

TAC NEWS

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L'ÉTAT FRANÇAIS

Integrating the French Army into the World of Wehrmacht '47

The GHQ Wehrmacht '47[®] project is a broad umbrella, in the shade of which anything is possible. It allows for the deployment of technology and forces that never actually saw the light of day (at least in a WWII context), a concept dear to the hearts of many Micro Armour[®] gamers and collectors. In this essay we will explore the possibilities inherent in a more active French participation in the war after 1940 and the expanded wargaming opportunities this provides for Micro Armour[®] gamers. As in all other aspects of Wehrmacht '47[®], we are not advocating any particular alternate history timeline, only 'suggesting' possible alternatives to actual history in order to show what can be done by the liberal application of imagination and creativity to what is often thought of as a rather dry and sterile topic, namely, "What do I do with all these French tanks after I've run the battle for Stonne?" Here, we have two main routes France might have taken which would lead to a more active role in the war. Both are equally well documented historically and are quite within the realm of possibility.

Axis Vichy

After a catastrophic defeat in 1940, the collapse of the Third Republic resulted in the establishment of *l'État Français* (The French State) in July of that year under the paternal gaze of the octogenarian Marshal Philippe Pétain in the tourist city of Vichy (due mostly to the large number of luxury hotel rooms available as office space). Among the first things on the agenda for the new Vichy leadership was establishing France's role in the "New World Order" once a permanent peace settlement was reached with the Third Reich. This was based primarily on a belief that Great Britain would see the futility of continued resistance and sue for peace themselves within weeks. Of course this didn't happen, requiring France to cast about for other ways to limit the damage done by the defeat and to rebuild the wealth and prestige given away under the severe conditions imposed on them by their conquerors. This gave rise to the term 'Collaboration' in a context specific to their situation. Pétain and the men of Vichy had replaced '*Liberté, Égalité, et Fraternité*' (liberty, equality, and fraternity) with '*Travail, Famille, Patrie*' (work, family,

homeland) and were determined to push forward a sort of 'revolutionary' program of labor, economic sacrifice, and patriotism to rejuvenate what, in their eyes, had become a decadent society. To this end Pétain's (formerly socialist) foreign minister, Pierre Laval pursued a policy of working closely with the Germans to integrate the new France into the Nazi war economy. Their aim was to come out of the war as the premier European economic power second only to the German Reich, to obtain the release of French prisoners of war, end the German occupation of France (which was bleeding them white financially), protect France's overseas colonial empire, and punish Britain as the instigator of war with Germany in the first place. From July of 1940 until the liberation of France by the Allies in 1944 the Vichy regime moved closer and closer to their German masters, both politically and economically, so that by the time the war had arrived on French soil again after D-Day, an incipient civil war was raging between the French 'underground' and the Vichy Milice (para-military force).

What is often not discussed (or even mentioned) is the fact that Vichy made repeated attempts to convince the Germans that they should take a more active role in the war. Four events in particular come to mind: the British attack on the French fleet at Mers el Kabir in North Africa in July of 1940; the attack on Dakar (Operation Menace) later that year; the Allied invasion of Syria in 1941; and the invasion of Madagascar in 1942. Each of these events created opportunities for closer collaboration with the Axis, allowing France to show its support for the New Order and regain some of her lost prestige. What never seems to have occurred to them is that Hitler despised everything even remotely French. Despite his own experience of French ferocity in WWI, he discounted their abilities as soldiers, and saw them as racial and ethnic 'mongrels' without character or honor. Hitler's view of the French was the same as his view of the Russians, and Poles. They were simply a source of cash and resources, to be wrung out until there was nothing left. All this is documented fact, but what if Hitler had become convinced that Pétain and the French 'Right' were somehow kindred spirits in his war on racial

'impurity'? Vichy wholeheartedly embraced his anti-Semitic policies, rounding up Jews and other 'sub-humans' to be shipped off to 'Death Camps'. They sent hundreds of thousands to die from overwork and starvation in German labor camps. Perhaps they should be given a chance to demonstrate their loyalty militarily as well...

Integrating Vichy French military strength into that of *Gross Deutschland* isn't really a difficult matter. Throughout the war French factories continued to turn out trucks, tractors, aircraft, and other military equipment for the *Wehrmacht* on a scale unmatched by any other occupied country. Many German self-propelled artillery weapons made use of French chassis. French tanks were often used for training and even took the field in a pinch on more than one occasion. It is interesting to note what might have happened had the Vichy garrison in Syria enjoyed a much higher level of readiness and more modern equipment than they had, or the effects of an active French defense of North Africa in 1942 to oppose the "Torch" landings. Then there is the fact that the French navy was one of the most modern in Europe in 1940. Active French naval participation in the battle for the Mediterranean opens up tremendous opportunities for surface actions involving capital ships. The possibilities are limited only by your imagination.

NATIONALIST FRANCE

The political atmosphere in France between 1918 and 1939 was as turbulent and unstable as in any period in that nation's long and dramatic history. One crisis after another battered governmental institutions with sickening rapidity. Political alliances, cartels, cabals, plots, counterplots, scandals (both political and economic) formed and collapsed like bubbles in a cauldron. There is one clear thread however in all this turmoil, the constant presence and threat of Fascism in one or another of its many forms. Early on, one of the most important of the "Fascist" groups was the royalist "*Ligue d'Action Française*," backed by its newspaper of the same name. Authoritarian, traditionalist, and violence-prone, many future Fascists earned their stripes in the league. Though strong, this group was never able to attract the numbers necessary for real political power.

Two periods of crisis, the monetary and political collapse of 1924-26 and the great depression of the 1930s, saw the most rapid growth of French Fascist movements, when the threat of leftist governments and an atmosphere of economic distress generated both the popular base and the business support required to get the whole thing off the ground. The victory of the "*Cartel des gauches*" (alliance of the Left) in 1924 led not only to the expansion of existing leagues but also to the birth of France's first openly Fascist party, the "*Faisceau*" led by Georges Valois. Valois' greatest achievements were to make the name "Fascist" (an Italian term, after all) acceptable in France and focusing on what would remain the preferred recruiting ground for all French right-wing movements: WWI veterans. The *Faisceau* collapsed when

Valois abandoned anti-Semitism and veered to the left. His followers simply walked away in disgust.

After 1928 many former *Faisceau* members gravitated to other veteran-dominated organizations supported by the right-wing millionaire François Coty (the perfume distiller), who had also been one of the *Faisceau's* biggest backers. Among these was the former *Faisceau* propaganda chief, and richly decorated war veteran, Marcel Bucard. In 1933 he founded France's second overtly Fascist party, the "*Francistes*". Bucard accepted large amounts of Italian money to support Mussolini and eventually became increasingly anti-Semitic in order to hold on to this most poisonous segment of the French Right. Two other, more conservative groups financed by Coty overshadowed the 10,000 members of the "*Parti Franciste*". The largest, the "*Croix de Feu*" (Cross of Fire), was initially founded as an exclusively veterans' organization, but after being taken over by Colonel François de La Rocque in 1930, it was opened to non-veterans and its membership grew to over 500,000! More faithful to Coty's ideas was "*Solidarité Française*", which combined a program of strengthening the executive branch of government with anticommunism, anti-masonry, and anti-Semitism. The greatest period of growth for French Fascism, however, took place during the Great Depression, with its development shaped by the February 1934 riots. The Right-Center government of national union that followed these served as the basis for the alliance of socialists, Communists, and radicals that became the "Popular Front" of 1936. The accession of Léon Blum (a Jew and a socialist) as prime minister brought on a lot of anti-Semitic agitation, drawing the widely disparate anti-democratic and anti-Semitic groups more tightly together.

The political earthquakes of 1934-36 led to fascism in other ways as well. The popular Communist mayor of Saint-Denis, Jacques Doriot, who had attempted to provoke a communist-socialist alliance before 6 February 1934, in defiance of the "party line", was expelled by the Communists for indiscipline (i.e. failure to tow the party line). When the party later officially adopted his tactics, he vigorously denounced his former comrades who blocked him from any role in the Popular Front and Doriot had to abandon his original plans to serve as the unifier of the French Left. Starting with a sort of "national Communism", he quickly swerved to the right, and in 1936 founded the largely Fascist "*Parti Populaire Français*" (PPF). This new group, which peaked at approximately 100,000 members, consisted of former Communists, many workers from Saint-Denis, former Radicals like Bertrand de Jouvenel, and intellectuals like Pierre Drieu la Rochelle. For several years, it also attracted important business support. PPF ideology was revolutionary and nationalist, but its socialism gradually gave way to corporatism and the defense of the middle class. Anticommunism became an obsession with Doriot, who combined it, like so many French Rightists with anti-masonry and anti-Semitism. Doriot's fascism was that of a politician squeezed out by

the workings of Third Republic politics. Polarization of French political life during the mid-1930s soon led to increased political violence.

French governments (rising and dying like May flies) moved to halt this ever-increasing violence by outlawing the paramilitary leagues. It was of little effect. In 1932 President Doumer was assassinated. In 1934 it was Foreign Minister Barthou's turn. During the period of agitation preceding the 1936 elections, a group of former *Action Française* members attacked Léon Blum. As a result, the royalist league was banned. Later the Popular Front government effectively outlawed all paramilitary groups. The principal Rightist movements then reorganized themselves as political parties. The *Croi de Feu* became the "*Parti Social Français*" etc. One of the effects of this change was to put French Fascists into more direct competition with the established conservative parties. Despite their fanatical opposition to the Popular Front and allits works, the French radical Right could not unite. A "*Front de la liberté*" to oppose Communism was formed in 1937, but the *Parti Social Française*, refused to join. With war on the horizon, internal French politics took a back seat to national survival, but the seeds of jealousy, hatred, and arrogance sown in the inter-war years would grow in the shadows into strangling vines, ready to suffocate the life out of French democracy under Nazi occupation in 1940.

L'ÉTAT FRANÇAIS

If you aren't lost in the above labyrinth, it should be clear that there were several opportunities for Fascist and Proto-Fascist groups to seize power in the chaotic atmosphere of French politics between the wars. What seems to have been lacking was a figurehead, a "man on horseback" so to speak, to rally the seething mass of angry, frustrated, citizens into a single movement like those in Germany or Italy. In his capacity as savior of the French nation after the bloodbath years of the WWI Western Front, Marshal Philippe Pétain may be the only man with the stature to pull this off, if you can get past the fact that, though an admittedly ambitious man, Pétain lacked the energy to cut his way through the inevitable opposition to the establishment of a true Fascist dictatorship. However, we should never lose sight of the fact that the French nation, prostrate after the disastrous defeat of 1940, turned to him literally on bended knee to beg him to lead them out of the pit in which they had found themselves. Hindsight is, of course, unerring, but a close reading of public sentiment during the troubled times from 1924 through 1939, with special attention to the period around February 6th 1934 has led to the belief that the horrors of Vichy and the German occupation might very well have been replaced by an equally horrific period of French Nationalist dictatorship. What effect this would have had on France's Axis neighbors (especially Germany) is another matter. The U.S.S.R was no democracy, yet they fought a brutal war of annihilation against Germany in the 1940's. Much would depend on the state of Hitler's mind (a difficult thing to

fathom under any circumstances), but the possibilities for exciting wargaming are simply enormous.

ON BEYOND 1940

Whatever political, military, or diplomatic path France takes, other than the one she actually took, that leads her to take an active part in the war beyond 1940, many things will remain unchanged. French military thinkers (including the outspoken Colonel deGaulle) were unanimous in the belief that the nation's territorial integrity was of paramount importance. Every effort was to be made to guarantee the security of France's land frontiers, especially in the industrial Northeast, which had suffered so much damage during the First World War. In addition, her coastal cities, especially along the Mediterranean, must be made safe from enemy blockade if maritime shipping were to pass to and from the motherland and her resource-rich colonial African empire. By 1940, as stated above, France possessed a large and modern navy capable of holding its own, at least in the Western Mediterranean with just this goal in mind.

Operationally, French doctrine had been laid down in blood between 1915 and 1917. Marshall Pétain, the hero of Verdun, put it most simply, "Firepower kills!" The French army was ideally to be equipped with as many machineguns as might be deemed necessary, dug in deep wherever possible, and backed up by a large artillery pool sighted for interlocking fields of fire. Any enemy advance would be channeled into pre-established killing zones where it would smash like a sea-wave against a stone breakwater. The enemy would then be allowed to batter itself to death against French defenses until such time as the necessary resources could be gathered to smash back with overwhelming force in something called "*Bataille conduite*" (methodical battle). No offensive action was to be taken without all the necessary pieces being in place and assigned their various roles. However, defending the colonies would not be so simple a matter as halting an invasion of the homeland on a narrow front, over familiar ground, and under ideal conditions of supply and communication. In Africa, war would be a mobile thing, with speed and tactical agility at a premium. French Africa (don't forget Syria!) was a 'wild and woolly' place, comprising vast emptinesses, steaming jungles, broad savannahs, and endless empty coastlines. Defending this enormous territory would require a body of experienced professionals. The framework around which such a body could be built and maintained already existed: the French Colonial Forces (*l'Armée Coloniale*) and the Foreign Legion (*la Légion Étrangère*).

OUTRE-MER

Contrary to popular belief, France never abandoned mechanized mobility, motorization, or combined arms tactics. In fact, much of the groundwork for the '*Blitzkrieg*' was laid down in the formulation of "Plan 1919" during the last year of WWI. It is also a well-documented fact that the

French Army was in the midst of a major reorganization and re-equipment program when the Wehrmacht opened "Fall Gelb" in May of 1940. Large numbers of excellent 47mm anti-tank guns were in the process of being distributed, as well as improved aircraft, tanks, and artillery pieces. In addition, the reforms advocated by Colonel deGaulle were finally being seriously considered for implementation during the Summer of 1940, only to be short-circuited by the German drive through the Ardennes in May. The tables of organization and equipment below represent one interpretation of how these reforms would have effected the French Colonial forces in Africa and Syria in 1947 had France's war not ended in 1940. The "Overseas"

(*Outre-Mer*) army would be the nation's first line of defense. In the world of Wehrmacht '47® it is entirely possible for the French Army to not only adopt more modern and practical armored doctrine, but to make use of its improved relationship with *Gross Deutschland* to obtain licenses to manufacture German equipment and to purchase captured enemy equipment (especially Soviet types) to upgrade its arsenal. This allows you to bring the French Army into 1947 and use it to defend Northwest Africa from being overrun by a combined American-African Union invasion coming up from the South.

- John Fernandes

NORTH AFRICAN/LEVANTINE MECHANIZED DIVISION (1947)

Dragons Portés Company:	3x Infantry/Carrier, 1x MMG/Carrier
Armored Car Company:	4x Armored Car
Reconnaissance Company:	4x Infantry[R]/Carrier
Antitank Company:	3x Anti-Tank Gun
Tank Company:	4x Tank
Engineer Company:	3x Engineer/Truck
Anti-Aircraft Company:	1x Light AA Gun/Porté
Dragons Portés Regiment:	1x Infantry HQ/Carrier, 4x Mechanized Infantry Co, 1x Tank Company, 1x 81mm Mortar/Carrier
Armored Regiment:	1x Tank HQ, 4x Tank Co, 1x Mechanized Infantry Co
Anti-Tank Regiment:	3x Anti-Tank Company
Reconnaissance Groupe:	2x Armored Car Company, 2x Recon Company
Artillery Regiment:	1x Infantry HQ/Truck or APC, 3x Artillery(2)/Truck or Tractor
Engineer Battalion:	3x Engineer Company
Mechanized Brigade:	1x Armored Regiment, 1x Dragons Portés Regiment, 1x Artillery Regiment
Mechanized Division:	3x Mechanized Brigade, 1x Recon Groupe, 1x AT Battalion, 1x AA Co, 1x Engineer Battalion

Notes:

1. The above Table of Organization and Equipment is based on that of French colonial forces in the Indo-China War and the French army associated with NATO during its early years.
2. French carriers during this period might include trucks, various German vehicles built on license, or perhaps early versions of the Hotchkiss TT6 (used by the Bundeswehr during the 1950s and 60s as the Spz.10).
3. French Armored Cars might include the excellent AMD.178 (especially the 'G' variant armed with the 47mm mle.37). This vehicle served well into the 1960s.
4. French Tanks might include Somua S.35s upgunned to 75mm, German Pz.V Panthers built on license, captured Soviet T.34s, or perhaps the highly advanced AMX.13/75 which entered production right after WWII and actually entered service as early as 1953.
5. French Anti-Tank guns might include various German or Soviet types in addition to other 'home-grown' varieties.
6. Anti-Aircraft weapons could include various German types, as well as the ubiquitous Bofors 40mm (used by virtually everybody).
7. Artillery might include Schneider Mle.13s or other 105mm types (with various improvements).

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