



France

Country located in Western Europe. France entered World War II in September 1939 to join its ally, Poland, in its struggle against Germany. The German army invaded France itself in May 1940. In June, the French surrendered and signed an armistice with the Nazis. France was then divided in two: northern France (the occupied zone) was placed under German control, while southern France (the unoccupied zone) was placed under the control of a new French Government, that was established in the spa town of Vichy. Marshal Philippe Petain, a World War I hero, revered by the French people, headed the Vichy Government. At the same time French General Charles de Gaulle, who bitterly opposed Petain's surrender to the Germans, fled to Great Britain, where he set up a French Government-in-exile and rallied around him other Frenchmen who wanted to free France from the tyranny of the Germans and the collaborating Vichy Government.

In the summer of 1940, after France fell to Germany, there were 350,000 Jews living in France. More than half the Jewish population were not French citizens, but Jews who had moved to France after World War I or Jewish refugees from Germany and other areas already occupied by the Nazis. Almost immediately after the occupation, both the Jews living in the occupied zone and those in the unoccupied zone were subjected to the first wave of anti-Jewish measures. In the German-controlled zone, Jews were stripped of their jobs, their freedom of movement became restricted, and many were arrested. At the same time, the Vichy Government actively commenced persecuting the Jewish community. In October 1940, it passed a set of anti-Jewish laws called the Statut des Juifs. These laws strictly defined who was to be considered a Jew, calling for the drastic reduction of Jewish involvement in French society. In March 1941 the Vichy authorities, under pressure from the Germans, set up an Office for Jewish Affairs under the direction of Xavier Vallat. The office was responsible to institute and carry out France's anti-Jewish legislation, including the confiscation of Jewish property and businesses (see also Aryanization). In November 1941 Vallat created the



Union of French Jews under the impetus of Adolf Eichmann's representative in France, Theodor Dannecker.

Initially, the anti-Jewish measures placed into effect by the Vichy Government were directed against Jews who were not native French citizens. Thousands were sent to forced labor camps or imprisoned. However, at the end of April 1942 Pierre Laval joined the Vichy Government as prime minister. Laval was proactively committed to collaborating fully with the Nazis. In May, the Vallat, Director for the Office for Jewish Affairs' was replaced by a rabid antisemite named Louis Darquier de Pellepoix, who willingly persecuted all Jews in France, irrespective of their citizenship. After 2 years of inflicting suffering upon the Jews, the Germans and the Vichy authorities commenced deportations.

The French police agreed to round up and arrest the Jews for deportation, in exchange for a great deal of independence. In June 1942, the Germans forced the Jews in the occupied zone to wear the Jewish badge for easy identification, began arresting large groups, and restricted the movements of the remaining community. (see also Badge, Jewish). The "roundups", carried out mostly by the French police, continued throughout the summer. In one severe *aktion* which took place on July 16-17, they rounded up about 12,000 Jews in Paris, jamming some 7,000 of them into the *Velodrome d'Hiver* sports stadium for days without food, water, or toilets. Many thousands of Jews were arrested and sent by cattle car to a transit camp in the Paris suburb of Drancy, from which they were deported to the east. The Vichy authorities also arrested and deported Jews from their zone. Altogether, 42,500 Jews were sent to the east during 1942.

In November 1942 German and Italian forces took over the Vichy zone. Italy took control of a small area of southeast France, and protected the Jews who fled there seeking refuge from the Germans and Vichy authorities. The Italians even refused to implement any anti-Jewish laws in their zone. However, in September 1943, when Italy attempted to surrender to the Allies, the Germans took over the Italian part of France, and began arresting the Jews who had found shelter there. Some Jews tried to escape southward to Spain or eastward to Switzerland, but the journey to those countries was extremely



dangerous, and few Jews made it successfully. French non-Jews, who hid them at great risk to themselves and their families, aided some Jews.

Despite Laval's proclaimed commitment to collaborate with the Nazis, he faced protests from the French people when the deportation of Jews began to include French citizens, and not just Jewish refugees from other countries. In August 1943 Laval refused to strip French Jews of their citizenship in order to expedite their deportation. However, in spite of this and other minor protests, the deportations continued in 1943 and into 1944. In total, approximately 80,000 Jews were deported from France during the war. 2,000 of them survived. Approximately 70,000 Jews were sent to Auschwitz, while the rest were sent to Majdanek, Sobibor, and a small number to Buchenwald.

Throughout the war, a French resistance movement (the *Maquis*) under the leadership of Jean Moulin was active against the Nazis and the Vichy Government. Moulin was the representative of General Charles de Gaulle. The Jews of France also participated in underground activities, both in the general French Resistance and in Jewish resistance organizations, such as a Jewish militia called the *Armee Juive* (see also Jewish Army, France). The Jewish underground worked very hard at hiding fellow Jews, especially Jewish children.

The Allies landed at Normandy in northwestern France on June 6, 1944. Two months later, France was liberated, and de Gaulle marched victorious into Paris. The leaders of the defunct Vichy Government fled to Germany.