

D-DAY, 1944: Essential Historical Context

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Global Research, June 08, 2024

Region: [Europe](#)

Theme: [History](#)

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Introduction

Nazi Germany was a military colossus and defeating the beast was a herculean task that could never have been accomplished singlehandedly by any one of its enemies. The job was done, but only after many years of struggle, and it required superhuman efforts from all the countries that were involved in the titanic conflict against Hitler, his Nazism, that is, the German variety of fascism, and other fascist dictatorships that had lined up with Germany, such as that of Mussolini.

The group of countries that fought and ultimately defeated Nazi Germany was called the “Grand Alliance” by Churchill, but the Soviets used a more prosaic term, the “Anti-Hitler Alliance”.

This partnership, which emerged only after the Soviet Union and the US became involved in the war in 1941, featured two wings, first, the “Western Allies”, and second, the Soviet Union. The latter battled the German forces in a titanic struggle along the so-called Eastern Front, starting in the summer of 1941. The former, meaning the Americans as well as the British, fought the Nazis in Europe starting in the summer of 1943, when they landed troops

in Italy.

However, their paramount contribution came on the Western Front, that is, a “theatre of war” not in Southern but in Western Europe, and the action there started with the famous landings in Normandy of June 6, 1944, whose code-name was Operation Overlord.

The 80th Anniversary of D-DAY

June 6, will mark the 80th anniversary of “D-Day”, the planners and participants of the landings in Normandy will be honoured in the presence of the French President and many other dignitaries.

Rightly so, because Operation Overlord epitomized the contribution of the Western Allies to the defeat of Nazi Germany. However, about the Normandy Landings, a few important aspects should be kept in mind, aspects that will almost certainly remain unmentioned during the commemorations.

First, while the “Battle of Normandy” that started on June 6, 1944, was undeniably a major clash, it was not the biggest battle of World War II, as the statistics reveal.

In terms of length, it started on June 6, 1944, and ended at the end of August of that year, so it lasted almost three months.

The Battle of Stalingrad, on the other hand, dragged on twice as long, it lasted for more than half a year, from mid-July 1942 to early February, 1943.

The Siege of Leningrad also deserves to be mentioned here, even though it was admittedly not a conventional battle: it began on September 8, 1941, and did not come to an end until January 27, 1944, so its exact duration was 2 years, 4 months, 2 weeks and 5 days.

Second, the casualties – killed, wounded, missing in action, and/or taken prisoner — suffered by the belligerents in Normandy were high, but not as high as the opening scenes from movies like *Saving Private Ryan* would have us believe.

Those scenes conjured up the fighting on Omaha Beach, one of the five sectors of the landing beaches where American soldiers landed, had to attack strongly fortified German positions, and suffered heavy losses, namely, 2,500 killed and more than 5,000 wounded.

But in the other sectors the Germans were less numerous and far less strongly entrenched, and their resistance was far less ferocious, so the Allied troops coming ashore took considerably fewer casualties.

- On Utah Beach, for example, the Americans encountered very light resistance and suffered merely 200 casualties.
- On Sword Beach, the British likewise met limited opposition.
- And on Juno Beach, the 14,000 Canadians who came ashore suffered 1,096 casualties, including “only” 381 killed.

The total number of Allied casualties on D-Day reached approximately 10,000, a figure that included 4,414 men killed, the latter still a high number, of course, but not nearly as high as most people imagine.

The number of casualties represented just over 6 percent of the total of 160,000 troops who came ashore, the number of killed, 2.7 percent.

The *relatively* low number of losses was due to the fact the Germans had only limited forces available to defend against an Allied “invasion”.

According to British military historian Richard Overy,

“in the east, Germany and her allies had some two hundred and twenty-eight divisions, compared with fifty-eight divisions in the west, only fifteen of which were in the area of the Normandy battle in its initial stages” — consisting mostly of troops of inferior quality, though supported by some elite SS units –, because the bulk of the Wehrmacht was fighting for dear life on the Eastern Front. In another one of his books, Overy writes that in, Normandy, the Germans had one division for every 217 miles of coastline, divisions consisting mostly of less than the usual minimum of 12,000 men and “largely made up of older soldiers, ...wounded from the eastern front and men of poorer physical condition, [with] low combat effectiveness.

The Germans defenders were thus stretched very thinly along the French coast.

Significant numbers of them, entrenched in and around bunkers and pillboxes of the “Atlantic Wall”, were separated from each other by sometimes long expanses of lightly defended coastline. The Americans learned the difference at Omaha and Utah. In any event, the notion that thousands of German soldiers were waiting in the dunes, shoulder to shoulder, as Allied soldiers alighted from their landing craft, is a fiction concocted by Hollywood in movies such as *The Longest Day*.

In the entire Battle of Normandy, the Americans, British, and Canadians suffered a total of about 220,000 casualties, while Germany accounted for 300,000, for a grand total of just over 550,000; the number of men killed was 30,000 for the US, 11,000 for the UK, 5,000 for Canada, and 30,000 for Germany, totalling 76,000. Mindboggling as these figures may be, they are dwarfed by the numbers killed, injured, missing in action and/or taken prisoner during the 1942-1943 Battle of Stalingrad.

According to the same source, the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, that battle resulted in approximately 800,000 casualties on the side of Germany and allied powers, and 1,100,000 on the Soviet side, for a total of 1.9 million. And that appears to be a rather conservative estimate, as Wikipedia cites higher figures, namely, a total number of over one million killed; and the Modern War Institute, a “national resource at the United States Military Academy at West Point”, puts the Stalingrad death toll at approximately 1.2 million. In any event, the Battle of Normandy may be said to have been only half as deadly as the Battle of Stalingrad.

Let us return to D-Day.

On that June 6, the plans called for Allied troops to overcome the German coastal defenses without too much trouble and to push deep inland, in the case of the Canadians from Juno Beach to the outskirts of the city of Caen, a distance of nearly 20 kilometers.

(Bicycles were brought along to facilitate that trip, so no major German resistance was obviously expected.)

However, it would take weeks before the “Canucks” were to enter Caen.

The other Allies did not do better; by the end of the first day, none of them had secured their first-day objectives.

The reason was that the Germans responded to the Allied landings by sending in elite troops that had been held in the rear, including SS units, to be sent to the front whenever and wherever the need would arise. These troops were unable to throw the Allies back into the sea, but they did manage to prevent them to penetrate deep inland, as the planners had expected.

The result was a long stalemate.

It helped the Allied cause that the Germans were prevented from transferring manpower from the Eastern Front to Normandy by actions of the Red Army, culminating on June 22 — anniversary of Nazi Germany’s attack on the Soviet Union in 1941 — in the kickoff of a major offensive on the Eastern Front, code-named Operation Bagration.

The Wehrmacht was mauled badly by the Red Army, which was to achieve an advance of more than 600 kilometres, all the way from deep in Russia to the suburbs of the Polish capital, Warsaw, which was reached in early August.

Bagration thus enabled the Western Allies to finally break out of their Normandy bridgehead, and General Eisenhower himself later acknowledged that Bagration had been a necessary precondition for the belatedly successful outcome of Operation Overlord.

(Incidentally, the Soviets would render a similar — and equally rarely acknowledged — service to the Western Allies in early 1945 when they responded to an urgent American request by unleashing a major offensive in Poland on January 12, 1945, one week earlier than originally planned; that move forced the Germans to abandon a surprise attack in the Belgian Ardennes that had caused the Americans great difficulties in the so-called Battle of the Bulge.)

Summarizing the above, it is clear that the Western Allies won the Battle of Normandy, admittedly not easily, but without major losses, because the huge sacrifices required to defeat the Nazi Moloch had been suffered for three years, and continued to be suffered, by the Soviets on the Eastern Front.

It is fair to say that Nazi Germany was defeated by the efforts and sacrifices not only of the Red Army but of Soviet women and men in general, including partisans, factory workers, farmers, and so forth, whose total losses by the end of the war would approach a mindboggling thirty million.

In fact, the string of Nazi victories that had started in 1939 came to an end — and the tide of World War II turned, to put it that way — not with the landings in Normandy in June 1944, as is claimed or implied in many history books and of course in Hollywood productions such as *The Longest Day*. The tide of the war turned on the Eastern Front, and it did so well before D-Day, namely, in 1941, in the vast expanses of Russia to the west of Moscow.

When Operation Barbarossa was launched on June 22, 1941, Hitler and his generals were convinced that the Wehrmacht was going to crush the Red Army within 6 to 8 weeks.

They also badly *needed* a quick victory, because only quick triumph could solve a major problem. In the thirties, while preparing for war, the Hitler regime had built up huge stockpiles of imported strategic raw materials that Germany lacked, above all rubber and petroleum, the latter mostly supplied by the US. During the coming war, the Reich would likely be prevented from importing sufficient quantities of these products, without which the mighty panzers and planes would be useless, by a British naval blockade, which is what had happened in World War I.

However, in 1939-1940, the stockpiles of crucially important petroleum had been severely depleted as Nazi Germany inflicted “lightning warfare” on countries as far apart as Poland, France, and Greece; and neither continuing imports from Romania and – via neutral Spain – the US, nor increased production of synthetic fuel and rubber could make up the shortfall. And so, when Operation Barbarossa started, and three million German soldiers crossed into the Soviet Union with no less than 600,000 motor vehicles, 3,648 tanks, and more than 2,700 planes, Nazi Germany only had sufficient fuel (and rubber tires) left to wage war for little more than two months. But this was deemed sufficient because the Soviet Union was expected to be knocked out soon enough, and then its unlimited raw materials, including Caucasian petroleum, would be available to the Reich.

However, it became clear all too soon that despite impressive initial victories, Barbarossa was not going to be a cakewalk after all.

By the end of August, the German spearheads were still nowhere near the Caucasus, the Eldorado of Soviet petroleum.

Hitler’s “Third Reich” now faced the prospect of catastrophic fuel shortages in addition to almost equally problematic scarcity of labor needed in its armament and other industries, as millions of men could not return home and go back to work in the factories. The conclusion drawn by many cognoscenti, such as high-ranking Wehrmacht officers, Nazi bigwigs, the Swiss secret service, and the Vatican, as early as the summer of 1941 and increasingly in the fall of that year, was that Germany could no longer hope to slay the Soviet bear and was doomed to lose the war.

Oceanic tides turn inexorably but slowly, yet not imperceptibly.

The tide of World War started to turn similarly slowly within weeks after the start of Barbarossa, but the phenomenon was already perceived by a small though increasing number of observers and could be certified on December 5 of 1941, when the Red Army successfully launched a major counter-offensive that threw back the Germans and certified the fiasco of Barbarossa. On that same day, Hitler was informed by his generals that he could no longer hope to win the war. It is therefore legitimate to define December 5, 1941, as the “turning point” [*Zäsur*, literally “caesura”] of the entire world war,” as Gerd R. Ueberschär, a German expert on the war against the Soviet Union, has put it. On the other hand, it is true that those in the know were rare and that, for whatever reasons, most of them chose to remain discreet; consequently, it was only after the spectacular German defeat at Stalingrad, in early 1943, that the entire world was to realize that Nazi Germany was doomed to lose the war.

When, more than one year later, the Western Allies landed in Normandy, they were lucky to face a (part of a) German army that was severely handicapped by a paucity of petroleum.

The Nazis had hoped that victory against the Soviet Union would provide them with plenty of Caucasian fuel for their panzers and planes.

That did not happen and, to the contrary, the fighting in the vast expanses of the Soviet Union further depleted Germany's stocks of fuel. By the summer of 1944, the Nazi war machine was not only figuratively but even literally "out of gas", and this is why the Luftwaffe, for example, which disposed of excellent airplanes, was virtually absent from the skies over Normandy, to the great relief of the Allies on the ground, on the sea, and of course in the air.

It should be mentioned that the US was not yet a belligerent when the turning of the war's tide was confirmed by the Soviet counter-attack in front of Moscow on December 5, 1941.

Washington was admittedly on extremely unfriendly terms with Berlin because of American deliveries of all sorts of weapons and other equipment to Britain, but had no intention, and therefore no plans at all, to go to war against Hitler, even though there were plenty of compelling humanitarian reasons for crusading against his truly evil regime.

America's major US corporations were also doing wonderful business with Nazi Germany itself, for example producing trucks, planes, tanks, and other strategic equipment in their branch plants in Germany and by supplying the petroleum so badly needed by the Panzers and Stukas.

America's political and social- economic elite was also staunchly anti-communist and did not want to undertake anything that might jeopardize the Nazi dictator's prospects for success in his crusade against the Soviet Union. Conversely, Hitler, in dire straits in the Soviet Union, was not keen at all to take on a new enemy of the calibre of the US.

However, Washington wanted war, not against Germany but against Japan, and did so mainly in order to prevent its much-despised rival in the Far East from pocketing Vietnam and Indonesia, resource-rich colonies of countries occupied by Germany, France and the Netherlands.

Tokyo was provoked into attacking Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, which triggered an American declaration of war on Japan but not on Germany, which had nothing to do with Pearl Harbor and whose alliance with Japan did not require Berlin to become involved in a war started by Tokyo.



However, to Washington's great surprise, Hitler declared war on the United States on December 11, 1941, four days after Pearl Harbor.

He almost certainly speculated that this entirely gratuitous gesture of solidarity would induce his Far Eastern ally to reciprocate with a declaration of war on the enemy of Germany, the Soviet Union, thus forcing the Soviets into the extremely perilous predicament of a two-front war. But Tokyo, expecting to have its hands full with the US as enemy, did not take the bait.

In Washington the German declaration of war arrived as a most unpleasant surprise, since a war against Germany was unwanted and no plans had been made for it. The American historian Stephen E. Ambrose has rightly emphasized that the US did not “enter” the war but was “pulled in[to]” it.

He was right in the sense that Uncle Sam was indeed “pulled into” the war *against Germany* against his will – and by none other than Hitler himself!

In view of this, it is worth asking whether the Americans would ever have declared war on Nazi Germany, and landed in Normandy, if Hitler had not declared war on them. And one should ask if Hitler would ever have made the desperate, even suicidal, decision to declare war on the US if he had not found himself in a hopeless situation in the Soviet Union. The entry of the US into the war against Germany, then, which for many reasons was not in the cards before December 1941, and for which Washington had not made any preparations, was not a cause, but merely a consequence, of a turn of the tide of World War II that happened in the Soviet Union in the second half of 1941.

In any event, when the Americans and other Western Allies did come ashore in Normandy in June 1944, there was less than one year left in a war whose outcome had already been decided three years earlier on the opposite side of Europe. In some way, Operation Overlord confirmed that Nazi Germany’s sun had reached its zenith in 1941 and was setting rapidly. And the troops were not sent to the Normandy beaches to liberate France en route to Berlin, but to prevent the Soviets from defeating Germany, take Berlin, and thus liberate all of Europe *on their own*.

When Nazi Germany unexpectedly became an enemy of the US, the US automatically became an ally of Germany’s enemies, including Britain and the Soviet Union. Uncle Sam’s alliance with Moscow was to involve supplying the Soviets with weapons and other equipment, but those supplies, while certainly important, would never represent more than a fraction of what the Red Army needed and would become quantitatively and qualitatively meaningful only in 1943, that is, well after the decisive battles in front of Moscow and in Battle of Stalingrad. The notion that the Soviets survived Operation Barbarossa thanks to American aid is nothing more than a myth.

With its British ally, on the other hand, Washington worked very closely together and coordinated strategy, and it was agreed that they would give priority to the fight against Germany, rather than the other common enemy, Japan.

This would logically involve sending troops into occupied Europe to confront the Nazi beast, thus opening a “Second Front”.

A Second Front would have provided much relief for the Red Army, which in 1942 faced an admittedly desperate German attempt to reach the Caucasian oilfields, an attempt that led to a titanic battle fought in and around Stalingrad from which the Soviets did not emerge victoriously until early 1943.

However, Roosevelt and Churchill preferred not to open a Second Front. The leaders of the US and Britain were happy to see their useful but unloved Soviet ally and Nazi Germany administer a major bloodletting to each other in what appeared throughout 1942 to be a stalemated conflict on the Eastern Front.

They realized that defeating Germany would require huge sacrifices, and landing troops in occupied Europe would unquestionably be a very costly affair. Was it not far wiser to stay safely on the sidelines, at least for the time being, and let the Soviets slug it out against the Nazis? With the Red Army providing the cannon fodder needed to vanquish Germany, the Americans and their British allies would be able to minimize their losses. Better still, they would be able to build up their strength in order to intervene decisively at the right moment, when the Nazi enemy and the Soviet ally would both be exhausted. With Great Britain at its side, the US would then in all likelihood be able to play the leading role in the camp of the victors and act as supreme arbiter in the sharing of the spoils of the supposedly common victory. In the spring and summer of 1942, with the Nazis and Soviets locked into a titanic battle, watched from a safe distance by the Anglo-Saxon *tertius gaudens*, it did indeed look as if such a scenario might come to pass.



The reason given to Stalin for not opening a second front was that the combined American and British forces were not yet strong enough for a major operation on the continent.

Presumably, the naval war against the German U-boats first had to be won in order to safeguard the required transatlantic troop transports. However, troops were successfully being ferried from North America to Great Britain, and in the fall of 1942 the Americans and British proved able to land a sizable force in North Africa. These landings, known as Operation Torch, involved the occupation of the French colonies of Morocco and Algeria, and in the summer of 1943 the “Yanks” and “Tommies”, now accompanied by “Canucks”, to use the nicknames of the Western Allied soldiers, were to cross into Sicily, followed by the Italian mainland, and knock Italy out of the war.

Not only Stalin demanded the opening of a Second Front, so did a large segment of the British public, mostly ordinary working-class folks who, in contrast to their “betters”, sympathized with the Soviets. To silence this annoying constituency, Churchill arranged for a contingent of troops, not coincidentally consisting mostly not of Americans or British but of Canadians, to be dispatched on a raid to the French seaport of Dieppe, an operation code-named Jubilee. As expected, these men were slaughtered there, which was then

conveniently cited as irrefutable proof that the Western Allies were not yet able to launch a major cross-Channel operation. The stratagem achieved its purpose, but the public was horrified by the slaughter. However, after the 1944 landings in Normandy, it became possible to concoct an ostensibly convincing rationale. Jubilee was triumphantly revealed to have been a “general rehearsal” for the successful Normandy landings, as valuable lessons had allegedly been learned during a raid that served to test the German defences. This was a laughable proposition, since any lessons about German defenses, learned in August 1941, could not have been relevant almost two years later: indeed, in the aftermath of Jubilee, in 1943, the Germans constructed new defenses, collectively known as the “Atlantic Wall”. In any event, thus was born a myth: the tragedy of Jubilee as the sine qua non for the triumph of Overlord.



After the Battle of Stalingrad, it was obvious that Nazi Germany was doomed to lose the war and opening a Second Front suddenly loomed urgent to Roosevelt and Churchill. The Soviets were now likely to start heading for Berlin, and via the Italian boot, where, after the fall of Mussolini the Germans had moved in and put up a tough resistance, the Allies could never beat them in what becoming an unspoken inter-allied race to Berlin. Preparations were now made for a landing on the French Atlantic coast, code-named Operation Overlord. The urgency of this task increased rapidly as in 1943 the Red Army advanced systematically along the entire length of the Eastern Front. But it was too late to carry out such a logistically complex operation in that year, especially since the necessary landing equipment needed to be transferred back from North Africa and Italy. Roosevelt and Churchill were far from delighted that the Red Army was grinding its way, slowly but surely, towards Berlin and possibly places farther west. And so, from the perspective of Anglo-American strategy, “it became imperative to land troops in France and drive into Germany to keep most of that country out of [Soviet] hands,” as two American historians, Peter N. Carroll and David W. Noble, have written.

The American and British political and military leaders, representatives of their countries’ establishment, that is, upper classes, had always been intrinsically anti-communist and anti-Soviet. Conversely, they had not been against any form of fascism, including its German variant, Nazism. They were “philofascists”, that is, benevolent towards fascism and supporters of fascists, because fascism was the paramount enemy of communism and simultaneously “good for business” and therefore for capitalism, of which fascism is

arguably a manifestation; it should not be forgotten that Hitler's Germany, like Mussolini's Italy and Franco's Spain, were capitalist countries. It is an irony of history that the US stumbled into a war against fascism, personified by Hitler (as well as Mussolini) and thus found themselves to be allies of the Soviet Union. But that alliance was an unnatural one, destined to last only until the defeat of the common enemy. As some American generals put it on one occasion, they were fighting a war "with the wrong ally against the wrong enemy."

The landings in Normandy, then, were organized for the purpose of preventing a scenario that haunted the gentlemen who happened to be the leaders of the US and Britain, a scenario in which the Soviets would singlehandedly defeat Germany and liberate not only Eastern but also Western Europe, including France. If that would happen, the "Russkis" were expected to follow the precedent set by the Americans and British in 1943 when they liberated Italy except the northern part, which remained behind German lines. They had done exactly as they pleased, *nota bene* without permitting any input from their Soviet ally, input that had been foreseen in previous agreements. To prevent any radical social-economic changes, they had neutralized the leftist partisans who had plans for an entirely new Italy; and installed an ex-fascist and known war criminal, Marshal Badoglio, in power. In fact, the Western Allies left much of Italy's fascist system in place, thus ingratiating the industrialists, bankers, large landowners, the monarch, Vatican, and other pillars of the nation's establishment who had in fact enabled, and benefited from, the Mussolini regime, but angering workers and "ordinary" Italians, who castigated the new system as "fascism without Mussolini".

If the Soviets were to act similarly in the countries they liberated, the result could be expected to be the opposite, namely, a joint effort of the liberators and the leftist resistance fighters to eradicate, at the expense of the upper class, not only of fascism but also of the capitalist system of which fascism may be said to have been the exoskeleton. From the perspective of the Americans, who were determined to maintain and revitalize capitalism wherever possible, this would have been nothing less than a catastrophe.

The far from uplifting tale of the "liberation" of Italy demonstrates clearly that the Americans and their British partners had nothing against fascism and fascist dictatorships and preferred to maintain fascism in one way or another, rather than allow a liberated people itself to determine the political and social-economic configuration of their country.

We will soon see that the landings in Normandy did not purport to liberate France in the sense of leaving the French themselves free to democratically make decisions about the postwar makeup of their country, and that the liberators actually preferred to maintain the fascist system of Vichy France, with some cosmetic changes, *naturellement*, rather than run the risk that the French might experiment with forms of socialism, as they had done, to the displeasure of the ruling elites in Britain and in the US, in the 1930s under the auspices of a leftist government known as the "Popular Front".

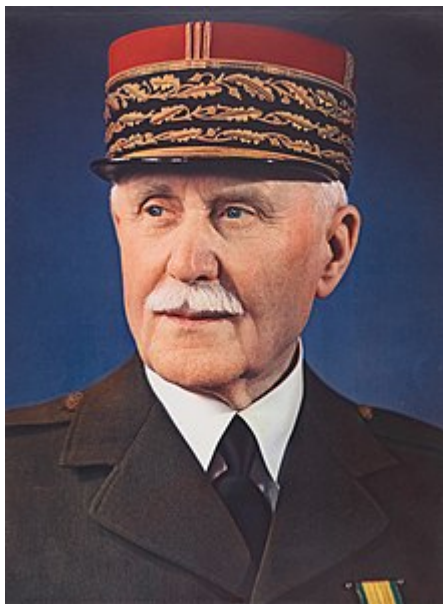
At that time, in 1936, the gentlemen in power in Washington and London, in contrast to most "ordinary" American and British people, sympathized with Franco, and proceeded to support him covertly if not overtly, when he waged war against a democratically elected republican government with plans for social and economic reforms. If the landings in Normandy purported to bring freedom to France, as we hear again and again, and defeat fascism in Germany and everywhere in Europe, why did the Americans and the British not follow up their triumph in the spring of 1945 by removing Franco from power in Madrid, as

they could have done with the wave of a hand?

The landings in Normandy, then, were not about freedom for France and crusading against fascist dictatorship.

Their real objective was to allow the Western Allies to compete with the Soviets in an undeclared race to Berlin, a race that, in the summer of 1944, was still very much winnable. And winning that contest would give the Americans and their British partner control over much if not all of Germany and the attendant possibility of doing in there what they had already done in Italy, namely preserving the social-economic status quo even if it meant sheltering fascists – in the case of Germany: Nazis — and philofascists. This was all the more important since US corporations and banks held huge investments in Germany, certain to be lost in case the tandem of Soviets and German antifascists took control. The tale of what happened to Germany cannot be told here, but we all know the result: the Americans got their way in the western reaches of the country, and the Soviets, in the eastern part.

As soon as the Battle of Normandy was concluded victoriously, German resistance melted away in most if not all of the rest of France.



This made it possible to undertake the primordial push into Germany, but also required dealing with the thorny issue of the situation in France. The Americans would have preferred to keep the Vichy-based collaborator government of Marshal Pétain in power, but minus the discredited Pétain, and with a more respectable personality, a French Badoglio, so to speak, at the helm; after all, the Vichy-regime had been good for business, including the business of French subsidiaries of US banks and corporations such as Ford France, which had made lots of money thanks to eager collaboration with the Germans.

Washington had maintained diplomatic relations with Vichy until the landings in North Africa, and had flirted afterwards with Pétainist politicians, high-ranking bureaucrats, and generals who, after Stalingrad, sensing where the wind was coming from, had opportunistically switched to the Allied side. Washington's preference for Pétainists was determined by two related factors. First, the desire to find French partners who, once hoisted into the saddle of power, could be relied upon to maintain the capitalist status quo in a post-liberation France. Second, their fear that the withdrawal of the Germans and the concomitant collapse of the Vichy regime might cause the Resistance to come to power, a

resistance that was mostly working class – just as collaboration had been mostly bourgeois – and very leftist, with the communists as the leading element, and introduce the kind of radical reforms that were very popular in France but abominated as a “red revolution” by American leaders, including president Roosevelt, who were determined to save capitalism in France regardless of the wishes of the French.

As for General Charles de Gaulle, leader of the so-called Free French based in Britain and acknowledged by many inside and outside of France as one of the leaders of the Resistance, he was not a leftist but a conservative personality; but Roosevelt and most other American decision-makers despised him as an obnoxious megalomaniac and shared Vichy’s view that he was a mere front for the communist real leaders of the Resistance. Washington thus refused to recognize de Gaulle and the French provisional government he headed, even though it had become clear to them that their favourite option, putting an ex-Pétainist in power, was unacceptable to the French people.

And so the Americans planned to rule “liberated” France (and other European countries) themselves, at least for the time being, via a military government they controlled but euphemistically called Allied Military Government of Occupied Territories (AMGOT). In Italy, this arrangement had overseen the previously mentioned transition from fascism *with* Mussolini, and the idea was clearly to achieve a similar result in France, Vichyism *sans* Vichy. However, with respect to France the idea of turning the country a de facto American protectorate, was not yet implemented at the time of the landings.

In the meantime, de Gaulle was slowly becoming acceptable to Washington on account of three factors. First, the Americans finally realized that the French people would not tolerate that the Vichy system would be maintained in any way, shape, or form. Conversely, they had come to understand that de Gaulle was popular, enjoyed the support of a considerable segment of the Resistance, and had the potential to eclipse the communists as its leader. Second, de Gaulle appeased FDR by committing himself to pursue a political course that would in no way threaten the economic status quo. To guarantee his commitment, countless former Vichyites who enjoyed the favours of the Americans were integrated into his Free French movement and even given leading positions. Gaullism thus became respectable and de Gaulle himself morphed into “a right-wing leader,” acceptable to French upper class, which dreaded a takeover by the “red” Resistance, and to the Americans, poised to succeed the Germans as partners and protectors of that elite.

By the end of August 1944, when the Battle of Normandy was won, an uprising of the predominantly communist Parisian Resistance clearly purported not to prevent the Germans from burning down the city, as would be suggested in a 1966 Hollywood production, *Is Paris Burning?*, but to establish a French government that was to be independent of the country’s “Anglo-Saxon” liberators and likely to pursue policies not to their liking.



That forced the Americans to abandon the AMGOT scheme and quickly reach for the card they had hitherto been reluctant to play: de Gaulle.

The general was rushed to the capital, to be presented to the Parisians as the saviour for whom patriotic France had been waiting for four long years. It was arranged for him to strut triumphantly down the Champs Elysees, while the local Resistance leaders were coerced to follow him at a respectful distance, looking like unimportant extras. A little later, on October 23, 1944, Washington certified its admittedly uneasy partnership with de Gaulle by recognizing him as head of the provisional government of the French Republic.

After the Battle of Normandy, then, it was thanks to the Americans that in France de Gaulle, and not the men of the Resistance, could come to power. In contrast to the latter, de Gaulle was a conservative personality, and he collaborated eagerly with Washington to prevent the radical reforms which the Resistance had planned and many if not most Frenchmen, and certainly the working class, had expected and would have welcomed. The country's capitalist social-economic system was preserved, though its political superstructure was updated: on the ruins of the fascist Vichy regime, a new, comparatively much more democratic system, was erected, to become officially known in 1946 as the "Fourth Republic". This arrangement provided immense relief to France's upper class but also served the purposes of the Americans, who were determined to make liberated Europe safe for capitalism, preferably an unfettered, American-style capitalism, with "open doors" for US products and capital - and Uncle Sam very much in control.

De Gaulle did not remain in power long enough - he resigned in January 1946 - to prevent France from being integrated into a US-dominated Western Europe and becoming a vassal of Uncle Sam, exemplified by membership in NATO - a development that was accompanied by the Americanization or "Cocacolonization" of the country. But in 1958 de Gaulle made a comeback and obtained wide powers as he arranged for the Fourth Republic to give way to a more authoritarian, ironically enough an American-style, presidential system, to be baptized "Fifth Republic". He subsequently proved to be a thorn in the side of Uncle Sam, for example by banning American army bases (and NATO headquarters) from France and, more in general, failing to be a pliant vassal like Konrad Adenauer in West Germany. (It is for that reason that the CIA very likely orchestrated some of the coups and assassination

attempts directed against the regime and/or person of the recalcitrant French president.)

De Gaulle also never forgave the Americans (and the British) for treating France like a “doormat” (*paillasson*), as he once put, at the time of the landings in Normandy. In 1964, on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of Overlord, he described the operation as “the prelude to a second occupation of the country”, and he never attended its annual commemoration. Also absent from the annual commemorations, at least during the last decade have been the Russian heirs to the Soviets, whose efforts and sacrifices had made possible not only the landings, but even the final victory against Nazi Germany.

This year, the official reason for Russian representatives being *non grata* is their country’s “war of aggression” against Ukraine, a kind of excuse that was never invoked to disqualify an American president for similar (and even worse) wars, for example, George W. Bush, who made an appearance in 2014. And what to think of the invitation extended to Ukrainian president, Volodymyr Zelenski?

His government teems with admirers of Stepan Bandera and other Ukrainians who collaborated eagerly with the Nazis, and with neo-Nazis, and Zelenski himself happily and proudly participated when, in September, 2023, the members of Canada’s House of Commons unanimously honoured a former Ukrainian SS-man, Yaroslav Hunka, with a standing ovation in Canada’s Parliament.



The parliamentarians later sheepishly claimed ignorance, but Zelenski certainly knew very well who that man was, and what he stood for, and Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, should have known or at least have been informed. It is indeed no secret that, at the Nuremberg Trials, the SS in its entirety was declared to have been a criminal organization.

And it also known, especially in Canada, that a SS unit similar to the one of which Hunka was a member, fought against Allied troops in Normandy and committed war crimes there,

including the massacre of dozens of Canadian prisoners of war in Ardenne Abbey near Caen.

Justin Trudeau presumably knows Canadian history and is aware of what happened at Ardenne Abbey; he should go there and lay a wreath – and invite Zelensky to come along.

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