The History of the Twentieth Century
Episode 322
“Plan Yellow”
Transcript

[music: Fanfare]

Adolf Hitler wanted a Western offensive immediately after Poland was defeated, but bad weather kept getting in his way. The rest of the world observed the quietude on the Western front and wondered if this war was to be taken seriously.

On May 10, 1940, the world learned that the answer was an emphatic “Yes!”

Welcome to *The History of the Twentieth Century.*

[music: Opening Theme]

Episode 322. Plan Yellow.

In 1933, Winston Churchill famously said, “Thank God for the French Army.”

He also said later that he got some funny looks from his colleagues in the House of Commons when he said it. But it’s not hard to understand his thinking. France had the largest army in the world, and by the 1930s, France was one of the few democratic nations left in Europe, but it also had by far the largest military, making France the bulwark of democratic values on the Continent.

Britain had the most powerful navy in Europe; France had the most powerful army. Together they made a potent military alliance.

Not that you could tell from events in the years leading up to the Second World War. German and Italian aggression went largely unchallenged. In the case of Italy, it was because the British and French wanted to keep Italy onside in the event of a confrontation with Germany. In the case of Germany, it was usually the British who got cold feet. It was the British who most strenuously

resisted intervening in the Spanish Civil War, and it was the British who led the way to the Munich Agreement.

But that was before the war. Let's let bygones be bygones and consider the situation as of September 1, 1939.

The British and the French had done military consultation over the previous years on how to conduct war with Germany. The basic strategy they arrived at looked this: in the event of war, Germany would likely mobilize faster, have better arms, and would attempt to seize the initiative, but in the long run, the greater wealth and productivity of the Allies would tip the scales the other way. The Anglo-French strategy would therefore be defensive, at first. The goal would be to hold the line against the initial German offensive and allow the conflict to wind down into a protracted stalemate, during which superior French and British military production would gradually win out. In other words, pretty much what happened in the last war.

What was different from the last war, and this was a difference on everyone's minds, was the threat of aerial bombing of civilian population centers. We've talked about this a couple of times before on the podcast, and we will again. It was generally believed that there was no practical defense to enemy bombing of friendly cities, and it was further believed that large numbers of civilian casualties would disrupt the economy and trigger a collapse of morale, possibly ending the war in a matter of days or weeks. Deliberate bombing of civilians simply to spread fear and panic was morally deplorable, but, the thinking went, since it might also end the war quickly and easily, the temptation would be too great to resist, no matter how moral the commanders were. Also, at least arguably, a smaller number of dead civilians now was a price worth paying if it saved the lives of larger numbers of soldiers later.

And we know the Germans had few qualms about bombing civilians. Ask the residents of Guernica. Or Warsaw. The only real defense against terror bombing was deterrence, as in, if you bomb our cities, we'll bomb yours. That was the thinking.

On the morning of Friday, September 1, 1939, in Paris, Simone de Beauvoir, the French philosopher and feminist, went to her neighborhood café and ordered a coffee. The waiter told her that Germany had invaded Poland. He had heard it from another customer; the news had come too late to make the morning newspapers. That afternoon came the announcement over the radio of a general mobilization. The government also suggested that Parisians who had somewhere else to go should leave the city.

On Saturday, the newspapers published maps of suggested routes for civilians fleeing the city. They also published instructions on how to administer first aid to the victim of a bombing or gas attack. Thousands of motorcars, roofs bucking under loads of luggage and furniture, made their way out of the city. Reservists thronged the train stations.

On Sunday, September 3, in Berlin, French Ambassador Robert Coulondre visited German foreign secretary Joachim von Ribbentrop to inform him that unless Germany began withdrawing from Polish territory by 5:00 that afternoon, France would declare war. Then "France will be the aggressor," Ribbentrop told him.

The ambassador replied, "History will be the judge of that."

The air raid sirens went off in Paris that evening. Parisians streamed into basements and Métro stations and waited hours for the all-clear signal. It turned out to be a drill. The next night's siren was also a drill, and the one the night after that.

It didn't take much of this before Parisians were sick of air raid drills and blackouts, not to mention grumpy from sleep deprivation. But in the weeks that followed, once it became clear that the feared German bombing raids were not coming, things gradually went back to normal. The drills became less frequent. Those who had fled the city returned. Paris nightlife started up again, the only difference being that restaurants now expected you to pay for your meal as soon as it was served, just in case an air raid came before you finished.

The story in London was similar.

The French had pledged to open up a western front against Germany within two weeks of an attack on Poland, and they kept that promise, if you are willing to count France's timid incursion into German territory in the Saarland beginning the second week in September. French troops advanced a few kilometers until they approached the Siegfried Line, Germany's western defense line. Then the Soviets invaded Poland and the French withdrew. The commander of the French Army, General Maurice Gamelin assured the Poles that France was meeting its obligation to its ally, a claim that one might charitably call an "exaggeration."

In fact, the French outnumbered the Germans on the Western Front by something like 4:1, so you have to count this as a missed opportunity. Fear of the Germans bombing Paris in reprisal was an important reason for French reluctance, though in fact most of the Luftwaffe was busy bombing Poles.

Once the Soviets intervened, it was clear Poland was lost, and here is the beginning of the period the British called the "Phony War" and the French called *drôle de guerre*, a funny kind of war. With Poland occupied, what next?

The French Army had been mobilized, and French soldiers stationed along the front from Switzerland to the North Sea. But they had nothing to do, and as you know, the winter of 1939-40 was unusually harsh. Soldiers were largely confined to barracks during the December snows and the January freezes, and those barracks were typically not heated, because coal was in short supply.

In circumstances such as these, of privation and inactivity, morale breaks down. So does discipline. Soldiers stopped saluting, then they stopped shaving, then they stopped changing uniforms. German propaganda broadcasts accused the British of engineering the war, then roping France into the conflict so that the blood spilled on the Allied side would be primarily French and not English. These claims gave pause to French soldiers and civilians alike.

Meanwhile, the French and British continued to restrain themselves out of fear of retaliation. When Winston Churchill—of course it was Winston Churchill—suggested dropping mines from the air into the Rhine River, which is a major shipping route for Germany, the French vetoed the plan out of fear the Germans would bomb Paris in retaliation. When Leo Amery suggested the British drop incendiary bombs on the Black Forest, Air Minister Kingsley Wood asked him, "Are you aware it is private property?"

The day after war was declared, the RAF did make a bombing run against the German fleet docked at Wilhelmshaven. The British lost seven out of ten bombers whilst dealing out no significant damage to the German ships.

The Germans showed a similar reluctance to bomb civilian targets in Britain or France, despite their ruthlessness in terror bombing Guernica and Warsaw. The difference was, unlike Spain or Poland, Britain or France could bomb back. So early in the war, the Germans also limited themselves to military targets. German bomber pilots sent against the Royal Navy base at Scapa Flow were warned that bombing civilians would be a court martial offense.

With nothing happening, soldiers and civilians alike began to wonder, why are we even at war? What's the purpose? What's the goal?

In April 1940, the Germans ended this quasi-truce with a surprise move against Denmark and Norway, Operation Weserübung, with which you are already familiar, but the Allies understood that, Weserübung or no Weserübung, it was only a matter of time before the inevitable German offensive against France finally came.

Allied military planners considered it almost certain that the main German thrust would come through northern Belgium, just as it had in 1914. The Maginot Line insured that the German offensive would not begin there, along the Franco-German border. The French plan in a nutshell was to move the best French units, and the British Expeditionary Force, into Belgium as soon as the offensive started. If this war was also going to settle into a grinding war of attrition, the French were determined this time the attritioning would take place on Belgian soil, not French soil.

When German war plans accidentally fell into Allied hands in January 1940, everything in the captured documents seemed to confirm expectations. The main axis of advance was to be through northern Belgium. The great Allied frustration was the Belgian government's rigid adherence to neutrality and its refusal to allow Allied soldiers onto its territory prior to a German

attack. The Belgians saw what happened to Norway and didn't want to give the Germans an excuse to intervene in Belgium. Even a British proposal to allow the British Expeditionary Force, which by May 1940 amounted to ten infantry divisions and one armored division, to move into Belgian territory was rejected. Surely not even the Germans could claim that this force represented a threat to Germany, could they? Still the Belgians said no.

Further north lay the Netherlands, which had clung to its neutrality and thus escaped the worst of the First World War. The Dutch government was determined to follow the same policy this time around. They were even stricter about it than the Belgians were; they wouldn't even enter into joint military planning with the Allies. Or with Belgium. They pinned their hopes on the storm passing them by.

Then there was the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, where preparation for a German invasion was limited to pre-drafting the appropriate diplomatic protests.

Now, you know and I know that Hitler has successfully pressured the German Army into revamping the invasion plan, and relocating the main thrust farther south, through the Ardennes. The Belgian military actually warned the Allies of this possibility, but General Gamelin in particular and French and British commanders generally discounted this possibility. The Germans would want to move their mechanized units through open terrain, where their speed and maneuverability could do the most good. Sending tanks through the Ardennes would amount to abandoning the German military's traditional reliance on speed. As if!

[music: Wagner, "Entrance of the Gods into Valhalla" from *Das Rheingold*]

On the German side, the situation was equally tense. German civilians were as puzzled by the Phony War as were French and British civilians, and it was widely believed that the so-called "war" would soon wind down into a negotiated settlement.

But Hitler's thinking was just the opposite. The situation around the German force in Narvik had given him a scare in April, but by the end of the month, with Narvik still holding and with the Germans establishing a land link to Trondheim, his thoughts began to turn once again to the long-delayed offensive in the West. He initially set May 5 as the date to begin, but once again bad weather forced a few days of delays. The final decision was for May 10.

Hitler confidently assured his commanders that the offensive would only take a few weeks. France would fall, and Britain would be unable to continue the war on its own. His one fear was that the great secret would leak out; that is, that the German Army's main thrust would not be through the open country of northern Belgium, but farther south, through the Ardennes.

On May 9, Hitler left by train for his field headquarters on the Western front. His destination was kept secret. His secretaries at the Chancellery speculated that he was headed for an inspection

tour of German positions in Norway. Hitler played along with this, telling them that if they were good, he'd bring them seal skins when he returned.

His train originally set out for Hamburg, but along the way it was diverted south to what was called the Felsennest, the "Cliff Nest," a mountaintop bunker prepared for the *Führer*. On the morning of the tenth, the codeword *Danzig* was sent to all Army units, signaling that Plan Yellow was in effect. A *Führer* directive sent to soldiers on the Western front proclaimed, with Hitler's characteristic modesty, that the battle upon which they were about to embark would determine the fate of Germany for the next thousand years.

They faced a daunting challenge. Germany had 141 divisions on the Western front. The Allies, counting French, Belgian, and Dutch soldiers, plus the British Expeditionary Force, had 144. The allies had 14,000 artillery guns to Germany's 7,400, and 3,400 tanks to Germany's 2,400. Germany had the numerical advantage only in combat aircraft, 5,500 to 3,100, and the German aircraft were more modern.

In the Netherlands, Luftwaffe air wings overflew the country and went on into the North Sea, as if they intended to attack England. But then they doubled back and surprised the Dutch air force with attacks in its airfields, which the Germans had carefully scouted in advance. Most of the small Dutch air force was destroyed on the first day. German attempts to drop paratroops to capture Dutch bridges and airfields were less successful. Many of these airborne units were unable to take their objectives; those that did struggled to hold them.

Most of the German air attack on the first day was in the north, in the Netherlands, in the hope that it would confirm in the minds of the French command that the main German attack would come from the north, through the Netherlands and Belgium as expected. Rapid seizure of Dutch airfields was meant as a move against Britain. If the land war bogged down as it had in 1914, the Luftwaffe would be able to use Dutch airfields as bases to attack England.

Farther south, many Belgian air force planes were also destroyed on the ground, though a larger portion were able to take off, not that it did them much good; the Germans came out ahead in most of the aerial combat. On land, the Belgian defense plan centered on holding the line at the Albert Canal, which runs from Liège to Antwerp. Critical to holding this line was the new Belgian fortress at Eben Emael, near the Dutch border. Eben Emael had only been constructed in the early Thirties, back when Belgium was still one of the Allies; it was Belgium's miniature Maginot Line, with underground bunkers for its soldiers and steel pop-up turrets from which its machine guns and artillery could spray devastation and death upon an approaching enemy.

German military planners had considered and dismissed the possibility of dropping paratroops on the fortress. Soldiers descending on parachutes would do nothing more than provide target practice for the Belgians.

It was Adolf Hitler, looking at reconnaissance photographs, who came up with the idea of gliders. The roof of Eben Emael was an open grassy field studded with turrets, to allow the fort's guns an unobstructed field of fire. Could gliders land there? It turned out they could.

The Germans had an edge in the military use of gliders, because the Treaty of Versailles had forbidden Germany military aircraft, but had not mentioned gliders. Gliders could land soldiers in greater numbers more quickly and more precisely than by parachute, and they hardly made a sound. And so gliders were used to land air assault units on top of the fortress, as well as to seize bridges across the canal.

At Eben Emael, the Germans landed ten gliders, carrying a total of 78 paratroopers, or *Fallschirmjäge*r, in German. These were specially trained soldiers, who had practiced on a life-size mockup of Eben Emael built in Czechoslovakia.

Once on the ground, these *Fallschirmjäger* used flame throwers against Belgian machine gun positions, and defeated the fortress's armored turrets with a new German secret weapon: shaped charges. These are explosive devices with the explosive material shaped in a particular way that focuses the force of the explosion in a specific direction. Such a charge can blast through much thicker metal armor than an unshaped explosive charge of the same size.

Armed with these weapons, these 78 German *Fallschirmjäger* were able to neutralize Eben Emael's turrets, force their way inside, and take control of the top level of the underground facilities against an estimated 650 Belgian soldiers inside, who were trapped in the lower levels until the next day, when sufficient numbers of German reinforcements arrived to force them out.

It was absolutely astonishing. Eben Emael, a state-of-the-art military fortification, the pride of the Belgian Army, widely regarded as the most formidable defensive position on the Western Front, probably the world, fell in a matter of minutes to a handful of German soldiers armed with modern wonder weapons never before employed in battle.

The Belgians were stunned. The world was stunned. The linchpin of Belgium's defensive line had fallen on the first day of combat.

The next day, the 11th, Belgian forces tried to retake Eben Emael and the bridges across the Albert Canal, but to no avail. With that option gone, the next Allied effort was an attempt to bomb the bridges to deny them to the Germans. But German air superiority, guaranteed by their Messerschmitt Bf 109 fighters, doomed the effort. Allied aircraft losses were heavy, including more instances of aircraft caught on the ground and destroyed by the Luftwaffe.

Large Allied forces—the French First and Seventh Armies and the British Expeditionary Force—were advancing into Belgium, but the plan was for the Belgians to be able to hold the line until the British and French arrived to reinforce it. Now, with the Belgian defenses already

collapsing, Allied units hurried into Belgium to halt the German advance. General Gamelin, the French commander, ordered additional units from the French reserve to follow.

Take note that I mentioned the French Seventh Army here, as one of the formations advancing into Belgium. I'll have more to say about them in a few minutes.

At the Cliff Nest, an anxious Adolf Hitler received news from the front lines. He was now commander of the German Army not just in name, but in fact. He read the reports, presided over staff meetings, asked questions, and issued orders. He'd spent months studying every detail of the battle plan and sometimes displayed better understanding of it than his commanders.

The key question for Hitler was whether the Allies were falling into the trap, and after the first two days of fighting, the answer was a tentative yes. The surprising speed with which the northern army group advanced into Belgium and pierced the defenses along the Albert Canal had caught the Allies' attention, distracting them from the advance through the Ardennes.

The Germans had plotted other distractions. Most of the Luftwaffe was busy attacking the Netherlands, suggesting the Germans were keen on capturing those Dutch airbases. Farther south, German units pounded the Maginot Line. Their main goal was to dissuade the French from transferring units from the Line farther north, but it also served as a useful distraction. Farther south still, German units maneuvered close to the Swiss border and leaked intelligence suggesting that Germany might attempt to invade northern Switzerland and flank the Maginot Line from the south. German radio broadcasts were trumpeting German advances in the Netherlands and Belgium, while remaining discreetly silent about the Ardennes sector.

In other words, the Germans were doing everything they could to call attention to every sector of the front except the most important one: that secret German armored thrust through the Ardennes.

The Germans had brushed aside the defenders of Luxembourg in a matter of hours. The Grand Duchess Charlotte and her family escaped to France, later Portugal, Britain, and then Canada, where they remained for the duration of the war.

So far so good for the Germans, but the forests of the Ardennes were as difficult as the naysayers had warned. German armored columns more than a hundred kilometers long snaked their way through the woods. If a vehicle broke down, it was pushed to the side of the road and abandoned. The treetops helped conceal the columns from the air, and Luftwaffe patrols covered them from above, driving off French reconnaissance flights.

The French got a hint of tanks and vehicles moving through the Ardennes, but General Gamelin doubted it could be anything major. Those columns were tempting targets for French bombers, but French bombers were already engaged in trying to destroy the Albert Canal bridges and getting shot down by German Me 109s.

The following day, May 12, the German force advancing through the Ardennes crossed the Belgian border into France and reached the main French defensive line, along the Meuse River, just before nightfall, near the French town of Sedan, site of France's humiliating defeat back in 1870. On the 13th, the Germans assaulted that defensive line. The Luftwaffe attacked with nine dive bomber wings, pounding the French positions in the heaviest aerial bombardment in history up to this time.

Unlike the mass artillery bombardments of the previous war, these dive bomber attacks focused with precision on key points in the French line. Gamelin had assigned his best units, including his armored formations, farther north. Those units were now moving into northern Belgium. Here along the Meuse defensive line were reserve infantry units that were not as well trained or equipped. The heavy bombing attacks demoralized the French and when the first German armored units crossed the Meuse, their arrival triggered panic. A German panzer division commander named Erwin Rommel distinguished himself by urging his troops on as they built a pontoon bridge across the Meuse in the face of heavy fire from the French side. One story has it that when there were no anti-tank weapons available, Rommel ordered his soldiers to fire flares at the French tanks. The French thought they were antitank shells and withdrew.

By May 14, the Germans controlled three bridges across the Meuse and had a sizeable armored bridgehead on the west side of the river. General Heinz Guderian, commander of the armored corps spearheading the advance wanted to push on; he had to be ordered to stay put until the infantry caught up. Guderian protested and threatened to resign, which won him permission from his superiors for a "reconnaissance in force," which Guderian chose to interpret as permission to advance the entire corps to the northwest, into the rear of the French forces advancing into Belgium.

Up in the north, the Dutch Army was holding reasonably well, but the Germans had overrun the eastern and northern parts of the country and the Dutch were running out of ammunition. And this brings me back to the French Seventh Army. Remember how I mentioned them a couple of minutes ago?

I said I'd get back to them, and here we are. The Seventh Army was a recent addition to the Allied defensive plan, the brainchild of General Gamelin. The original plan put the British Expeditionary Force on the left flank of the Allied line. That is to say, along the North Sea coast. This was perfectly reasonable. The BEF, unlike the French Army, drew its reinforcements and supply from Britain, and these come across the sea in ships which unload them at French ports. It made sense to have the BEF close to the coast where those reinforcements and supplies would only need to travel a short distance to reach their destination.

But by March 1940, two months ago, it was becoming clear that the Germans meant to invade not only Belgium, but the Netherlands as well. This led Gamelin to create the Seventh Army. Its mission, when the Germans attacked, would be to rush northeast along the coast, to the left of the

BEF, through Belgium, past the Belgian port of Antwerp, and on into Zealand, in the southwest of the Netherlands, where it would link up with the Dutch Army.

The idea here is that even if the Germans overran most of the Netherlands, the Dutch Army would be able to fall back to Zealand, where it would join up with the French Seventh Army and become part of the Allied line, defending at least some small portion of Dutch territory. If you think back to the previous war, something like this happened with the Belgian Army. The Germans pushed the Belgians back to the far western edge of their country, but the Belgians, with Allied support, were able to hold that portion of the Western Front for the rest of the war. Gamelin planned to support the Dutch Army in a similar way, so they could remain as part of the Allied coalition even if most of their homeland was under German occupation.

The catch is that the Seventh Army was originally meant to be part of the strategic reserve, held back in France in case of need. It represented the very best units in the French reserve, including all of the armor reserve. Gamelin put them on the front line and gave them a whole new mission.

This will have consequences.

The Seventh Army advanced according to the plan and reached Dutch territory on May 12. But by then, the Dutch right flank was collapsing. Gamelin had to order the Seventh Army to pull back toward Antwerp. In the Netherlands, the Germans were in control of most of the land area of the country and Dutch forces were cut off from the Allies, but Dutch resistance had proved stronger than the Germans expected, and the Dutch still controlled Holland, the western coastal region that represents a major portion of the country's population and economy, including its four most important cities: Amsterdam, Rotterdam, the Hague, and Utrecht. In particular, the Dutch defenders were digging in around Utrecht, Rotterdam, and the Hague, forming a semicircular defensive line to hold those cities, with Amsterdam secure behind them, against the powerful German armor.

This development was worrisome to the Germans. If the Dutch were able to hold this line, the British might be tempted to ship reinforcements to bolster the Dutch, creating a sort of Fortress Holland that might hold off the German Army for weeks or months. Key to the Dutch defense were the bridges in Rotterdam that crossed the Maas, which is what the Dutch call the Meuse. German paratroopers had captured one side of one of these bridges, the Willemsbrug, and held onto it for three days against Dutch counterattacks, but who knew how much longer they could hold on?

In view of these considerations, on May 13, Luftwaffe chief Hermann Göring ordered a massive bombing of the city of Rotterdam. On the morning of May 14, a German soldier crossed into Rotterdam to deliver a message to its defenders: surrender the city in two hours, or it would be annihilated. The Dutch, knowing that they were dealing with Germans, pointed out that the surrender order was not signed, and demanded a signed one, as a way of buying time. This flummoxed the Germans as intended, but unfortunately for the Dutch, it was too late to recall all

of the bombers. Some fifty German He-111 bombers completed their mission, dropping over a thousand bombs, which leveled central Rotterdam, killing about 800 civilians and destroying 25,000 homes.

Now you can add Rotterdam to the list, after Guernica, Shanghai, and Warsaw, of cities subjected to deliberate terror bombing of civilians.

The defenders of Rotterdam surrendered the city. The Dutch military was still determined to fight on until they heard from the commander in Utrecht that the Germans were now demanding the surrender of that city and threatening it with the same fate, and so the Dutch decided enough was enough. There was no sense in fighting on, alone and isolated, as the Germans destroyed city after city. Dutch Army units were ordered to destroy their weapons and surrender. At 7:00 that evening, a radio broadcast announced the surrender to the Dutch people, and to the Germans. Queen Wilhelmina, the Royal Family, the Cabinet, and the Dutch gold reserve would be evacuated to Britain where they would form a Dutch government in exile, and the Dutch Navy would fight on, but in the Netherlands, the war was over.

That was the evening of May 14. Earlier that same day, having secured permission for his "reconnaissance in force," General Guderian's panzers sliced into the region west of Sedan where the French Sixth Army was mobilizing, disrupting the unit before it had a chance to get organized. The collapse of the Sixth Army exposed the rear of the also-just-organizing French Ninth Army, also forcing its collapse.

And boom, boom, boom, just like that, the French rearguard formations had been swept away. The cream of the French and British Armies were to the north, defending Belgium, and now there was absolutely nothing behind them. Their lines of supply and communication, their lines of retreat, lay exposed and undefended before Heinz Guderian and his panzers.

There was supposed to be a reserve force there, the Seventh Army. But General Gamelin had reassigned the Seventh Army to relieve the Dutch. But the Dutch had surrendered and the Seventh Army was now stuck on the North Sea Coast, a hundred kilometers away, accomplishing nothing.

It was only when the Ninth Army fell apart that General Gamelin and French war minister Daladier realized the full scope of the unfolding disaster. That night, the two of them met with Prime Minister Reynaud, the interior minister, and the military governor of Paris to discuss what could be done to defend the capital.

The following morning, May 15, five days into the German offensive, at 7:30 AM, Prime Minister Reynaud telephoned his British counterpart, Winston Churchill. Churchill was still asleep and had to be roused and brought to the telephone. When he answered, Reynaud blurted out, "We have been defeated!" Churchill, still groggy, had difficulty processing this. When he said nothing, Reynaud emphasized the point. "We are beaten. We have lost the battle."

Churchill responded, “Surely it can’t have happened so soon?”

“The front is broken near Sedan,” Reynaud informed him. “They are pouring through in great numbers with tanks and armored cars. The road to Paris is open.”

German armored units on the loose in northern France, and no one to stop them. What would they do? Would Guderian turn south, and attack the Maginot Line from the rear? Or turn southwest, and drive toward Paris?

The answer is, neither. He would turn north, and aim to cut off the entire Allied Western front.

But that is the topic of next week’s episode. We’ll have to stop here for today. I thank you for listening, and I’d especially like to thank Amy for her kind donation, and thank you to Cameron for becoming a patron of the podcast. Donors and patrons like Amy and Cameron help cover the costs of making this show, which in turn keeps the podcast available free for everyone, so my thanks to them and to all of you who have pitched in and helped out. If you’d like to become a patron or make a donation, just visit the website, historyofthetwentiethcentury.com and click on the PayPal or Patreon buttons.

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And I hope you’ll join me next week, here on *The History of the Twentieth Century,* as we continue today’s narrative on the Western offensive. German armor advances, except when it doesn’t, and Allied commanders scramble to salvage something from the unfolding disaster. Operation Dynamo, next week, here, on *The History of the Twentieth Century.*

Oh, and one more thing. Not everyone in France was satisfied with General Gamelin’s wait-and-see strategy during the Phony War. French prime minister Daladier supported Gamelin, but Daladier resigned in March 1940, after Finland capitulated to the Soviet Union. The new prime minister, Paul Reynaud, was frustrated with Gamelin and wanted to sack him, but Daladier, now the war minister, would not agree.

Gamelin had served well during the First World War, when he was a member of the Army’s general staff. Some credit him with planning the 1914 French counterattack that led to the Battle of the Marne and halted the German advance on Paris. Later he served as a field commander.

Gamelin, unlike many officers in the French Army, was fully committed to the Republic and refused to consider a candidate’s political views when considering promotions. This made him exceptional in an Army whose general officers were likely to be right-wing and suspicious of the

Republic. It was because of his apolitical, pro-Republic stance that Daladier supported him so strongly.

[music: Closing War Theme]

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