



FRENCH BRIEFING

BACKGROUND

France emerged in 1918 as the supreme military power in Europe. Its war machine was the greatest of all the powers and had enabled France to triumph. The cost however was considerable. The French nation suffered dreadfully in both material and human terms. Casualties in metropolitan France alone numbered 1,315,000 or 27 per cent of all men between the ages of eighteen and twenty seven, a higher rate than any other combatant nation. Population growth since the war and the German annexations means that Germany can now field many more men than France (seventy five million compared to forty million) can in the current conflict. France can however balance this by drawing on its considerable reserves of manpower in the colonies.

As a result of the last war being fought on French soil, industry in northern France was devastated and the cost of the damage is estimated at some 134 Billion gold Francs. It is a tribute to the indomitable French spirit that all this was rebuilt in just four short years. One can only speculate what could have been achieved in the years since the war had not the nation lost the cream of its youth in that terrible holocaust. It must never be allowed to happen that way again.

France's wartime allies have since proved unreliable in peacetime, seemingly lacking the resolve to make Germany pay the due post-war reparations and failing to support us when Germany re-occupied the left bank of the Rhine in 1936. This latter action particularly changed the European strategic situation, forcing France to once again consider the possibility of having to fight a war along the whole of the Northeastern frontiers with the inevitable damage to French territory that this would entail. The new King of the Belgians recinded the post-war Alliance in 1936 and declared neutrality in the misguided belief that the Germans will respect such a move and leave him in peace!

Among the important lessons learned from the Great War were that a future war must not be fought on French soil and that it must be strategically defensive in nature. The battle for Verdun and its epic ten month defence stirred the hearts of Frenchmen and the world

and showed the fundamental strength of the defence. France and France alone stood against the might of the German army and bested it in bloody combat. The cost however was enormous - over 400,000 casualties. Proper fortifications, at which France has excelled since the days of Vauban, enable a defence without such losses. To this end the Maginot line has been created at enormous cost to guard the border from Belgium to Switzerland. Adequately supported by field troops the line is impregnable. In addition to deterring an attack (and particularly preventing a surprise attack) the Maginot line will also serve to provide a shield behind which the army can fully mobilise and provide a defensive zone from which coordinated and carefully planned counter-attacks can be made. It is recognised though that the sheer cost of the Maginot line has required cuts elsewhere in defence spending.

More worrying are the ends of the line. In the south it is clear that a possible German advance through Switzerland cannot be disregarded after the ruthless behaviour of the Germans elsewhere. Fascist Italy may also prove a threat and the southern defences cannot be neglected.

Belgium's neutrality has dramatically complicated the situation in the north. It has not been possible to coordinate war plans with the Belgians since then (although informal contacts have occurred). The more serious consideration is that no advance can be made into Belgian territory until the Germans have invaded; to do otherwise might give the Germans an excuse to act before we are fully ready, and would bring our forces into conflict with the Belgian army whose twenty divisions are vital to the defeat of the German threat.

To ward against the twin threats to the north and south of the line fortifications have been recently extended in these areas. However, the damage that would be done to French industry in the north by extensive fort-building, together with the nature of the ground with its high water table makes the sort of deep fortifications necessary virtually impossible to build.

Spain would seem to pose little immediate problem as that country is still recovering from the civil war but cannot be entirely ignored since General Franco is beholden to Germany for its support during the conflict.

While during the political turmoil of the twenties and early thirties the rapid succession of short-lived governments and the temporary accession to power of the leftist popular front the army suffered long periods of neglect the situation has now changed dramatically. The growing menace of Fascist Germany and the incredible political successes of Hitler in respect of Austria, Czechoslovakia and the non-aggression pact with the Soviet Union have served to awaken France to the efforts that are required.

In the face of a massive and swift programme of German re-armament (which has led the Deuxieme Bureau to conclude that the German army is now stronger than the French army) a considerable effort has been made to strengthen the French armed forces. In 1938 the rearmament programme provided for the production of 6,000 25mm and fifty-one 12-gun batteries of the matchless 47mm gun to provide a solid anti-tank base; fifty new groups of 105mm guns plus five groups of mechanised artillery for the armoured divisions to add a modern component to the French army. To complete its mechanisation the army

ordered 5,000 armoured utility vehicles for the infantry and fifty battalions of infantry support tanks. Also ordered were twelve battalions of B tanks to equip two heavy 'breakthrough' armoured divisions; 325 excellent SOMUA tanks were ordered for the DLM's; 3,200 tanks altogether.

Following Germany's annexation of Austria the then Army Minister Daladier set in motion another programme for twelve billion francs to provide 6,000 25mm automatic cannon to hold off low flying attacks; 480 90mm guns (comparable to the German 88) for defence at high altitudes.

Thus great strides have been made in replacing much of the obsolete equipment the army was forced to make do with during the twenties and early thirties. New and more powerful tanks have been introduced such as the Somua and Char B; the new 47mm anti-tank gun is now in full production. These are only a few of the examples of the changes which have been made to ensure that the French army remains the worthy successor to the fighting force which emerged victorious from the 1914-18 war.

Of particular benefit are two particular facets of the French army; a stable and unbroken military organisation which is able to draw on the experiences of the last war and a sound strategy which is an ideal combination of mobility, defence and counter-offensive.

After some debate concerning the proposal from Colonel de Gaulle to form a mobile professional army of 100,000 men at the expense of the rest of the army the tactical doctrine of the French armed forces has been recently summarised in the 1937 Army Instruction on the 'Tactical Employments of Major Units' which was written by General Georges and approved by the then Minister for the Army, Daladier. This document concludes that technical progress has not appreciably modified the tactical rules laid down by its predecessors. As previously the infantry are entrusted with the principle duty in battle. protected and accompanied by its own guns and by the guns of the artillery, and occasionally preceded by combat tanks and aviation it will conquer the ground, occupy the ground and organise and hold that ground. The infantry has a particularly dangerous task of outstanding glory. The development of anti-tank guns will result in the employment of tanks in the attack only after the protection and support of very powerful artillery (it will be remembered that many tanks came to grief before the power of the anti-tank gun during the Spanish Civil War). The bulk of the tanks will thus remain distributed among the infantry divisions.

The air force has also received considerable attention with large numbers of the most modern aircraft having been ordered in recent years to counteract what is undoubtedly a powerful German air force. This will increase the air force by some 16 fighter groups and 24 bomber groups bringing the total to thirty four and sixty respectively by April 1st 1941.

FRENCH ARMED FORCES

THE MAGINOT LINE

This defensive line stretches from Basle on the Swiss Frontier to Longwy, at the junction of the Belgian, Luxembourg and French frontiers. The strength and depth of the line varies,

but for 120 km it consists of fortified regions guarding the two main invasion routes. One covering an assault aimed at Metz and Nancy, the other facing north to guard the plains of Lower Alsace. Facing directly east there are a number of lesser fortifications covering the wide river obstacle of the Rhine. Just behind the frontier the defences of the two fortified regions begin with a series of tank-proof obstacles and thick barbed wire. This is backed up by maisons fortes and pill-boxes. These advance posts will give warning of any attack and delay it. To the rear of these posts is a deep anti-tank ditch and then the underground casemates and forts which make up the backbone of the line.

Each casemate is protected by up to 3 metres of reinforced concrete, and contains rapid-firing anti-tank guns and machine guns firing out of underground slits with a wide 50° arc. There are also grenade throwers to dislodge enemy infantry that might manage to approach using dead ground. The 25-man garrison of the casemates live and sleep on a level still deeper underground. These positions are superbly camouflaged and blend completely in with their environment. The first an attack will know that they have encountered the line will be withering and destructive fire from an interlocking system of protected fire positions.

The real heart of the Line is the forts. These back up the casemate positions at an interval of every 5-8 km. Drawing on the great traditions of Vauban, our engineers have created a modern wonder of impregnable concrete and steel fortification. Troops live, eat, sleep, work and exercise for weeks completely self-contained within these forts. Electric trains whisk men from deep underground barracks and canteens to action in the gun turrets. Independent power stations give uninterruptable electric power. Powerful compressors supply air, and make the forts proof against poison gas attack. Immense stores of food, water, ammunition and fuel ensure that they can remain fully operational completely cut off from outside assistance for at least three months.

There are three different types of fort, the largest is Category 1. This has, typically, a garrison of 1200 men and contains 15-18 concrete 'blocks', each with many guns mounted in disappearing turrets and ranging from 37mm to 135mm calibre. Each fort is divided into two parts, connected by deep subterranean galleries, invulnerable to the largest bomb or shell, and varying between 400m to 2km in length. Even if one half of a fort should get knocked out, the other half can continue the fight, and bring down fire on its companion.

In total, the NE frontier and the Rhine has:

- 23 artillery forts
- 35 small infantry forts
- 295 casemates and interval blockhouses
- 70 interval shelters
- 14 armoured observation posts.

plus many minor fieldworks.

To prevent infiltration, interval troops are necessary. These are usually infantry divisions, complete with artillery which can be moved to counter the threat to any particular fort or group of forts.

This line is correctly known as the **Shield of France**. Any attacker will expend himself uselessly against this impenetrable defensive barrier, giving the Field Army the time to

mass for a final battle of destruction.

ARMY FIELD FORCES

Definitions:

- ACTIVE = 70% regular officers and men. Efficient and reliable.
- A = 30% regular officers, 2% regular soldiers. Average.
- B = 100% reservists commanded by generals recalled from retirement.

CURRENT POSITIONS AND COMPOSITIONS OF ARMIES

Game note: In order to keep the game manageable for the players, we have ignored the corps level of organisation, so each Army is simply composed of a number of divisions.

No.1 ARMY GROUP

Unit	Starting Location
1st Army	
[See 'FRENCH PLAN' below]	
2nd Army	
1 Active Infantry Division)
1 'A' Infantry Division)
2 'B' Infantry Divisions) Covering Northern end of
1 DLC Division) Maginot Line
1 Cav Brigade)
2nd Air reconnaissance wing)
7th Army	
[See 'FRENCH PLAN' below]	
9th Army	
[See 'FRENCH PLAN' below]	

NO. 2 ARMY GROUP

- 3rd Army
 - 1 Active Infantry Division
 - 6 'A' Infantry Divisions
 - 4 'B' Infantry Divisions
 - 3rd Air reconnaissance wing
- 4th Army
 - 1 Active Infantry Division
 - 2 'A' Infantry Divisions
 - 1 'B' Infantry Division
- 5th Army
 - 4 'A' Infantry Divisions
 - 3 'B' Infantry Divisions
- Army Group Reserve - 1 'A' Division

NO. 3 ARMY GROUP

- 8th Army

1 Active Infantry Division
 1 'A' Infantry Division
 3 'B' Infantry Divisions
 Army of the Alps
 3 Mountain Divisions
 Army Group Reserve- 1 'B' Division

Unallocated GHQ Reserve Units

6 Active Infantry Division
 2 'A' Infantry Divisions
 1 'B' Infantry Divisions
 1 Motorised Division

2 at St Quentin, 2 at Cambrai, 2 at Reims
 St Quentin, Cambrai
 Reims
 Reims

Naval Units - 1 'A' Division

Dunquerque

Abbreviations

DINA = North African Infantry Div
 DLM = Light Mechanised Div
 DCR = Heavy Armoured Div.
 DLC = Cavalry Division

Forces in French possessions overseas :

French North Africa (Morocco, Algeria & Tunisia) - 10 Infantry Divisions and 2 Cavalry Brigades.
 Corsica - 1 Infantry Division
 Levant (Syria & Lebanon) - 2 Infantry Divisions

FOREIGN TROOPS

Foreign troops (Poles and Czech) forming on French soil. These are based around Loan.

Polish - 1st Grenadier Division
 2nd Rifle Division
 10th Armoured Brigade
 3rd Infantry Division Currently forming
 4th Infantry Division Currently forming

Czechoslovak - 1st Czech Infantry Division

AIR FORCE

PARIS : 1st Night Fighter Wing

ZOAN (Northern Zone)

Unit	Base	Notes
2nd Fighter wing	Reims	Allocated to support 9 th Army
3 rd Fighter wing	Loan	Allocated to support 7 th Army
4 th Fighter wing	Cambrai	Allocated to support 1 st Army
5 th Fighter wing	Calais	Navy co-operation wing
1 st Bomber wing	Soissons	

2nd Dive Bomber wing

ZOAE (Eastern Zone)

6th Fighter wing Toul
 3rd Bomber wing Troyes

ZOAS (Southern Zone)

7th Fighter wing Chissey
 4th Bomber wing

ZOAA (Mediterranean Zone)

8th Fighter wing Marseilles Local defence of Med ports
 5th Bomber wing

The following units are training in the south of France:

Operational by end of May 1940

9th Fighter wing
 6th Bomber wing

Recce wings are deployed to air control at Army level.

Operational Radius

	Km
Fighter Wing	160
Bomber Wing / Recce Wing	1200

NAVY

The general disposition of Fleet in 1939.

	Battleships and battle cruisers	Aircraft carriers	Cruisers	Destroyers	Submarines
Channel	-	-	-	7	-
Bay of Biscay	-	-	-	3	-
Force de Raid	2	1	3	10	-
Mediterranean	3	1	10	48	53
Morocco	-	-	-	2	4
Far East	-	-	2	6	2
totals	5	2	15	76	59

NAVAL AIR SERVICE

The main combat strength lies in the modern squadrons earmarked to equip the new Carrier, or already equipping the Seaplane Carrier "Commandante Teste", and shore-based torpedo bomber squadrons. It should be noted that the Carrier is not yet built and "Commandante Teste" has landed its squadrons to act as an aircraft transport from

America.

AERONAVALE

The French Navy operates its own aircraft from ships and ports. The following combat aircraft are also available:

Boulogne: 1 Bomber wing,

Cherbourg: 1 Fighter wing, 1 recce wings

Note also that the French Navy is entitled to expect the 5th Fighter wing to support it with land-based fighters from Calais.

In the event of war Aeronavale forces are likely to be fully engaged in protecting the fleet's naval operations and will be very unlikely to become available to support land-based operations.

THE FRENCH PLAN

General Outline

3rd Army Group will defend the Upper Rhine section of the Maginot-line with 8th Army. This army will guard against a possible attack through Switzerland. The Armée des Alpes will guard against a possible attack from Italy.

2nd Army Group will man the main defences of the Maginot Line, 5th Army along the Rhine, then 4th Army, and finally 3rd Army up to Longwy in the West.

1st Army Group's primary task is to advance to defensive positions inside Belgium and there engage and defeat the German armies.

Force Composition and initial orders.

GHQ troops

Naval Division: Dunquerque, defend the port facilities.

The GHQ reserves (including emigre troops) have been located at four key locations that position them to be able to be attached to one of the main armies with great rapidity.

The assembly areas are:

St Quentin (2 infantry divisions)

Cambrai (3 infantry divisions)

Reims (1 Motorised and 3 infantry divisions)

Loan (2 Polish Infantry Divisions, 1 Polish armoured brigade, 1 Czech Infantry Division)

1st Army Group : HQ in Cambrai

1st Army

1st Army Orders: Advance to line linking with the BEF south of Halle to Charloi, linking with the 7th Army east of Chatelet. This line is to be fortified.

Composition

2 DINA Active Infantry Division	Jeumont
1 Moroccan 'A' Infantry Division	Jeumont,
5 DINA 'A' Infantry Division	Maubeuge
1 Motorised Division	Crespin
15 Motorised Division	Crespin
12 Motorised Division	Bavay
2 DLM Division	Crespin
3 DLM Division	Bavay
1 DCR Division	Maubeuge
1st Air reconnaissance wing	

For the first few days of operations 4th Fighter Wing will be available to provide air cover.

Army Boundaries:

The British Expeditionary Force is to your North. The boundary between 1st Army and the BEF is the West-East line from Ath to South of Halle. Halle will form the southernmost deployment of the BEF.

French 7th Army is to your south. The Boundary runs from south of Chatelet to Maubeuge, running east to west

7th Army

7th Army Orders: Advance to line East of Chatelet – Namur – Dinant - East of Fumay to link with the 1st Army to the North around Chatelet and with 9th Army in the south who will be deployed around Gedinne. This line is to be fortified.

Composition:

21 Active Infantry Division	Givet
29 Mountain 'A' Infantry Division	Fumay
32 'A' Infantry Division	Fumay
4 'A' Infantry Division	Givet
60 'B' Infantry Division	Givet
25 Motorised Division	Avesnes
9 Motorised Division	Avesnes
1 DLM Division	Avesnes
2 DCR Division	Givet
7 th Air reconnaissance wing	

Army Boundaries:

1st Army is to the north of you, The Boundary runs from south of Chatelet to Maubeuge, running east to west.

9th Army is to the south, Boundary runs North of Monterme – Signy L'Abbare, south to north.

9th Army

9th Army orders: Advance to

Composition

4 DINA Active Infantry Division	Sedan,
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WAR IN THE WEST

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102 Fortress Active Infantry Division	Carvignan
22 'A' Infantry Division	Monthorme
18 'A' Infantry Division	Monthorme
53 'B' Infantry Division	Sedan
61 'B' Infantry Division	Carvignan
2 DLC Division	Montmedy
5 Motorised Division	Montmedy
3 DCR Division	Carvignan
9th Air reconnaissance wing	

Army Boundaries:

7th Army is to the north, Boundary runs North of Montherme – Signy L'Abbare, south to north.

2nd Army is in the Maginot line to the south of you.

