

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to another exciting issue of *Against the Odds!* A few years back, we published our “Four Roads to Moscow.” This was very successful, and so we decided to give it another try with “Four Roads to Paris.” Again, four established designers have pondered why the Nazis beat the supposedly superior and prepared Western Allies in May 1940. You hold in your hands the results of their labors, four splendid games on the Fall of France.

Naturally, there’s more. Besides a main article going over the various threads represented in the games, Ed Heinsman takes a look at the numbers and gives his opinion on why numbers don’t always matter. J.D. Webster gives us a detailed examination of Hitler’s “Flying Artillery.” John Burt then takes us past the surrender at Compiègne to show that after this stunning upset, Hitler’s follow-up was lacking. As was said about the late Yasser Arafat, Hitler, scrambling to find an advantage to solidify his monstrous empire, never missed an opportunity to miss an opportunity.

We have rounded out your experience with a centuries-long view of the wars for the African slave trade, leaving us much to ponder. You may come away angry; you may come away sad; but you will definitely come away enlightened.

Since this is a World War II themed annual, I’d like to thank the fine folks at Casemate Books for some recent books on the conflict, including *Operation Market Garden* edited by John Buckley and Peter Preston-Hough, *Konev’s Golgotha* by Mikhail Filippenkov about Operation Typhoon, and *Operation Barbarossa 1941*, by Christer Bergstrom, another opulent treatment in his series of books, full of maps, photos, and orders of battle. You can visit Casemate at casematepublishing.com

For now, though, it’s time to take the road to Paris. Which road, you ask? Well, we have four for you to choose from. It’s up to you.

Andy

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THE FALL OF FRANCE

AN ANALYSIS OF SEVERAL THEORIES

BY ANDY NUNEZ

with twelve maps by Terry Leeds



“This is not peace, but an armistice of twenty years.”
 —French Marshal Ferdinand Foch, 1919

There are stacks and stacks of books about the events leading to the surrender of France in the summer of 1940. The many factors that conspired to bring down the Third Republic and lead France into the subjugation of the gloating Adolf Hitler mean that even an article of this size is too short to give more than an overview of competing, or perhaps, converging, views. Within are four games with points of view modelling some of the theories. My aim is to look at these and beyond, to get a glimpse of the state of affairs that led to gloomy Compiègne and the humiliation of France.

My first exposure to the May 1940 campaign, as a teen, was watching the film *Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*, which showed Hitler doing his little jig that the propagandists rigged by clever editing and looping. Prior to that, my exposure to World War II was mostly through American eyes in comics like *Sergeant Rock*, *Star Spangled War Stories*, *Sergeant Fury and His Howling Commandos*, *Fightin’ Army*, and *Combat*. On TV, it was the same, with *Combat* battling through occupied France and *Hogan’s Heroes* giving a skewed vision of the brutality of the prison camp system. In college, I discovered board wargames, one of the first being the Avalon Hill Game Company’s remake of the *Strategy and Tactics* game *France ’40*, with “Fast Heinz” Guderian leaning forward across the cover. What I learned about German tactics was simple. The German attack factors were 7 and the French were 6. Surrounding a French division was always fatal to the gallant Gauls. Eventually, the French ran out of divisions.

The three main views are that the Germans were better, French doctrine was a failure, and good old Perfidious Albion (see the “We Were Betrayed” sidebar for the latter). The first theory can be dealt with quickly, because it has been written about by far better historians than me. The Germans, tactically, were better. They had been honing their skills for some years, by air in the Spanish Civil War (via the Condor Legion) and on the ground (the mobilizations for occupation of Czechoslovakia and Austria showed glaring deficiencies that were amended). They put the lessons to good use in their invasion of Poland, the trigger that turned Europe into a blazing conflagration for nearly five years.

As a blogger summed it up, the Germans won every meeting engagement the first few years of the war, but if their opponent had room to retreat and regroup, they would be back. The Polish didn’t, the French didn’t, but the English did, both at Dunkirk and in Egypt, the Russians did (twice –1941 and 1942), and the Americans did after Kasserine. There are other things that the Germans did well, but we’ll get to them in the analysis of the campaign later on.

We will do other comparisons in the main article, but for now, let’s look at what the French did after the end of World War I that put them in a position to lose 123,426 dead, 5,213 missing, and over 200,000 wounded. So, let’s look at the idea that the French doctrine, well, sucked. It was rigid and ignored its own intelligence findings. Worse, lower echelon commands sucked more. They were not aggressive and poorly trained for the task at hand, which was stopping a blitzkrieg attack such as the one launched against Poland. While the term “sucked” is pretty harsh, there has to be some way to explain this, so let’s begin.



A Journal of History and Simulation
 Against the Odds Annual 2015
 published December 2016

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PRINTING COORDINATION
 Phoenix Printers

DIE-CUTTING
 Sure Fold Company Inc.
 Philadelphia PA

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 Printed in the USA.

