

Laval, Pierre

(1883--1945), Head of the collaborating Vichy government in France from 1942 to 1944.

Laval served as French prime minister from 1931 to 1932 and from 1935 to 1936. After the Nazis occupied the northern part of France in June 1940, Laval became the second in command to Philippe Petain, the French war hero who agreed to collaborate with the Nazis and set up a government in southern France. However, Petain was afraid that Laval would seize power away from him, so he fired Laval in December 1940. In spite of Petain's decision, the Nazis called for Laval to be reinstated, and in May 1942 he returned as prime minister.

Laval was more interested in being practical than in ideology. He wanted peace for France at any price, so he agreed to cooperate with the Nazis in full. He helped the Nazis arrest thousands of Jews for Deportation to their deaths, while in public, he stuck to the story that they were just being sent to labor camps in the east.

After the war, Laval was sentenced to death for collaboration and treason against France. He was executed in Paris in the fall of 1945. (For more on Vichy, see also France.)