



Why was France granted an equal status among victors of World War II?



Source: Quora David Lipman, former 1st Cavalry Division (1983-1987)

France earned her equal status among the victors of World War 2. Lets just look at the record. France declared War on Germany in support of her Polish ally. G.B joined her. These three nations fought the War from first day to last.

France was a nation deeply divided. Hatred between the political right and left was rabid. Governments rose and fell, no consensus was possible. This disunity crippled the political leadership. The military was overage and mentally arthritic. Some Generals and Admirals had more political power than was wise.

France had suffered heavily in 1914-1918. Germany had ravaged occupied France. The war on the Western front, in its most basic form, consisted of French and allied armies trying to push German troops out of France. These French soldiers, true to their birthright, fought like heroes in defence of la belle France. They died in droves in frontal assaults against German fortified lines. They were the martyrs of the trenches. One million four hundred thousand of them paid the ultimate price. Millions more were wounded and maimed. Victory in the Great War nearly destroyed the victor.

Germany had been repelled, Alsace and Lorraine were restored to the Nation. But the cost had been so dreadfully high. The fires of war destroyed more than just the soldiers bodies and minds. The war had challenged all the truths of the pre war world. The post war world was

different. A fun house mirror of the old order. Mass production slaughter had made the old virtues like courage and patriotism seem a pathetic joke. Sick in its soul, a nation in agony, France steeled itself for a new war in 1939.

At the start of the Great War, 750,000 young Frenchmen of the draft class of 1914 answered their nations call. As Poland resisted the Nazis, France called on her youth again. For the draft class of 1939, 450,000 answered. What is missing are the more than 300,000 unborn sons of the soldiers of the Great War who died for France. This is a stark example of the sacrifice and devotion of the French soldier. This quality shone forth in the Second World War. But this tragic deficit would haunt France.

The Allies waited while Poland was destroyed. They reacted with speed to the Germans attack by rushing the B.E.F. and the cream of the French Army to the Dyle river line to meet a new Schiefflin sweeping right attack. Instead they received a rapier to the guts. The Germans blasted through the "impassable" Ardennes and reached the sea. The cream of the allied armies were trapped. The elite French Armored, Light Mechanized and motorised divisions sacrificed themselves in defence of the Dunkirk perimeter. Their amazing gallantry enabled the escape of the B.E.F. and 100,000 of their comrades.

Dunkirk proved the salvation of the British Army. These quarter million men would form the cadres that would grow to a 3 million man force. The British Army would meet it's foe again, but not yet. They were almost completely disarmed. Their day would come.

For France, the aftermath of Dunkirk was a disaster. At wars start, the French Army boasted 90 divisions, in the line with 9 British and 1 division of indomitable Poles. The armies of Belgium, 22 divisions and Holland, 12 divisions would fight with the allies. True, 13 of the French units were immobile fortress troops for the Maginot Line, but the Allies enjoyed nearly every advantage. French tanks were more numerous, and in many cases, better than their opponents (Somua S-35). The Germans did have more aircraft and, with their blitzkrieg doctrine, used them far more effectively. But Mansteins thrust to the Channel changed everything for the worse for France.

Gamelin was replaced with Weygand, but generals past their prime were the problem. Weygand didn't have a lot of Army to work with. The magnificent Armored, Light Mechanised, Cavalry and motorised infantry divisions that were the sword of France were gone. Half of France's strength was already dissipated. The remainder were badly shaken. The Luftwaffe had gained air superiority and ruthlessly exploited it. Weygand had 65 divisions, only 3 of them badly mauled Armored units. There were 17 additional fortress or second line reserve units. All elements were understrength and lacking equipment. Morale was low. The French Army deployed in depth behind the Somme and the Aisne River and to the Maginot Line. They waited for the axe to fall.

On June 5, 1940 the Heer opened the attack. Kleists panzers smashed through Tenth French Army. They reached the Seine on June 9th. The panzers turned west to pin French IX Corp and the 51st Highlanders against the sea. They were forced to surrender on the 12th. The

French 7th Army fought hard to the 10th's east, but to restore his flank, Weygand withdrew his entire 3rd Army group to the Seine on the 8th. On the 9th the Germans unleashed their main assault. The French launched fierce counter attacks while resisting valiantly, but the German panzer spearhead broke through at Chalons and Chateau-Thierry, the Marne was breached and the government abandoned Paris, declaring it an Open City. The Germans occupied the City of Lights on June 14.

The jackals gather when the Lion is wounded. Italy declared war as the Germans swept up the Channel ports and crossed the Loire. An easterly jab reached the French alps, cutting off the shattered wreckage of the French Army. The isolated units were forced to surrender after their almost hopeless defence. The politicians forced an armistice on bleeding France.

Pétain and his adherents kept individual power, as German puppets. As France writhed in her extremity, the dazed populace was confronted by the question of loyalty. The Vichy regime was the legal government. But the ass-kissers and catch-farts of the wretched Vichy sickened French patriots. Heroic resistance from France's extensive colonial empire, guarded by the powerful French fleet was the answer. American aid was in the pipeline. Churchill would never surrender, Britain would totally support a Government in Exile. But the odious Vichy were satisfied as German lackeys. This government failed France and brought condemnation and shame upon itself.

Questions of loyalty plagued France. But one man had no questions. His loyalty was to France Eternal. He told his countrymen that they had lost a battle, not the war. France would find a saviour in Charles deGaulle. The Free French safeguarded the honor of France. In growing strength and numbers, these exiles were among the Germans most ferocious foes. At every turn, they more than did their part, fighting with their old British and New American Allies. From Bir Hachim in N.Africa, to the Italian Campaign and especially the liberation of Western Europe, the Fighting French did their part. They fought and they died for France and for the world.

So to conclude, we mustn't judge people by their nation's government or politicians. Many Vichy officials were jailed or executed for their crimes. But the eternal flame of France never was extinguished. It flickered low, but De Gaulle and the Fighting French had nurtured the embers. The French fought from the first day. On the last day, French army divisions overlooked the rubble of defeated Germany. The flame of French Gloire shone blindingly bright. To put it simply, the reason the French were treated as full allies at war's end, was because their friends and allies

s, the British and Americans knew it was just. They travelled a different path to victory. Their road to victory started with defeat and humiliation. It ended with justifiable pride and new glory. France was treated as an equal partner because she had paid the price in blood and in sorrow. France had earned her equal status. No one doubted it.

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[Answered Oct 22](#)

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