

WHY THE ACTIONS OF VICHY FRANCE WERE HELPFUL TO THE ALLIED
CAUSE DURING WORLD WAR II

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores how the initial defeat of the French army in June 1940 and subsequent request by Marshal Pétain for an armistice with Nazi Germany which was followed by collaboration with the Nazi regime in an attempt to maintain some degree of French National Sovereignty would eventually allow the Vichy French time to aid the Allies in the defeat of Germany. Under terms of the armistice, the Germans fully occupied the Northern Region of France, leaving the French government to administer the Southern region of France as well as the French North African colonies. This paper will argue that exigent circumstances instigated the call for the armistice. This paper will show the extent of the collaboration between Vichy and the Nazi regime. A significant number of Vichy leaders clandestinely and the French populace in general reached out to the Allies in various ways aiding the Allied cause during World War II.

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CHAPTER I
THE GERMAN INVASION AND FRENCH DEFEAT

When war erupted in 1939, France mobilized against a traditional enemy, Germany. French society had faced Germany less than a quarter century before. This paper explores how the German military conquest of France in the summer of 1940 changed the government of France. It changed from a constitutional democracy to a totalitarian regime under the French hero of Verdun who earned his fame during the Great War. Marshal Philippe Pétain was that hero. During the course of World War II significant Vichy French leaders clandestinely and French society in general would eventually defy the dictate of Nazi Germany. This aided the Allied cause in spite of the armistice called for by Pétain in June 1940.

There is a great deal of debate among historians concerning what role the government and populace of Vichy France played in the outcome of World War II. American historian Robert Paxton wrote: “no one who lived through the French debacle of May-June 1940 ever got over the shock. For Frenchmen, confident of a special role in the world, the six weeks’ defeat by German armies was a shattering trauma.”¹ The unexpected rapid defeat of France shattered the confidence of the Allies in their quest to

¹ Robert Paxton, *Vichy France: Old Guard and New Order* (New York: Knoph, 1972), 3.

curb or if possible halt Hitler's blatant aggression and obvious intension to dominate Europe and the World.

In 1940 the renowned French historian and resistance fighter Marc Bloch wrote a first-hand account of the German invasion and rapid collapse of France, which occurred during his service as a reserve officer in the French army. The significance of Bloch's account was it provided historians a view of the military collapse of France through the eyes of a first-rate historian whose critical faculty and all the penetrating analysis added credibility to the account far in excess of a typical narrative. In this work, Bloch agonizingly struggled with why France and the French army were so inefficient in defense of the homeland. Bloch, after significant analysis, concluded that the main cause of the disaster was the incompetent French High Command as well as other important factors including how French national solidarity had been comprised since 1870. Bloch intuitively wrote: "the duty of reconstructing our country will not fall on the shoulders of my generation. France in defeat will be seen to have had a Government of old men. That is but natural. France of the new springtime must be the creation of the young."² Historians continue to write and argue the copious factors that caused the rapid collapse of the French army in 1940 but it is difficult for any to exceed the insight and analysis of Marc Bloch.

The catastrophic defeat that Bloch described was a reality and by the middle of June 1940, the government leaders in Paris were packing up their offices and preparing to leave Paris to the German invader. What to do now? It was apparent that someone had to step forward and deal with Adolf Hitler while keeping order in France and its colonies.

² Marc Bloch, *Strange defeat: A Statement of Evidence Written in 1940*, translated by Gerald Hopkins (New York: Norton & Company, 1968), 175.

Who amid all the chaos commanded the instant respect and possessed legitimacy with the French people? One possibility was Marshal Henri Phillipe Pétain, the hero of Verdun, advocate of the Maginot Line, and recently named Paul Reynaud's vice-premier. As the victorious German army marched into Paris, on June 16, 1940, French Prime Minister Paul Reynaud resigned in favor of a hero of the First World War, Marshal Pétain who immediately requested terms for an armistice from Hitler. The Third Republic had collapsed.

It should be noted that only eight months prior to the collapse M. Edouard Daladier, President of the Council of Ministers, had proclaimed in Paris to the French people "Men and women of France! We are waging war because it has been thrust on us. Every one of us is at his post, on the soil of France, on that land of liberty where respect of human dignity finds one of its last refuges. You will all cooperate, with a profound feeling of union and brotherhood, for the salvation of the country, Vive la France!"³

Daladier's words "for the salvation of the country" must have been in the mind of Marshal Pétain when he petitioned Germany for an armistice in June 1940. Historically, France had been at odds with Germany for centuries with the memory of World War I and the harsh terms and reparations that France and its Allies had demanded of Germany at Versailles in 1918. At this juncture in the summer of 1940, Marshal Pétain and the people of France had little choice but to ask Germany for an armistice. Marshal Pétain did what he perceived as the only viable option in order to save France as a nation. This paper will argue that even though Vichy France collaborated with Germany partly on

³ "Avalon Project: The French Yellow Book: No. 370: Appeal to the Nation by M. Edouard Daladier, President of the Council of Ministers, Paris, September 3, 1939," Yale Law School, Lillian Goldman Law Library, accessed April 6, 2013, <http://avalon.law.yale.edu/wwii/ylbk370.asp>.

ideological terms on similar perspectives of the Jewish question that it would also be open for collaboration with the Allies for the purpose of redeeming France as an independent nation. In doing so Vichy France would aid the Allied cause.

The exigent circumstances that precipitated the call for an armistice were evident in many of the desperate actions taken by the retreating French army. Robert Paxton wrote: “for there was simply no mistaking the wave of relief which came flooding after the anguish when Marshal Pétain announced over the radio, shortly after noon on June 17, that the government he had formed the night before was seeking an armistice. ‘With heavy heart, I tell you today that it is necessary to stop the fighting.’”⁴ Pétain, the French army and the people of France found themselves in a foreboding situation that would take time to sort out but eventually a significant number of Vichy leaders would exact revenge on their traditional enemy Germany by aiding the Allies most notably in the Allied invasion of North Africa that would occur in November 1942. At this point, it was necessary to weather the storm and hopefully save at least a modicum of National sovereignty.

Historians continue to argue how the French populace during the early Vichy period viewed the devastating military defeat, the terms of the armistice and the new Vichy government. Three important themes of the Vichy experience that received considerable analysis were resistance, collaboration and memory. This paper will focus on collaboration from two perspectives; the collaboration between the Vichy and the Nazi regime and the collaboration between some high ranking members of the Vichy government and the Allies. From the perspective of the resistance, focus will be on the

⁴ Paxton, *Vichy France*, 8.

resistance aimed at the Germans and the resistance against the Vichy government will be explored. Additionally, the role the French police played in support of the Vichy government and police collaboration with the Nazi regime certainly had a critical function in helping the Vichy government continue the policies outlined in the armistice agreement. Article 3 of the Franco-German Armistice of June 1940 stated the obligation the French police had to collaborate with the Nazi regime. This stated that:

In the occupied parts of France the German Reich excises all rights of an occupying power. The French Government obligates itself to support with every means the regulations resulting from the exercise of these rights and to carry them out with the aid of French administration. All French authorities and officials of the occupied territory therefore, are to be promptly informed by the French Government to comply with the regulations of the German military commanders and to cooperate with them in a correct manner...⁵

Ineluctable authoritarian states use the police to ensure the suppression of public liberties. In doing so, police use methodology that would include monitoring public opinion on behalf of the government. Historian Simon Kitson wrote: “Vichy considered the institution as a means of guaranteeing the survival of the state, particularly since ministers were aware from as early as the middle of 1941 that their government was extremely unpopular.”⁶ During the middle of 1941, it was becoming increasingly more apparent that many Vichy leaders and the populace were reaching a point that the Nazi regime could no longer be passively tolerated and must be driven from French soil. The United States had entered the war in December 1941 giving the French hope that the

⁵ “Avalon Project: Article 3 of the Franco-German Armistice: June 25, 1940, Yale Law School, Lillian Goldman Law Library, accessed April 6, 2013, <http://avalon.law.yale.edu/wwii/ylbk370.asp>.

⁶ Simon Kitson, “From Enthusiasm to Disenchantment: The French Police and the Vichy Regime, 1940-1944,” *Contemporary European History*, Vol. 11, No. 3 (August, 2002), pp. 371-390, published by: *Cambridge University Press*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20081843> (accessed: 11/05/2013), 373.

Allies and Vichy militaries would receive vast material assistance as well as large infusions of American troops.

CHAPTER II

COLLABORATION WITH THE ALLIES IN 1942 IN NORTH AFRICA

American's formal entry into World War II in December 1941 significantly changed the course of the war as it infused American strategy and resources into the conflict. The British and American approaches as to how to prosecute the war in Europe were divergent after the Americans entered the war in 1941. The British were essentially designing a strategic plan that would rely on blockade, bombing, subversive activities, and propaganda to weaken the will and ability of Germany to resist. British Prime Minister Winston Churchill was skeptical of confronting the German land forces head on believing that committing vast armies of infantry and armor to the continent like was done in World War I would be a mistake. Instead, he proposed a strategy that would emphasize mobile, hard-hitting armored forces operating on the periphery of German-controlled territory rather than a large scale ground action against the German war machine on the continent. Therefore, Churchill believed that the best approach was to wage war on the continent with a peripheral strategy. Historian Dr. Maurice Matloff wrote: "the Mediterranean or 'soft underbelly' part of the peripheral thesis has received great attention in the post war debate...from the beginning the British leadership

envisaged a cross-Channel operation in force only as the last blow against a Germany already in the process of collapse.”⁷

The Americans on the other hand believed that large-scale land operations would be needed to defeat Germany. Mass concentration was the core of American strategy. Matloff wrote: “in the summer of 1941 the [American] army’s strategic planners concluded that sooner or later ‘we must prepare to fight Germany by actually coming to grips with and defeating her ground forces and definitely breaking her will to combat.’”⁸

These two opposing strategic views of how to best prosecute the war in Europe against Germany and the Axis powers were reflected in 1942 in the debate over Operation Bolero vis-à-vis Operation Torch. American Admiral Harold R. Stark had as early as November 1940 predicted that it would take large scale land operations to defeat Nazi Germany and in the summer of 1941 the army’s strategic planners concluded that in the end the Allies would have to defeat Germany by defeating her ground forces.

After Pearl Harbor in December 1941, Secretary of War Stimson, General Marshal and American war planners in the United States were concerned with American assets becoming too widely disbursed and as a result devised Operation Bolero. The plan was designed to assemble troops and supplies in England for a major cross-Channel invasion as early as the spring of 1943. According to Matloff, the British initially

⁷ Maurice Matloff, “Allied Strategy in Europe, 1939-1945,” in *Makers of Modern Strategy: from Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age*, ed. Peter Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 684.

⁸ *Ibid*, 685.

approved Bolero in principle in April 1942 but that the agreement lasted less than three months.⁹

The British strategic planners were concerned that a major cross-Channel offensive at this juncture would be premature prompting Churchill to go to Washington for a strategy meeting and propose a North African operation instead of Bolero. This new British proposal so frustrated the American war planners that they threatened to concentrate on the Pacific theater instead of Europe, however, President Roosevelt overruled them. Roosevelt believed that since the British were not in favor of a cross-Channel operation in 1942 that a thrust into North Africa would be a viable alternative. Operation Torch would place American ground forces against the Germans and a successful operation in North Africa would help secure vital Mediterranean Sea lanes and potentially secure a staging point for an Allied invasion into southern Europe. Additionally, resources existed for Operation Torch where they were suspect for a cross-Channel operation in 1942.¹⁰

Substantial evidence exists that a significant number of high ranking Vichy military officials would be involved in the planning of Operation Torch and that Vichy complicity with the American Office of Strategic Services (OSS) is additional evidence of high ranking Vichy Officials defying Pétain and the armistice agreement with Germany.

Operation Torch began in the early morning hours of November 8, 1942 when Allied troops, mostly American, landed ashore at various points in Vichy French-

⁹ Matloff, "Allied Strategy in Europe," 685.

¹⁰ Ibid, 686.

controlled Morocco and Algeria marking America's first major offensive in World War II. Historian David A. Walker wrote: "simultaneously, pro-Allied guerrilla fighters organized by General William J. ('Wild Bill') Donovan's recently formed Office of Strategic Services (OSS) sprang into action to assist in the invading forces."¹¹ For the previous three months, these guerrilla fighters had been recruited and trained by OSS agents stationed in Vichy French North Africa. This tactic by American forces represented a new approach or dimension to military operations in the field during World War II. Additionally, OSS agents were tasked with assessing enemy motivation and the conducting of clandestine negotiations designed to create pro-Allied factions in either enemy or neutral countries.¹² It is important to note the early collaboration between American and Vichy French authorities in North Africa began in the form of the vice-consuls organization which was the precursor of the OSS which formed in June 1942 and its predecessor organization, the Office of the Coordinator of Information (COI), in July 1941. In May, 1941 the vice-consuls organization was established after the Murphy-Weygand economic agreement of March 10, 1941. This agreement allowed for certain American goods to be imported into French Northwest Africa even though the British had a blockade of the area in effect. In return, the Americans would be allowed by Vichy French authorities to maintain American observers in Vichy controlled North Africa to monitor the destination of the imported goods and ensure that they did not fall into the

¹¹ David A. Walker, "OSS and Operation Torch," *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 22, no. 4, Intelligence Services during the Second World War: Part 2 (October 1987), pp. 667-679, Published by: *Sage Publications, Ltd.*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/260815> (accessed October 10, 2012), 667.

¹² *Ibid*, 667.

hands of Axis powers.¹³To further accentuate the Vichy American collaboration Dr. Walker wrote: “Furthermore, OSS maintained links with disaffected officers of the Vichy French army of North Africa, and it was on the basis of evidence supplied from this source that OSS agents claimed that the resistance of the Vichy French to a primarily American invasion of North Africa would be minimal.”¹⁴ It was reported that one of the major tasks entrusted to the OSS was the recruitment of the distinguished French General Henri Giraud to the Allied cause. Many historians have noted that, for a long period of time during the planning of Operation Torch, General Eisenhower favored General Giraud over Admiral Darlan to head Vichy French forces during the North African operation. However, other historians dispute this as Douglas Porch points out that Eisenhower believed General Giraud was “reactionary, old-fashioned and cannot be persuaded to modernize...he has no, repeat no, political acumen whatsoever.”¹⁵ A possible reason for the OSS directive on the recruitment of Giraud was found in an incoming message R-2014 from Headquarters ETOUSA on October 16, 1942 addressed for the eyes of General Eisenhower only in paragraph of that communication:

[Eisenhower was] to transmit this information to General Giraud immediately. General Mast stated that General Giraud desires that he be dealt with instead of Darlan, who he feels cannot be trusted, but is merely desirous of climbing on the band wagon. A request was made for an expression of unity of French forces (army and navy), of whom Darlan is Commander-in-Chief. The French Fleet is extremely important in that the admiral controls ports and coastal batteries in French North Africa. Mast stated that the army is loyal to and will be commanded by Giraud instead of Darlan; also, that the navy in French North Africa should go

¹³ Walker, “OSS and Operation Torch,” 668.

¹⁴ Ibid, 668.

¹⁵ Douglas Porch, *The Path to Victory: The Mediterranean Theater in World War II*, (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2004), 366.

along with the army. I urge that the success of the operation depends upon the working of the French forces with us.¹⁶

This message from General Marshal at Headquarters ETOUSA to General Eisenhower on October 16, 1942 provides a portion of the evidence why some historians believe that General Eisenhower preferred Vichy General Giraud over Admiral Darlan to head Vichy French troops during the North African operation. General Mast, who commanded a Vichy French army division in Casablanca, Morocco during this period, was one of America's chief contacts in North Africa and a strong advocate of General Giraud leading French troops during the invasion.

Historian Dr. Arthur Funk has noted, however, that three weeks prior to the commencement of Operation Torch an agreement had been consummated in a London meeting by General Eisenhower, General Clark, Churchill, Eden, and the British Chief of Staff General Sir Allen Brooke and that Roosevelt had been kept informed. Funk wrote: "these deliberations had led to a qualified acceptance of Darlan (he was then considered less useful than a rival candidate, General Henri Giraud) as a possible replacement for Clark as Eisenhower's deputy."¹⁷

The news that Admiral Darlan would lead Vichy troops in North Africa brought indignant protest in the American and British press because he was perceived as a Nazi collaborator and had demonstrated his anti-Semitism as well as his Anglophobia. Additionally, the British had backed and given refuge to Free French leader General

¹⁶ Message taken from General Mark Clark's papers at The Citadel, Charleston, S.C., from Box one, cables and coded messages.

¹⁷ Arthur Funk, "Negotiating the 'Deal with Darlan,'" *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol.8, no. 2 (April, 1973), pp. 81-117, *Sage Publications, Ltd.*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/259995> (accessed March 19. 2013), 81.

Charles de Gaulle, who considered the Allies reported deal with Darlan an ill-considered affront. The editorials in both the British and the American press asked the same basic question: “how could American commanders, General Dwight Eisenhower and his deputy General Mark Clark have been so short-sighted or ignorant that they could improvise a compact with a notorious double-dealer, a fascist and a quisling, in order to obtain uncertain temporary advantage?”¹⁸

Evidence based on documents found in General Mark Clark’s letters show a significant number of high ranking Vichy French officials like General Mast, General Giraud, and Admiral Darlan were open to and did collaborate with the Allied cause. Arthur Funk wrote: “Even before Giraud and Darlan had been taken under consideration, the Allied planners had decided to reach a political and military accord with some Vichy official.”¹⁹

Allied planners, in early October, had drawn up a model agreement as a benchmark to use when they began negotiations between Allied task force commanders and whatever senior Vichy official surfaced in Algeria or Morocco who would be willing and capable to aid the Allies by providing facilities and security measures necessary to prosecute the invasion. There is little doubt that the existence of such a benchmark document was evidence that the Allies were searching for ways to deal with Vichy officials thus aiding their cause during Operation Torch and the war in general. At the insistence of President Roosevelt, General de Gaulle had been ruled out during the early planning stages. Therefore, the principle of collaboration was established weeks before

¹⁸ Funk, “Negotiating the ‘Deal with Darlan,’” 81.

¹⁹ Ibid, 81.

the invasion of North Africa. Once the principle of collaboration with Vichy had been agreed on; it became urgent to identify and successfully recruit a Vichy official.

At this point, it should be noted that General Eisenhower made a last-minute effort to recruit Vichy General Giraud into the operation. Some historians have noted that Allied commanders learned after the invasion that General Giraud had little or no influence in North Africa which left planners little choice but to negotiate with Admiral Darlan. It is well known among scholars that the United States and the British decision makers preferred a friendly Vichy leader to control the operation over an American military government in North Africa which would have been the only practical alternative.²⁰ There is little question that the controversy over which Vichy official would emerge was further complicated because of the demeanor and character of Free French resistance leader General Charles de Gaulle who President Roosevelt refused to consider.

There is evidence that as late as October 1942 the Americans were still considering Giraud because on October 27 General Marshal sent an urgent message to General Eisenhower which stated:

Mast sent messenger to France after meeting with Clark. Giraud request you continue study of plan for bridgehead southern France. He concurs in principle with our plan. Information for me only which I have promised not to transmit to you is that Giraud is willing to come to French Africa for the military operation. He did not wish you to know because last Friday messenger left in the morning by air before I could give him text of proposal which Clark, Mast, and I had agreed upon and approved. Giraud had, therefore, only an oral account of Clark and Mast morning meeting, October 26. On basis of oral preliminary report he agrees, subject to final decision upon study of text.²¹

²⁰ Funk, "Negotiating the 'Deal with Darlan,'" 82.

²¹ Clark letters, Box one, messages and dispatches, The Citadel, Charleston, S.C.

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