

1960

The Battle of France, 1940

Adolphe Goutard

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review>

Recommended Citation

Goutard, Adolphe (1960) "The Battle of France, 1940," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 13 : No. 1 , Article 8.
Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol13/iss1/8>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Naval War College Review by an authorized editor of U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. For more information, please contact repository.inquiries@usnwc.edu.

prolong the war. The writers discuss the horrors of the gas chambers and mass executions with frankness, and they remark on the pangs of conscience which a number of people felt sufficiently to cause them to risk their lives in opposing the regime, and even if in a disorganized way, to lend themselves to the project of assassination as the only way to free their country from the prospect of total physical destruction by the war or of complete spiritual destruction by the Nazi tyranny. It should be mentioned in passing that attempts to draw lessons from the German experience during this period respecting the unified command of the armed forces fail to recognize the political significance of the incongruous arrangement whereby the High Command of the Armed Forces (OKW) really was not superior, but was the equal of the high commands of the Army, Navy and Air Force. This is a digest of history well worth the short time it takes for anyone to read it.

Goutard, Adolphe. *The Battle of France, 1940*. New York, Ives Washburn, 1959. 280 p.

The defeat of France in 1940 was a devastating and demoralizing shock to the free world. The speed and decisiveness of the victory cut like a Turkish scimitar through the veil of complacency. Since that time many theories have been propounded as to the cause of defeat. The most popular and perhaps most generous of these theories holds that the French of 1940 were decadent, pleasure-loving, timid, weakened by infiltration and subversion, and defeatist. The same theorists hold that the Germans of 1940 were supermen of overwhelming numbers armed with tanks, aircraft and guns of extraordinary capability and incredible lethality and led by military geniuses of clairvoyant perception. This is perhaps the common view. But a courageous Frenchman, Colonel Adolphe Goutard, in *The Battle of France, 1940*, shatters this view with a cold-blooded analysis of the reasons for his country's defeat. He examines the affair from both sides, and, with the advantage

of hindsight, is able to reconstruct the events leading up to the defeat of the French, He concludes that, while France may have been lethargic, defeatist and decadent, the main culprits in her defeat were the military — and not the soldiers, who fought ungallantly in only one sector and then only because they were untrained and located in the wrong place by a miscalculation in strategy. Goutard's analysis points out that defeat came because of a succession of failures to take advantage of opportunities — of not attacking the gap between Panzers and infantry, for example; by reliance on doctrine of the past — of not understanding the value of massed armor and the use of aircraft in modern war — of being suprised tactically — by feeling that the enemy could not and therefore would not make their main thrust into France through the Ardennes — which is what they did; of being surprised strategically — by massing their best forces in the north where they fell into the trap laid for them by the German Manstein Plan. But most of all Goutard puts the blame on the French high command for failing in leadership — both before the war and during the battle. The book goes into some detail to prove that the French could have won the war many times and in many places. It discusses intelligently what might have been had the French taken advantage of their opportunities. The maps to illustrate the maneuvers of the Germans are well done — neither too detailed nor too sketchy. And in the chapter on the miracle of Dunkirk, the author points out a curious and provocative idea which may have been a reason why the Fuehrer halted his Panzer Divisions when they could have cut off the British: the Fuehrer didn't want to embarrass the British because he admired them and wanted to ally with them! This is not the first time that this enigmatic logic of the Fuehrer's has been exposed. Altogether, this is a readable, interesting book for the student of warfare — mostly ground, admittedly — which goes step by step like a geometry theorem to prove the author's point. Thus the logic is hardly refutable.