

- The Battle of Sedan 1940 (or the Second Battle of Sedan) was a battle fought between the Wehrmacht and the French Army in the field of Sedan during the initial stages of the campaign in France.
- This battle represented a crucial moment for the fate of the German offensive against France and one of the most important and successful military operations of the first phase of the Second World War.
- Some German armoured divisions of Army Group A were able to overcome the Meuse and to conquer the important position of Sedan, thus laying the foundation for the rapid conversion to the north-west that would have surrounded in a few days the bulk of the Anglo-French troops of Army Group n. 1 in Belgium.

In this presentation, I want to demonstrate how Germany training and individual leadership allowed the German sub-units to cross the River Meuse and defeat the defending French Units opening the way for the breakout of German armour

To give you a wider understanding of the Campaign I will play the following video.

'How did Germany defeat France in 1940'

German Land Forces

- When Guderian's XIX Corps arrived at Sedan on the River Meuse on the afternoon of 12th of May his corps consisted of the 1st Panzer Division, 2nd Panzer Division, 10th Panzer Division and the elite Motorised Infantry Regiment *Großdeutschland*.
- However, only the advance units of these divisions had arrived. Support engineers and artillery units were still in the rear.
- The crossing of the Meuse was to take place in three locations at Sedan. The central crossing was to be undertaken by the 1st Panzer Division. The units involved in the attack were the Schützen-Regiment 1 (renamed Panzergrenadier-Regiment 1 Jul 1941), Grossdeutschland Regiment, 43rd Assault Engineer Battalion, and the entire artillery pool of the three divisions in XIX Corps.

German Air Forces (Luftwaffe)

The Luftwaffe placed 61% of its total operational air assets at the disposal of Gruppe Kleist for the assault on the Meuse River.

For the Sedan Sector 51% of air assets allocated to the Gruppe were deployed against the Sedan sector;

The breakdown was as follows:

- 280 Messerschmitt Me109
- 90 Messerschmitt Me110
- 180 Junkers Ju87
- 360 Heinkel He111, Dornier Do17 and Junkers Ju88 bombers

A total of 910 aircraft (540 bombers and 370 fighters)

French Forces

The main defence of the River Meuse opposite Sedan is the responsibility of the 55e Infantry Division.

The composition of the division is as follows:

- 213 Infantry Regiment (which was not on the front line)
- 295 Infantry Regiment which was incomplete as one its Battalions was destroyed in the German advance
- 331 Infantry Regiment
- The division possessed double its normal allocation of artillery. A number of corps-level artillery units were also attached to the 55th, giving it 140 guns under its control.

As the battle commence units of the 71 Infantry Division commenced arriving.

The main front line of the river was held by six companies of soldiers from the 147e RIF (fortress infantry regiment)

French Defences

The main French defences were 103 pillboxes manned by the 147th Fortress Infantry Regiment supported by the 55th Infantry Division and arriving elements of the 71st Infantry Division.

Both of these divisions were manned by grade 'B' reservist. B Divisions were composed of reservists, above 30 years old and ill-equipped. A serious qualitative deficiency was a lack of anti-aircraft artillery, mobile anti-tank artillery and radio communication systems. All communications between Headquarters and units was by runner or land lines.

Although thousands of anti tank mines had been laid months before the battle, they had been removed because of dam. It is estimated that only 2000 anti tank mines and an unknown number of anti personnel mines were deployed along a 70 Klm front. As a comparison, Rommel used about 500,000 AT mines on 70 km in El Alamein in 1942.

In fact although the French had spent months improving their defences Ariel reconnaissance reveal that the defences in many cases were incomplete.

The French infantry lacked any useful training and were used on labor/pioneer tasks.

German Tactical Doctrine

German tactical doctrine had been slowly developing since the 19th century. The Germans believed in the principles of *Bewegungskrieg* (manoeuvre warfare). The great German offensive on the Western Front in World War I had been based on such principles.

After that war, the Germans had studied the results and refined the techniques with the developments of tanks and air power. General Guderian was the mastermind behind the development of the panzer force. Along with his Army Commander General von Rundstedt and his chief of staff General von Manstein had designed and developed the plan for the breakthrough in Ardennes and crossing the Meuse at Sedan.

Although a great deal of attention has been concentrated on the development and use of Armored forces, a key element of the doctrine was the freedom given to officers and non commissioned officer to met their tactical objectives.



German Training

The Germans used the period know as the Phoney War (between August 1939 and May 1940) to undertake large scale training and reequipping of their forces.

For example General Guderian concentrated on hard training. Tank crews practiced in the Eifel Mountains to replicate the conditions in the Ardennes. Infantry and engineers practiced river crossings on the river Moselle which was almost identical to the River Meuse.

A significant part of German training also involved the coordination of close air support.





Colonel Hermann Balck attacks

Schützen-Regiment 1 under command of Colonel Balck was tasked with forcing the river crossing of the Meuse on the right flank of the 1st Panzer Division at Sedan.

The assault was to be carried out using rubber assault boats. However in the traffic jam the boats arrived, but not the operators had not.

However, Colonel Balck's leadership came to the fore as he had trained his unit for just this circumstance.

The morale and training of this unit was first rate, they were ready to tackle the river crossing and take the high ground of La Marfée.

However, before he could attack, he needed to surprise the French defenders!

The Luftwaffe Attack

General Guderian and General Hugo Sperrle, commander of *Luftflotte 3*, devised and executed the heaviest air bombardment the world had yet witnessed and the most intense by the *Luftwaffe* during the war.¹ The *Luftwaffe* committed two *Sturzkampfgeschwader* (dive bomber wings) to the assault, flying 300 sorties against French positions, with *Sturzkampfgeschwader 77* alone flying 201 individual missions.¹⁴⁵¹ A total of 3,940 sorties were flown by nine *Kampfgeschwader* (Bomber Wing) units often in *Gruppe* strength.

The planned aerial assault would last for eight hours, from 08:00-16:00. However it was two hours late!

The attacks were rolling in nature and concentrated on the positions of the French defenders in the Maree Heights.



The Impact of the Air Attack

The Luftwaffe targets systematically the unachieved bunkers, the artillery positions, the communication and command posts. It is therefore roughly without artillery support that the weak French first line will have to stop the German assault. Each French battery entering in action is silenced by the Luftwaffe.

During 4 hours, the French troops are heavily bombed. The psychological shock of this air attack is even stronger than for the first use of combat gas during WW1 according to several testimonies. Heavy bombings occur every 20 minutes on the men hidden in their trenches. The 55e DI is devoid of AA weapons and unable to return fire. All the communication by telephone lines between the first lines and the rear are cut. Battalions, companies and platoons are roughly isolated.

During these 4 hours of bombing, no allied fighter appeared to stop the German aircrafts despite support had been asked from the beginning, adding to the bad effect on the morale. All the allied fighters are too busy in other areas.

The French gunners remain hidden in their foxholes and trenches during the bombings. The French infantry is also pinned down, cut from the others, roughly deaf but also blind. The banks of the Meuse River have disappeared in the dust of the explosions and later in the German smoke screen just before the German assaults.

The Crossing

The German infantry started across. Despite the artillery and air attacks, heavy fire

greeted them, causing heavy casualties for the first few waves; one estimate placed the dead and wounded at fully half the infantry Balck took with him. Nevertheless, they pushed forward and seized a bridgehead.

Black was assisted by the independent actions of Sergeant Rubarth and his small squad of assault engineers. were the only Germans to get across the river from the 10th Panzer Division. He destroyed seven French bunkers, carving out the bridgehead, and sowing such fear among the enemy.

His actions allowed for the successful crossings of the Grossdeutschland Regiment and the further advancement of Colonel Balck regiment.



Consolidation and Victory

Once the two regiments had secured the bridgehead they fought to consolidate their gains and secure the heights.

Hermann Balck decided to continue his attack even though darkness had fallen. His troops were worn out from their earlier exertions, but once again Balck's leadership spurred them to further efforts, as he would later speak of in a postwar interview: "At Sedan, my combat leaders told me that they were finished—that they just simply couldn't advance anymore, and I said, 'Fine. Whoever wants to stay here can stay here. I'm leading the attack on the next village' the entire regiment sprang up as one man to follow him.

The Grossdeutschland Regiment continued attacking and took hill 247 and the French are beginning to withdraw to the northern edge of the La Marfee woods. Element of the 10th Panzer Division have now being able to cross as well as elements of the 2nd Panzer Division after Balck's men secure the village of Donchery.

Balck's infantry reaches the road next to Chehery at 2300 hrs the most advanced positions of the breakthrough.

French reaction and defeat

As stated the air assault had destroyed communications and artillery support and created confusion amongst local French Commanders.

The following is a description of what was happening on the French side.

During the same time, at 18h30 Capitaine Fouques commanding artillery batteries from the 169e RAF north of Chaumont (south of the La Marfee woods), phones to the commander of the regiment (lieutenant-colonel Dourzal) and reports gunfire at 500m of his position and the possibility of the presence of French tanks. It remains possible that he thought that there were French tanks because of the same reason than the Germans (Renault UE or Renault FT17 tractors in the woods) or simply because he was too nervous. K.H. Frieser does not think that the presence of the Renault UE tractors of the AT platoon corresponds with the time frame but he seems not aware of the presence of the Renault FT17 in these woods. At 18h45, lieutenant-colonel Dourzal phones to colonel Poncelet, commanding all the artillery of the area. Poncelet asks for extra information but Dourzal keeps saying that he would be encircled in the next 5 minutes and confirms the presence of German tanks. Poncelet orders then the retreat of the French artillery units.

Retreat and disaster

On the first lines the companies of the 55e DI and of the 147e RIF are still fighting desperately but the artillery units (especially the artillery from the Army Corps but also from the 55e DI and 71e DI) will flee away. The rumours of the presence of German tanks near Bulson (despite the fact that no single German tank has actually crossed the Meuse River) will cause what is known as the "Bulson panic".

While the first lines are still fighting courageously in a desperate situation, the rear troops are abandoning their position in panic. The HQ of the 55e DI follows the movement, without being able to check the information. The panic spreads in the rear lines, many men abandoning their weapons. 2 artillery groups of the 55e DI and 5 heavy artillery groups of the Army Corps abandon and/or scuttle their gun before retreating.

All the retreating artillery units with many horse-drawn wagons, ammunition trailers, guns etc. will congest the trails, lanes and the single national road from Sedan to Vouziers. Added to the civilian refugees, these men will considerably hamper the movement of other French units moving to counter-attack the German breakthrough.

Conclusion

The Germans have established a 6 km wide and 3 km deep bridgehead. It is an important German success, but most of the infantry, all the vehicles and the heavy armament of the XIX.Panzerkorps are still on the north-eastern bank of the Meuse River :

- 787 tanks
- 168 armored cars
- 18 15cm sIG.33 auf PzI
- 6 8.8cm FlaK (Sfl) Sd.Kfz.8
- all the attached StuG III (at least 6 of Sturmgeschütz-Batterie 640 included in the "Grossdeutschland" IR)
- all the attached Panzerjäger I (at least Panzerjäger Abteilung 521 with 18 Panzerjäger I, attached to 10.PzD)
- all the artillery and 8.8cm FlaK

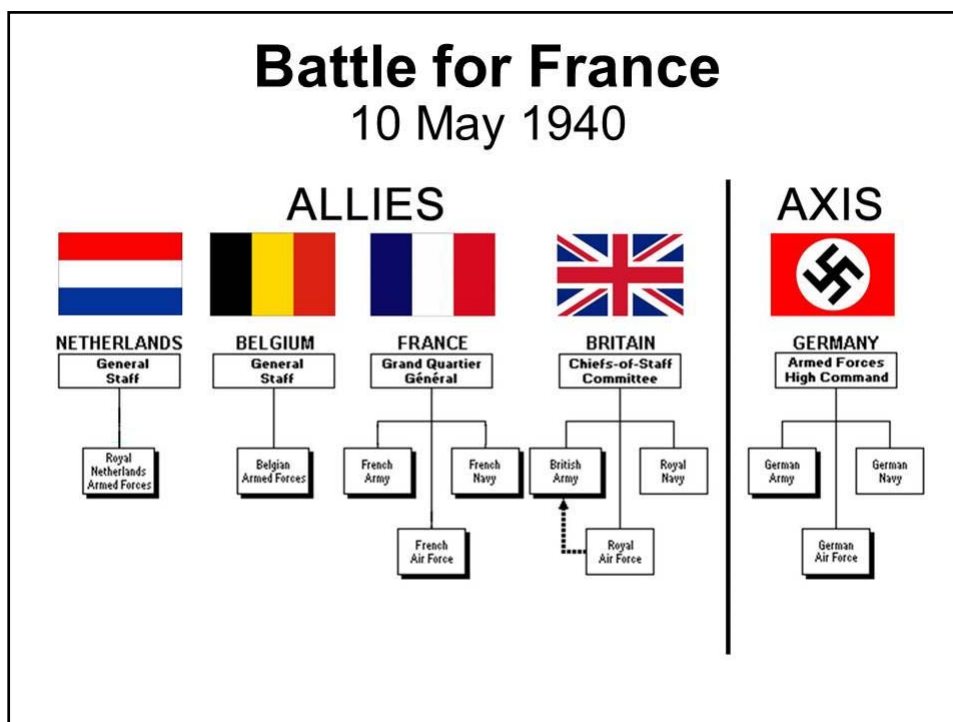
More than 1000 AFVs are in front of Sedan itself but have not yet crossed the river. Despite the omnipresent Luftwaffe, a quick and strong French counter-attack would still be able to close the door to the German army.

This will never happen! The French reactions as shown was too slow.

The German breakthrough at Sedan was achieved by a great plan backed by flexible commanders and committed and well trained and motivated troops.

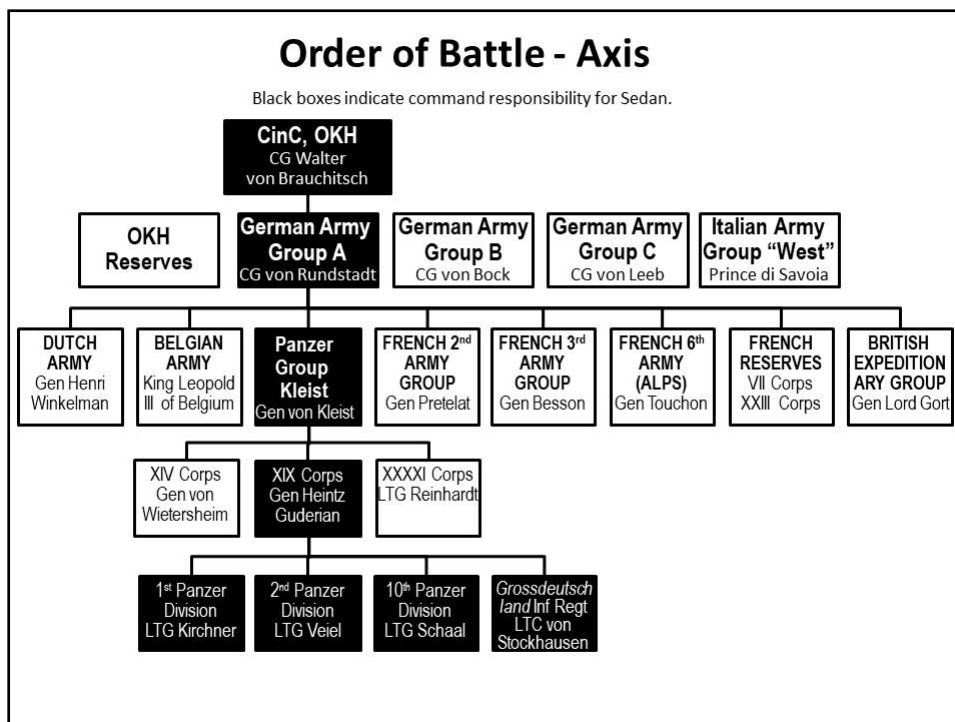
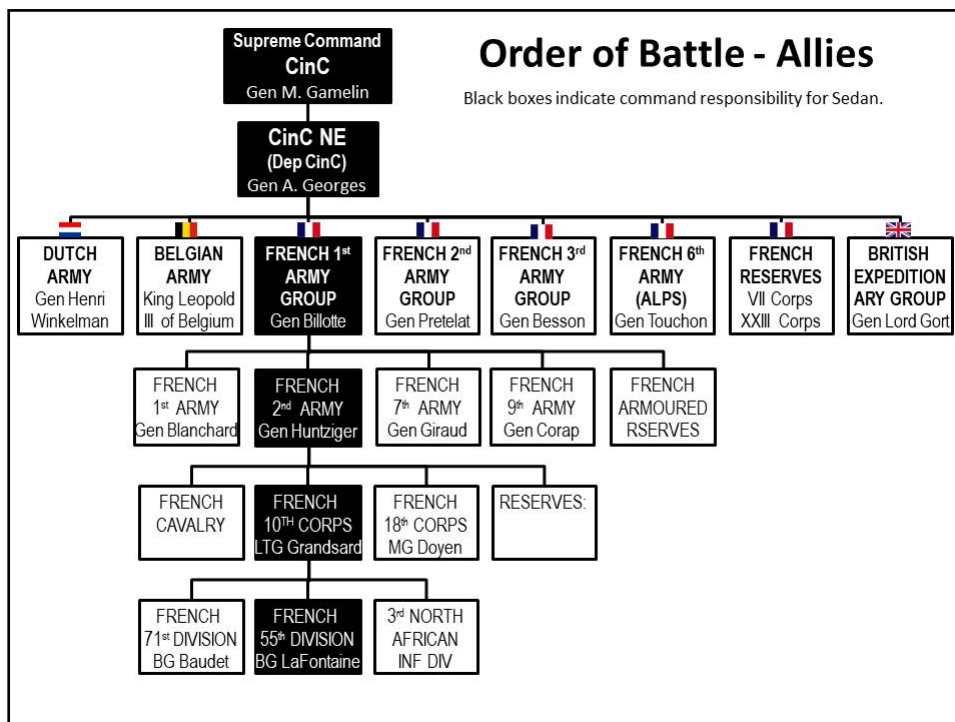
Individual bravery and initiative won the battle for the Germans against poorly trained and led French troops who did fight bravely.

Supplemental Slides













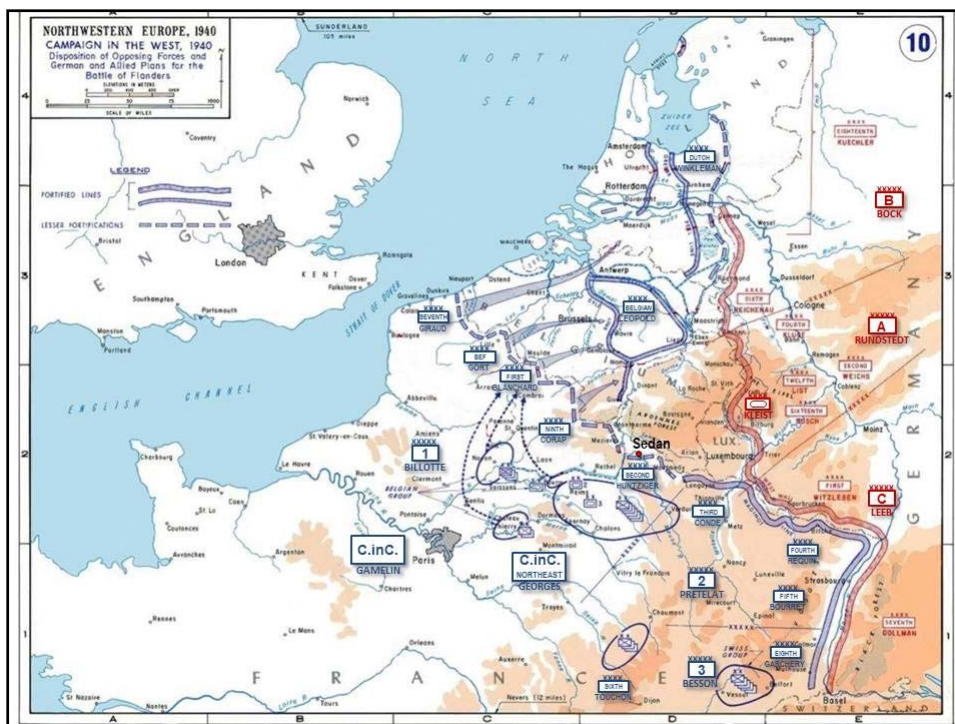
The Battle of Sedan, 12-15 May 1940

Belligerents	
France	Belgium
United Kingdom	The Netherlands
	Germany
Commanders and leaders	
Général d'armée Maurice Gamelin, CinC	Army Group A, FM Gerd von Rundstedt
Army NE, Général d'armée A. Georges, Dep. CinC	1 st Panzer Army, Col. Gen. Ewald von Kleist
1 st Army Group, Général d'armée Gaston Billotte	XIV Army Corps (Mot.), LTG Wietersheim
French 7 th Army, General Henri Giraud	XIX Panzer Corps, LTG Heinz Guderian
French 2 nd Army, General Charles Huntziger	1 st Panzer Division, MG Friedrich Kirchner
French X Corps, General Pierre Grandsard	2 nd Panzer Division, LTG Rudolf Veiel
55 th Division, BG Pierre Lafontaine	10 th Panzer Division, LTG Ferdinand Schaal
71 st Division, BG Joseph Baudet	Infanterie-Regiment Großdeutschland, COL Gerhard von Schwerin
French Air Force, NE Theater, LTG Marcel Tētu	XXXXI Panzer Corps, LTG Georg-Hans Reinhardt
French Artillery in Sedan Area, Colonel Poncelet	16 th Infantry Division, MG Heinrich Krampf
British Expeditionary Force, FM John Lord Gort	71 st Infantry Division, LTG Karl Weisenberger
RAF (AASF)- AM Sir P H L Playfair	8 th Air Corps, Col. Gen. W. von Richthofen
RAF – France, Air VM Arthur Barratt	II <i>Fliegerkorps</i> (Air Corps), MG Bruno Loerzer
Combatants	
20,000 men	60,000 men
300 tanks	41,000 vehicles
174 artillery pieces	772 tanks
152 bombers	1,470 aircraft
250 fighters	141 artillery pieces
	96 rubber boats

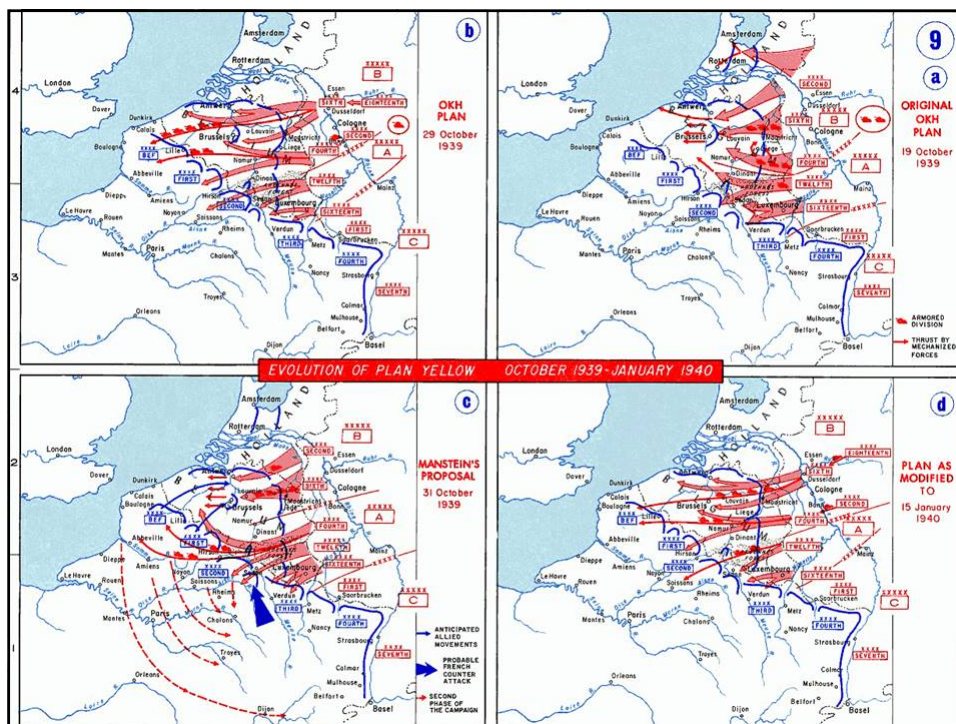


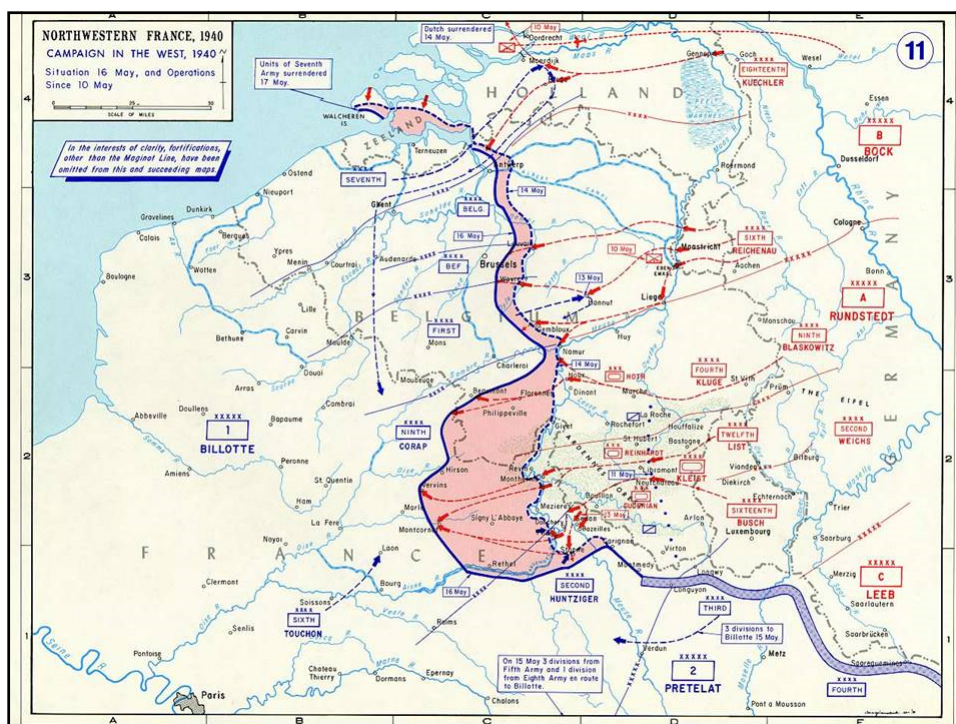
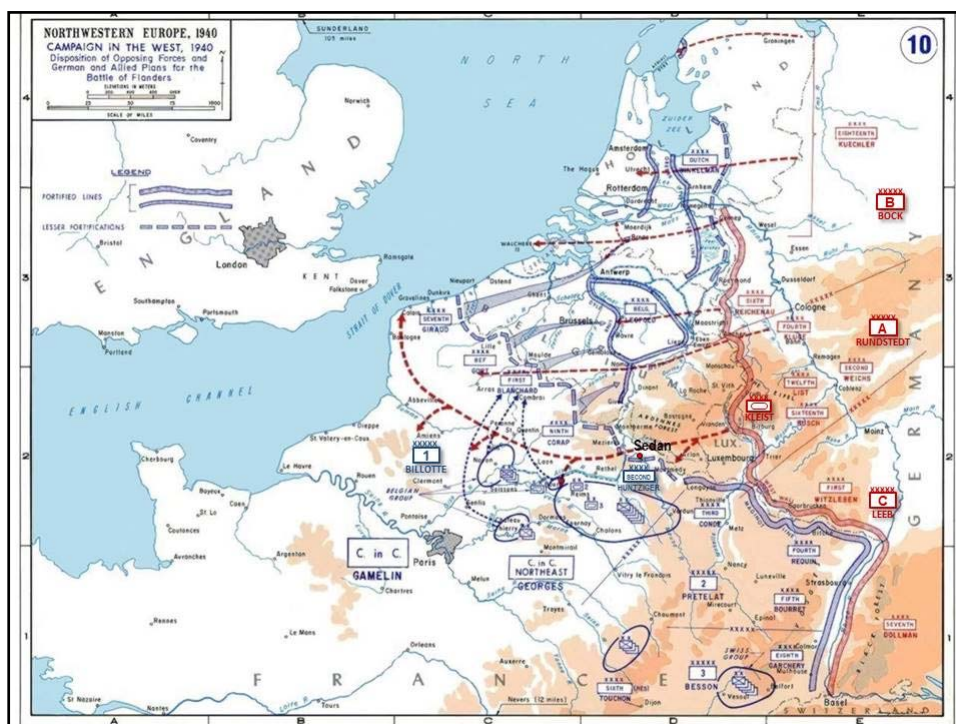


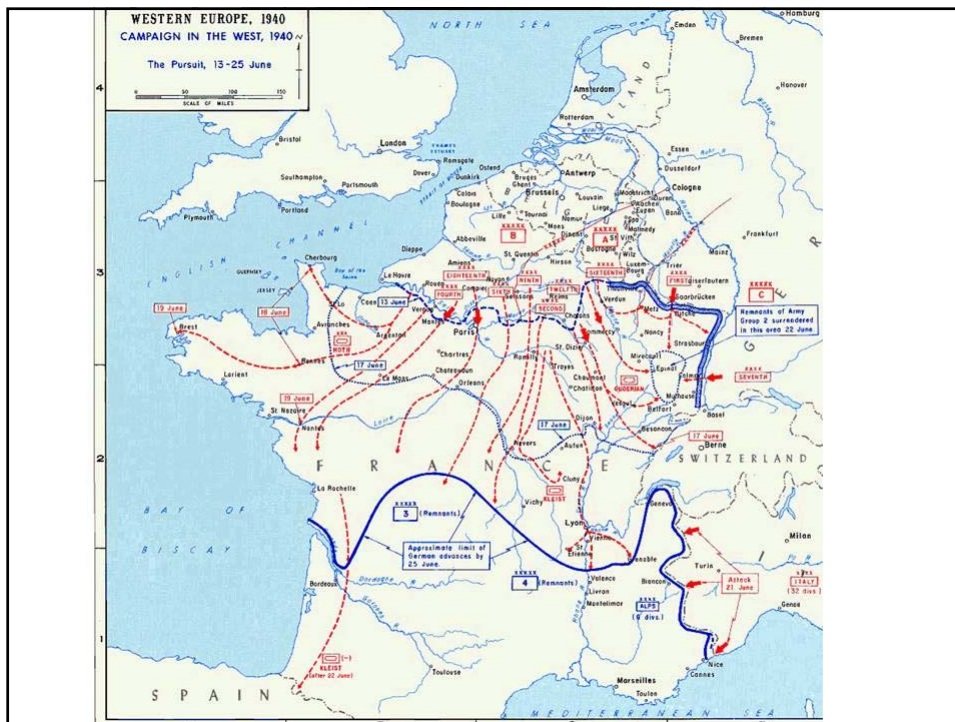
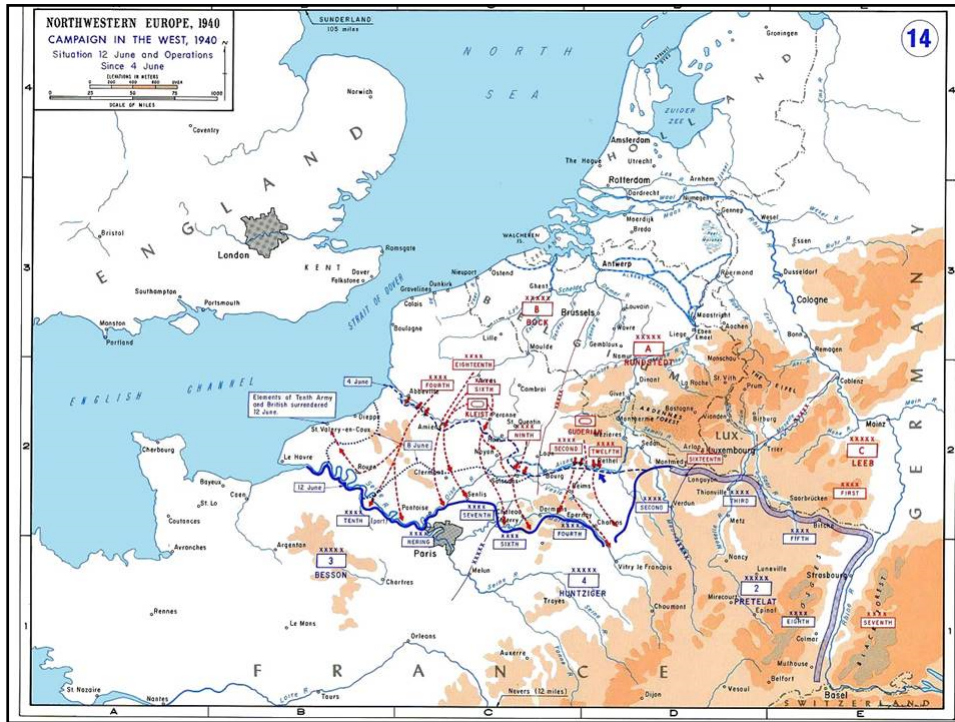
	772	89	280	215	122	40	26
		Panzer I 	Panzer II 	Panzer III 	Panzer IV 	Panzer 35(t) 	SdKfz 265 
1 st Panzer Div 	-	52	98	58	40	8	
2 nd Panzer Div 	45	115	59	32	-	-	
10 th Panzer Div 	44	113	58	32	-	18	
Infantry Regiment Großdeutschland 	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

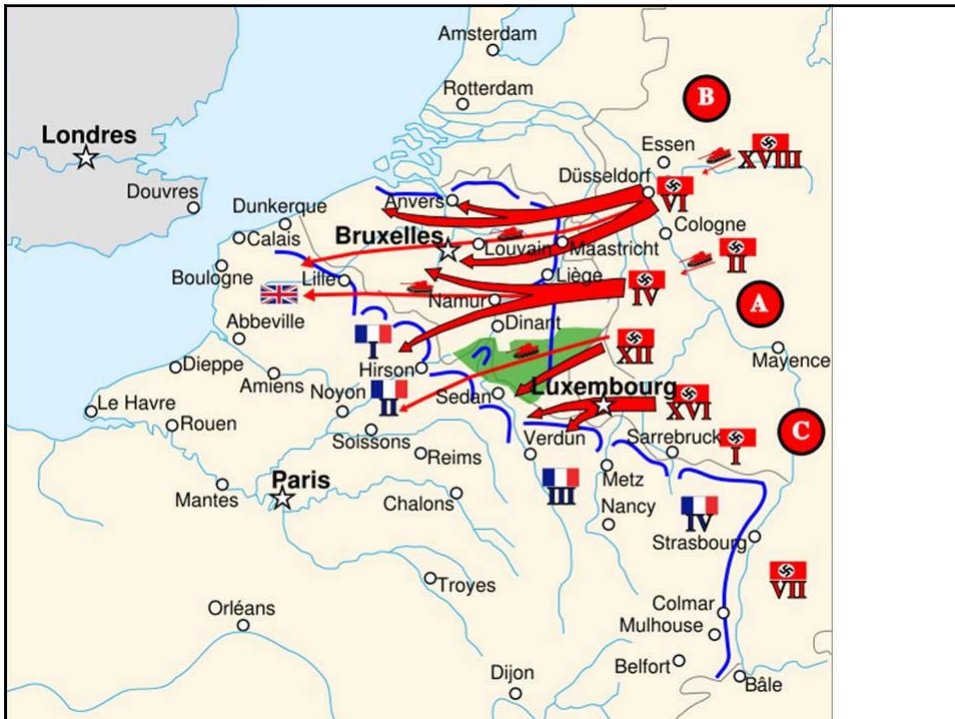
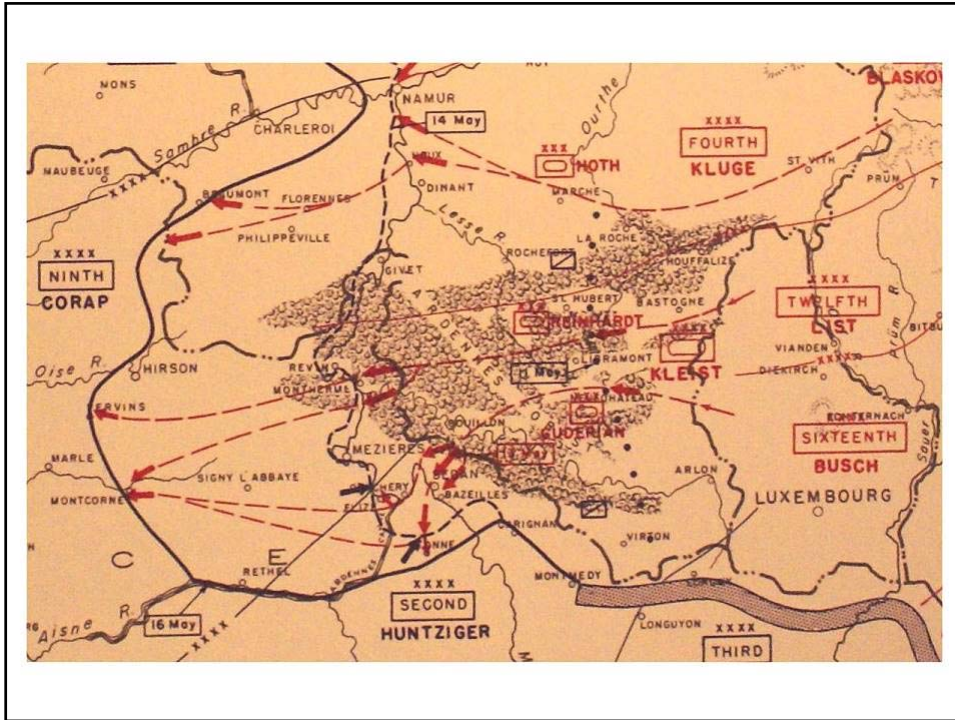


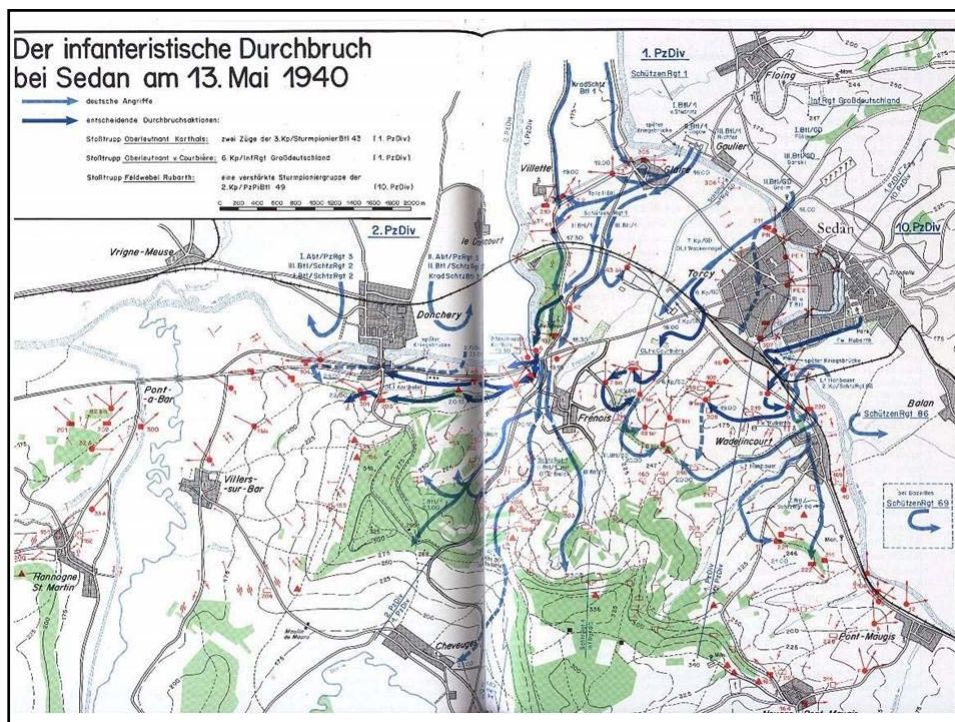
14 May 1940 1st Panzer Regiment crosses pontoon bridge over the Meuse at Floing, near Sedan



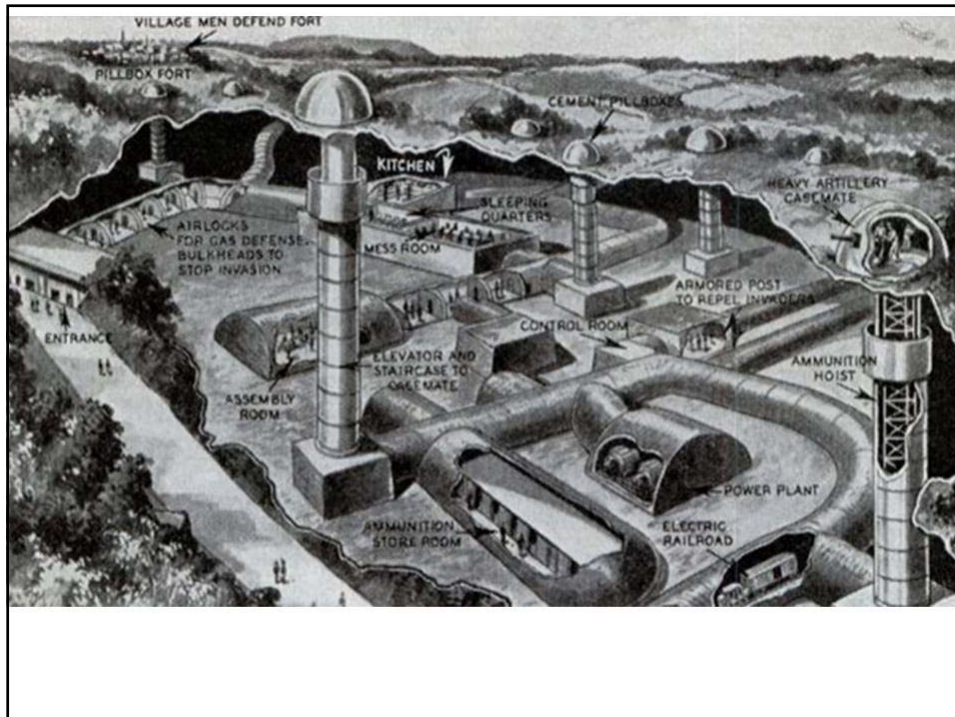
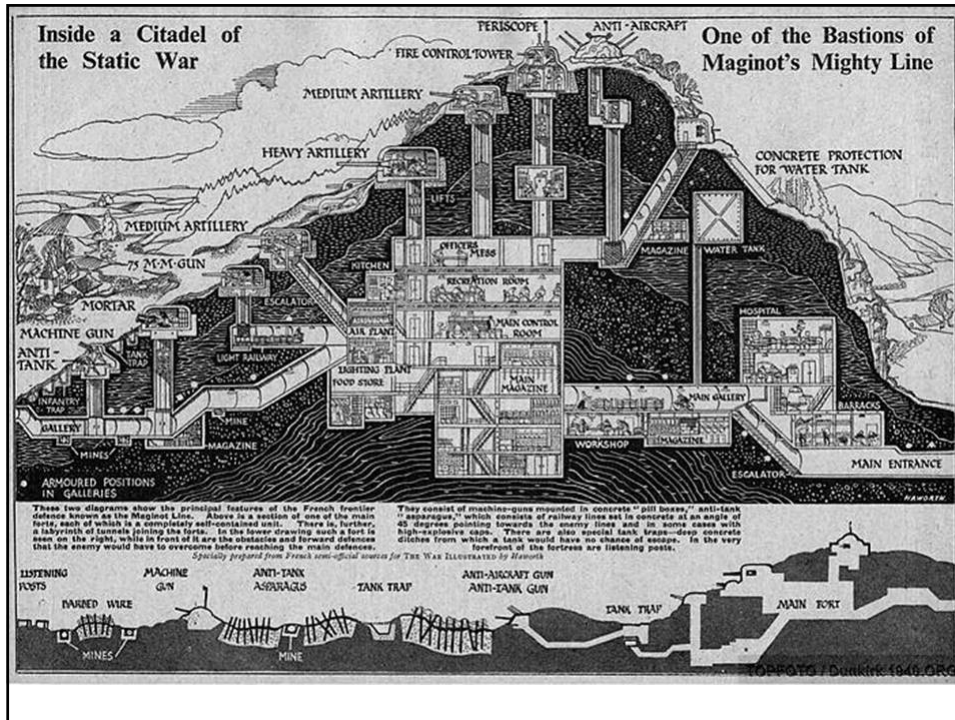


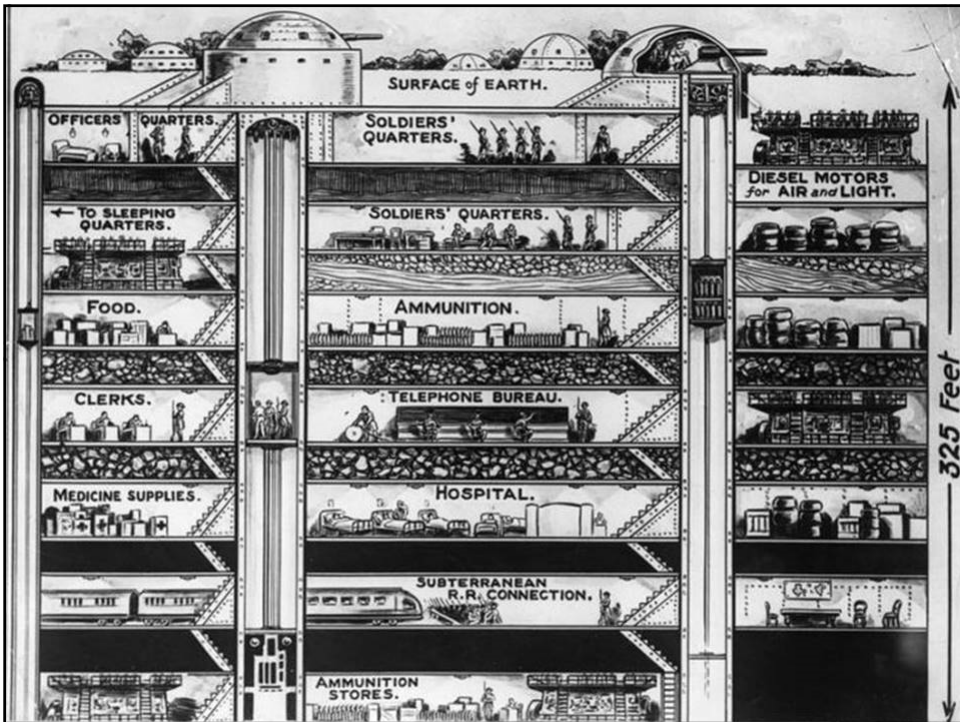
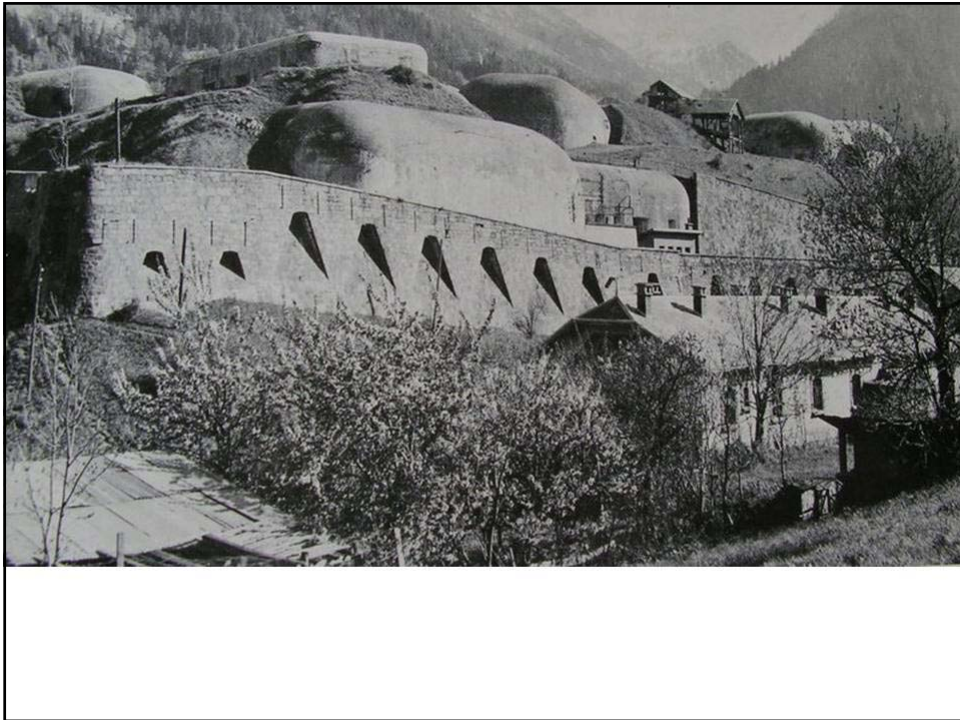






The Battle of Sedan, 12-15 May 1940	
Belligerents	
France United Kingdom	Belgium The Netherlands Germany
Combatants	
20,000 men 300 tanks 174 artillery pieces 152 bombers 250 fighters	60,000 men 41,000 vehicles 772 tanks 1,470 aircraft 141 artillery pieces 96 rubber boats
Casualties and losses	
Manpower losses unknown, but massive Artillery losses unknown, assume most of the 174 Tank losses unknown, assume most of the 300 167 aircraft lost	120 killed and 400 wounded (12–14 May) ¹ 647 killed or wounded (15–17 May) At least 81 rubber boats destroyed
Outcome – Decisive German Victory	
1. Instrumental in the Fall of France in June 1940, and surrender of Belgium and The Netherlands. 2. Forced the British Expeditionary Force to withdraw to England (Dunkirk).	1. Captured the Meuse bridges at Sedan. 2. Achieved the operational goal of <i>Fall Gelb</i> and encircled the strongest Allied armies (e.g., BEF) 3. Enabled Germans to break into the undefended rear of the Allied front and advance to the English Channel without significant opposition.







The Battle of France

- The Battle of France was an important act of aggression made by the Germans, that weakened the government of France and strengthened the Nazis.

Fall Gelb (Case Yellow)

- Case Yellow was the codename for the German's plan of attack
- Their plan was to take armored offensive through the Ardennes Forest to bypass the French Maginot Line defences.
- Their goal was to try to encircle the French and British divisions.

Fall Gelb (Case Yellow)

- The Germans overwhelmed the Dutch forces.
- The bombing of Rotterdam made the Netherlands surrender on May 15.
- The French second-rate divisions in the Ardennes area weren't ready to deal with the troops the Germans had.
- They were "hammered" by German bombers.

Fall Gelb (Case Yellow)

- Four days in, the Germans crossed the Meuse river, breaking through French lines.
- Allies' attempts to counter by air and land ended with heavy losses or didn't work due to the pace of events.
- The British Expeditionary Force and France's best forces were still in the north.
- The German breakthrough in the south forced to retreat, so they wouldn't be cut off.
- German tanks reached Amiens and trapped the British.

Operation Dynamo

- Evacuation plan that was quickly prepared in Dover by Vice Admiral Bertram Ramsay.
- Used civilian vessels to move troops to larger ships offshore or evacuate them
- Between May 26 and June 4, 200,000 British and 140,000 French troops were evacuated to England
- 9 allied destroyers and about 200 civilian vessels were lost in the evacuation
- On June 5, the Germans moved south and the French resistance collapsed

Fall Rot - Case Red

- This was the second phase of the German attack on France in 1940
- It was designed to follow up after a victory from Case Yellow
- France attempted to make hedgehogs (strong bases) to stall Germany
- German forces attacked on and broke France's line to advance towards Paris

Fall Rot - Case Red

- Germany then seized Paris as it's own city
- Within the seize of Paris, France appointed a new prime minister, Philippe Petain
- Petain then arranged an armistice with Germany

