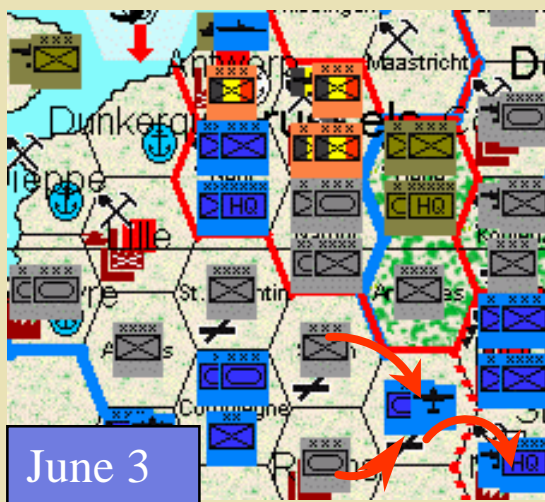
14me Armee, 2me, 9me & 15me Corps attacked the XVI. Panzer-Korps at Nancy. The German tanks retreated south to Epinal before the large masses of infantry but inflicted severe damage upon the attackers. The French force had no punch for a second go at Epinal. Their troops surrendered at armistice. The 5me Corps, 8me Corps & 13me Armée smashed their way through Verdun and headed south for Dijon. At Chaumont, a battle was fought with 4. Armee. France's battered armies matched up against Germany's most elite infantry formation. Despite slight majority in numbers, the French offensive soon crumbled for a lack of punch, mobility and also supply. After the loss of 5 divisions as compared to 1 German, the French forces surrendered.

## Battle of Montelimar

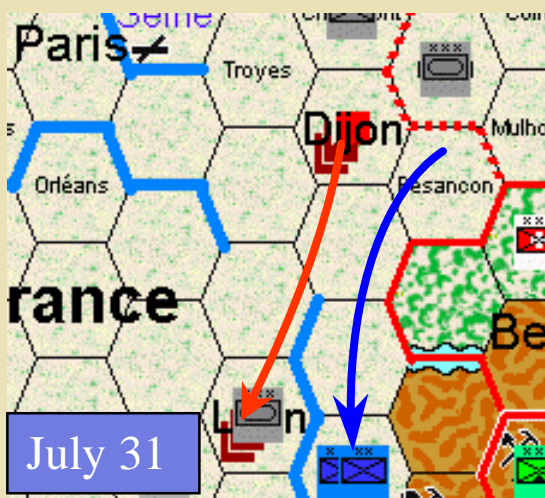
I Panzer-Korps pursued the routing elements of French 6me Corps and 6me Armee. After overrunning the rearguard in Valence, I Pz-K started rolling up the French army from behind. At Montelimar it became evident that the superior German mobility would not allow the escape of the army. General Joselin decided to turn around and defend in depth with his army. But the German tanks cut a wedge into the French defense, broke through to the south and cut off the French army from all supply and communications. French units then tried to break out at company to battalion level, pressing hard at the small number of German forces surrounding the area of Montelimar. Despite severe losses, the German ring held tight, the French had to surrender with over 100,000 troops after receiving over 50,000 casualties.



# Mopping up the remains



On 3 June 1940, the XVI. Pz.K. and XL. A.K. attacked the remnants of 1<sup>st</sup> French tank corps at Verdun. Outmatched and outnumbered by the fast German tanks, the French formation was not able to retreat and collapsed under the German blitz. Airfield was overrun with planes unable to scramble. 6<sup>me</sup> Armée attacked from Colmar via Nancy but reached Verdun too late to save their comrades. A fierce battle ensued with the French army ferociously fighting the six German divisions. XL. A.K. took so much damage that its remnants were used to reinforce XVI. Pz.K. and form a rump division for rearward security. 6<sup>me</sup> Armée lost 4 divisions and retreated badly corrupted to Nancy. Winged by its victory, and blessed with the luck of the prowess, the German tank corps single-handedly counterattacked the 6<sup>me</sup> Armée and retreated them all the way back to Colmar, overrunning the French army group south HQ and an airfield with the 3<sup>rd</sup> Bomber Wing.



Meanwhile, I. Pz-K occupied Lyons. The French planes had already left the airfields and evacuated south. In the following battles, the Luftwaffe completely dominated the skies and largely contributed to the German successes. French formations were observed coming from the north past German positions on the other side of the Rhone. German artillery shelled the retreating columns of 3<sup>me</sup> 4<sup>me</sup> & 6<sup>me</sup> Corps plus 6<sup>me</sup> Armée. However still they managed to slip past the German forces and reached Valence in early August. Many destroyed French vehicles seamed the autoroute Dijon-Marseilles. But a sizeable force was evacuated to Northern Africa in September to form the core of the Free French resistance force.



# Time for the scavengers

After Germany's decisive victory, her allies join for a feast





# Spain joins in



The Spanish 5<sup>th</sup> Reserve Div attacked Marseilles and ran into French 7<sup>th</sup> Corps, took severe losses and was annihilated. 7<sup>th</sup> Corps counterattacked across the river upon following Spanish 6<sup>th</sup> Reserve Division, which surrendered after short battle.

Two Spanish reserve divisions captured undefended oil fields at Bordeaux-5 and pressed on towards the city. A French militia division resisted, resulting in the annihilation of the Spanish 3<sup>rd</sup> Reserve Division. The French militia only gave up after Paris was reportedly taken by German troops.

Sooner than anticipated, the French government collapsed under the mutual assault, which, after thorough analysis, played into the hands of the German offensive after France demonstrated her inability to maintain a solid defense line. In the resulting moving encounters the German mobile force played out their full advantage. Battle results were not surprising to the French commanders with the exception of Nancy, where the German counter attack really shocked them. But the French soldiers need not complain. They did their duty and kept their pride. The French were able to prove their capabilities against the much worse fighting Spaniards who were folly enough challenge them.



# And also the Italians



The Italian 5<sup>th</sup> Legion and 11<sup>th</sup> Corps attacked Nice with a clear numerical superiority in mid-June. The French were driven from the city at little losses. Cavallero took one division from his fast reserves to bring the army back to full strength, then further pressed on to the outskirts of Marseilles.

The French then began to frenzy out. With a medley of panic and a false sense of superiority, de Gaulle ordered 3<sup>me</sup> and 4<sup>me</sup> Corps to attack the Italian positions east of Marseilles. Indeed there was some initial success, as the Italians were just reinforcing the area with another corps. When that happened, the battle odds were already 1:1, but as German troops corroded the rearward area and cut off the supply lines, all attacking French had to surrender to the Italians and Germans.

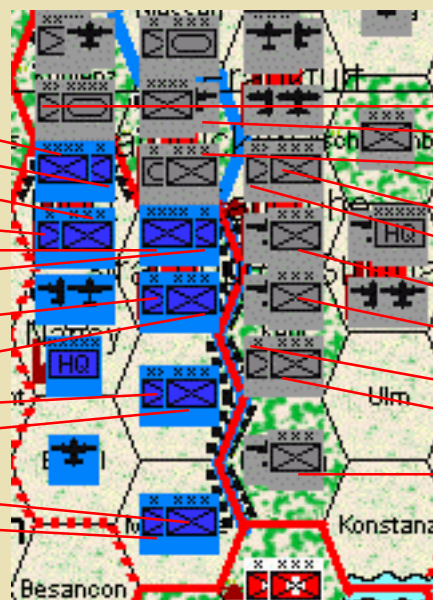
It is arguable whether these troops could have evacuated, too. The French seemed to have gathered enough transport space to evacuate their three corps and one army, at least on the paper. Even if so, some troops would have to guard the embarking troops. A German attack into Marseilles, as opposed to relieving the Italians, could have turned the French escape into a disaster. Nevertheless the evacuation was a brilliant plan.



# Innocent Bystanders

## Maginot Line

- 13me Armée
- 1re Corps
- 5me Corps
- 8me Corps
- 12me Armée
- 2me Corps
- 9me Corps
- 15me Corps
- 6me Armée
- 6me Corps
- 3me Corps
- 4me Corps



## Westwall

- IV. Armee-Korps
- XXX. Armee-Korps
- V. Armee-Korps
- I. Panzergrenadier-Korps
- XX. Armee-Korps
- 7. Armee
- XXXII. Armee-Korps
- VI. Armee-Korps
- IX. Armee-Korps
- XXVIII. Armee-Korps
- XII. Armee-Korps

During this time  
protected

### Grenoble

16me Armée

### Marseilles

11me Corps

17me Corps

18me Corps

### Nice

16me Corps

## Maginot Line-Westwall

### France

900,000 men

500 tanks

(54 divisions)

### Germany

650,000 men

100 tanks

(39 divisions)

## Other areas

350,000 men

200 tanks

(21 divisions)

350,000 men

0 tanks

(21 divisios)

During this time were stationed

## In the Reich

XXXV. Armee-Korps

XXXVII. Armee-Korps

## In Poland

II. Armee-Korps

XI. Armee-Korps

XVII. Armee-Korps

## In Slovakia

XVIII. Gebirgs-Korps

## In Lithuania

XXVI. Armee-Korps



# Aftermath



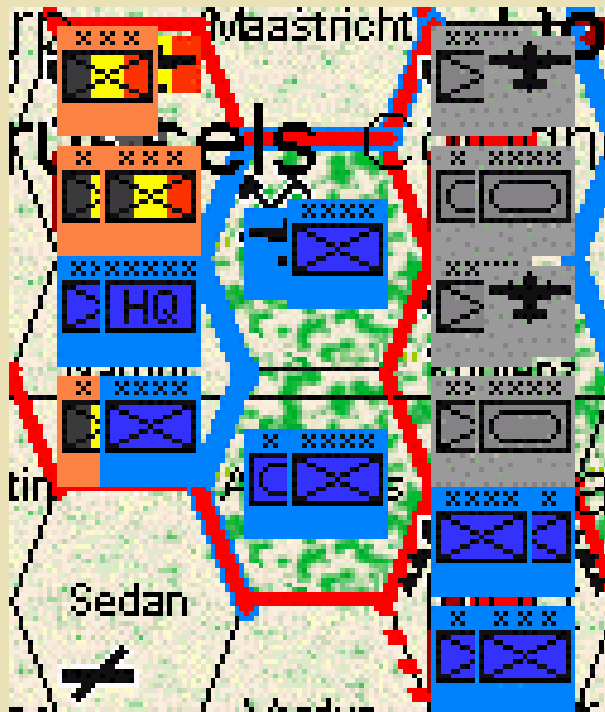
The Germans cannot complain over the result, although General Manstein, one of the chief planners and executors of the French campaign, pointed out German mistakes and weaknesses. However, the Wehrmacht suffered the losses she was prepared for. About 200,000 combat losses were recorded, half of these lethal. Of the wounded and missing, 50% can be expected to be ready for service within a year. The losses in supply and equipment are being compensated by the masses of captured French material.

The stubborn French resistance, triggered and fueled by de Gaulle and Weygand produced a more fierce, more attritious battle than the Germans anticipated for the type of moving combat that dominated all encounters. So the Germany cost may have been higher, but the chief one who suffered was the French soldier. Their losses in dead and wounded could have been almost equal to the German side. In fact they reached the amount of 600,000 men, dead, wounded or missing. Almost a million surrendered, and 200-250,000 escaped via Marseilles to Algeria. 50,000 were left at Bordeaux on a suicide command.

France is split in many parts. One part is occupied by Germany, one by Italy and one by Spain, one by the new 'Vichy' French government. Parts of France and the colonies are held by the 'Free' French Gaullists. France paid a high price for war but her freedom fighters can still contribute to the alliance she set out with.



# French vs. German Organization



**French 8me Armée:**  
3 Corps à 3 Infantry Divisions  
150,000 men  
900 armored cars  
300 tanks

**French Armored Corps:**  
3 Armored Divisions  
50,000 men  
300 armored cars  
700 tanks

**French Armored Division:**  
16,000 men  
100 armored cars  
230 tanks

**French Infantry Division:**  
17,000 men  
100 armored cars  
35 tanks

**German 1. Panzer-Armee:**  
3 Panzer-Korps  
140,000 men  
1600 armored cars  
1000 tanks

**German Panzer-Korps:**  
1 Panzer-Division  
2 Mechanized Divisions  
or  
2 Motorized Divisions

**German Panzer-Division:**  
14,000 men  
200 armored cars  
300 tanks

**German Mechanized Division:**  
12,000 men  
500 armored cars  
50 tanks

**German Motorized Division:**  
17,000 men  
1000 half-tracks



# Conclusions



Of an entire 149 divisions the Wehrmacht had readied by April 1940, 60% were committed to the small area where their generals planned to stage the deciding thrust into France. Of a total of 166 Allied divisions, the majority was positioned to defend just the same area, where a slight superiority in number of troops (1.5 vs. 1.4 million) and tanks (3,700 vs. 3,600) was achieved over Germany. However the operational distribution, the organization and foremost – the battle plan grossly splattered the Allied efforts to counter the German assault. In Liège the Germans attacked with 2:1 superiority and more than 5:1 in tanks. In the southern Ardennes the Germans attacked with 3:1, and despite even odds at tanks, the German tanks were better concentrated and followed closely up by motorized infantry, rapidly outmaneuvering the French defenders. In both battles the Germans enjoyed air superiority and excellent support by precise dive-bombing attacks. The German armored tactic proved successful in all cases except where the enemy countered with equal numbers and concentrations of tanks, such as in the first stages of the battle of Ardennes. But the French defended there only with weak numbers, and allied reserves in Paris and Dieppe were too far-flung to reach the critical point in time. The German para assault on Sedan played a decisive role to thwart the French reaction movement, preventing reinforcement of the Ardennes area. When the Germans broke through, the campaign was practically decided.



# Epilogue



Directive from the 'Führer' to his generals, August 1940

“Congratulations on driving the enemy back to the sea. Now that Paris has fallen and the French chain of command is effectively in shambles, England is our strongest remaining enemy. The harder we hit them now, the easier the remainder of this war will become for our side.

Now that “Case Yellow” has effectively moved to a successful conclusion, we must work with great wisdom to win over the sympathies of the French people. This includes a friendly and correct behavior that conducts the following message, which shall be spread by paper and radio media all across France:

This conflict was not the result of German aggression, but of the war-mongering efforts of De Gaulle, who is a traitor to France, and Churchill. The German peace proposal is generous and infinitely more beneficial than was the harsh dictate of Versailles. France will stay occupied and humiliated only for as long as England continues the war. It is therefore the English government's responsibility and fault, not ours. We have made our peace proposals already.

signed, Adolf Hitler“

