Gaulle, Charles de

(1890--1970), French army general and political leader. During World War II de Gaulle headed the Free French Movement and resistance forces in German-occupied and Vichy France.

Germany invaded France in May 1940. After the French army was defeated, de Gaulle was appointed Deputy Minister of War and strenuously opposed French Prime Minister Philippe Petain's surrender to Germany. He then went to London, where he formed the Free French Movement for all those French soldiers and civilians who did not accept the truce with Germany.

In 1941 de Gaulle led Free French troops in battle against Vichy forces in Syria and Lebanon to free those French colonies from the Nazis. However, during the 1942 battle to liberate North Africa, the Allies did not confer with de Gaulle; instead they relinquished Algeria to Vichy officials such as Francois Darlan who had surrendered to them. De Gaulle soon overwhelmed his enemies in Algeria and abolished the anti-Jewish laws instituted there by the Vichy government.

De Gaulle became prime minister of the provisional French government established after France was liberated in August 1944. He cancelled all racial laws and made sure the Jews received their property and rights. De Gaulle served as president of France from 1958--1969. (For more on Vichy, see also France.)