

GURPS[®]

WWII[™]

RETURN TO HONOR[™]

The Defeat and Rebirth of France



By **BRIAN J. UNDERHILL**

STEVE JACKSON GAMES

TRAGÉDIE ET COURAGE!

Experience the agony of 1940 and the exultation of 1945 with the rest of war-torn France in *GURPS WWII: Return to Honor!* From the proud Free French to dark Vichy henchmen, inside you'll find:

- The war as it impacted France, tearing apart society as well as the national borders.
- French fighting forces, from the 1940 army that met defeat to the Vichy and Free French units that replaced it, and many more.
- The history, networks, and goals of the underground Resistance.
- French weaponry, from the most formidable tank of the early war to the most sophisticated auto.
- Campaign notes for a variety of French experiences, from the Foreign Legion to the furtive dealings of the Resistance.

A divided country awaits rescue from its savage occupier. Are you gallant enough to take up the cause?

VIVE LA FRANCE!

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Written by
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WWII™

RETURN TO HONOR™

France's Journey From Defeat to Victory

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Page References

Rules and statistics in this book are specifically for the **GURPS Basic Set, Third Edition**. Any page reference that begins with a B refers to the **GURPS Basic Set** – e.g., p. B102 means p. 102 of the **GURPS Basic Set, Third Edition**. Page references that begin with CI indicate **GURPS Compendium I**. Others are CII to **Compendium II**, HT to **High-Tech**, W to **WWII**, W:HS to **WWII: Hand of Steel**, and W:IC to **WWII: Iron Cross**. The abbreviation for this book is W:RH. For a full list, see p. CH181 or visit the updated web list at www.sjgames.com/gurps/abbrevs.html.

INTRODUCTION

“Only he is vanquished who accepts defeat.”
– Marshal Ferdinand Foch

France. From the Maginot Line to the Falaise Gap, this land was home to some of the most memorable affairs of World War II. After 60 years, terms such as Vichy, de Gaulle, Maquis, Normandy, Dunkirk, and the French Foreign Legion still evoke images of great courage and heartbreaking loss. **GURPS WWII: Return to Honor** is a roleplayer's guide to France during that tumultuous time, providing an overview of the era complete with examples of the heroism and tragedy that make for great adventure.

After a crushing defeat by Germany and a surrender many considered cowardly and treasonous, a small group of French men and women continued to fight the Nazi regime using whatever means was at hand. Though ill-prepared for war in 1940, Free French soldiers and underground Resistance fighters held tenaciously to their belief in France and their ability to regain their freedom. That belief was not misplaced; by 1945, the German interlopers were defeated, and France was free once again.

Delineating six years of occupation, resistance, and war in only 48 pages is impossible; capturing the spirit that sustained the French, and the moral issues that haunted them, even more so. But what's contained in the pages that follow should provide GMs and players with enough background, atmosphere, history, and plot seeds to last through many adventures. The information can be used in campaigns featuring French soldiers, underground Resistance fighters, legionnaires, spies, and British SOE agents. It can also be used together with other **GURPS WWII** supplements as a backdrop for Allied or Axis soldiers fighting across the war-torn country.

Regardless of its place in any given campaign, it's the author's hope that **Return to Honor** does justice to the brave men and women of France who never gave up hope.

Vive la France.

About the Author

Brian J. Underhill first began writing for *Steve Jackson Games* in 1987, and, after a lengthy hiatus, has recently returned to the fold. This prodigal author's most recent releases include **GURPS Cliffhangers** and **GURPS Traveller Heroes 1: Bounty Hunters**. **Return to Honor** is Brian's first supplement for **GURPS WWII**.

I. FRANCE

AT WAR

*“On these battlefields, my lovely, safe world
blew itself up.”*

– F. Scott Fitzgerald

France felt secure and self-satisfied in the early years of the 20th century. It was a time of enlightenment and intellectualism, of culture and decadence. In the last week of June 1914, a Paris editorialist declared, “What spoiled children we are!” Some readers probably agreed with delight.

But a decade of war threats and brinkmanship had pushed Europe toward the inevitable. With the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand (see p. W6), diplomatic channels flooded with activity. Despite those who spoke with the voice of reason, France *wanted* to go to war. Still bitter over their 1871 loss to Prussia, the French generals saw the impending conflict as an opportunity to gain back what was lost – a chance to restore Alsace-Lorraine, France’s honor, and her undisputed place atop the continental powers.

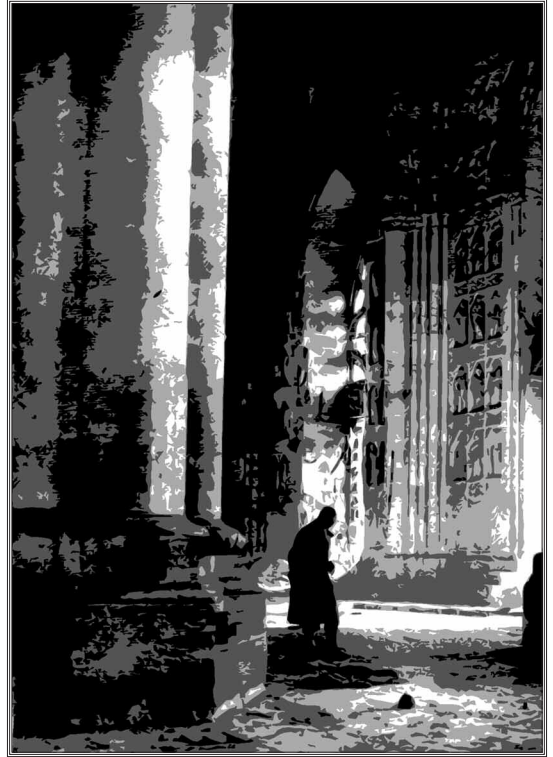
WORLD WAR I

In their bid to avenge 1871, the French reached back to the chivalric precepts of 1371.

Plan 17

As Germany prepared to invade France under the Schlieffen Plan (see p. W6), France created a grand strategy of its own, Plan 17. It called for invading Alsace with one thought in mind: Whatever the circumstances, *attack*. Plan 17 was more of a mystique than a military plan. It was not founded on the principles of steel and strategy, but on *élan* and impetuosity. This idea that high morale could defy shrapnel would unnecessarily spill French blood throughout the war.

Soon after the Germans invaded Belgium, the French commander Joffre began his own attack. Dragoons in horsehair plumes and metal cuirasses marched forward alongside infantry in red trousers



and blue jackets. Soon, the French tricolor waved above liberated cities up and down the front. Plan 17 was, briefly, a success, but the horsemen in traditional armor and riflemen in traditional colors would soon discover the modern merits of the Kaiser’s drab MGs and artillery.

Stalemate

In only six days, Germany shattered the colorful French forces. By Aug. 25, 1914, the tricolor flew nowhere in Alsace. Ironically, had the Germans feigned retreat before the French attack, their own Schlieffen Plan might have worked, but they themselves hesitated to give these traditional foes even the illusion of victory. As Plan 17 failed spectacularly, refugees crowded the roads before the advancing Germans. Echoes of 1871’s shame haunted France’s generals.

THE LIBERATION OF PARIS

“Paris must not fall into the hands of the enemy except as a heap of rubble.”

– Adolf Hitler

On Aug. 19, 1944, some 20,000 of Paris’ 3 million residents began to revolt against the Wehrmacht occupiers. Resistance fighters threw up crude barricades and turned their weapons on the Germans in a series of guerrilla attacks that left the occupying force reeling. As Tiger tanks machine-gunned cafes, Resistance fighters slipped up behind them and flung Molotov cocktails down their hatches. The poorly armed French irregulars rooted out German troops across the city.

The Allied plan had been to bypass the city; they feared getting embroiled in a long-term battle that would slow the advance and do unnecessary damage to the countless French landmarks. On hearing of the uprising, the Free French command persuaded Eisenhower to allow Gen. Leclerc and his 2nd Armored to charge toward the French capital. Parisians consider it the height of rudeness to drop in unannounced, so for the first time in four years Leclerc called his father in Paris, and told him he would be visiting soon!

On the night of August 24-25, the 2nd Armored, together with troops from the U.S. 4th Infantry, rolled into Paris. They were greeted by thousands of cheering French citizens showering them with handshakes, hugs, kisses, and champagne. A war correspondent later commented that by the time his jeep had reached the Seine, it contained 67 bottles of champagne! Maj. Frank Burk later said it was “without a doubt, the happiest scene the world has ever known.”

Lt. Gen. Dietrich von Choltitz surrendered Aug. 26, having chosen for various reasons to disobey Hitler’s orders to reduce the city to rubble. A few diehard troops took a little longer to throw down their arms, but it was shortly over. Champagne flowed freely; women donned their best dresses, some pieced together from scraps of black-market fabric. Paris was free at last. De Gaulle made his entrance into the city the same day, Eisenhower on the next. As a strategic objective Paris had mattered little, but as a symbol it was overpoweringly important.

Afterward, 123,000 Parisians claimed to have been part of the 20,000 Resistance fighters that began it all.

On Aug. 15, 1944, Allied troops landed in southern France. French commandos covered the flanks of the invasion, but opposition proved light. A group of these commandos led by Col. Bouvet captured the Cap Nègre fortifications. By nightfall of Aug. 15, they had marched nine miles and taken 1,000 prisoners.

The next day saw the vanguard of the French 1st Army, under the command of Gen. de Lattre de Tassigny, enter the fray. The French attacked with extraordinary spirit and *élan*, capturing Toulon and Marseilles on Aug. 28, and Lyons on Sept. 3. They linked up with Leclerc’s 2nd Armored at Châtillon-sur-Seine on Sept. 12.

By Sept. 15, 1944, all of France was free once again.

Leclerc was sent to wrest Indo-China back from the Japanese, but only arrived in time to accept their surrender.

POST-WWII FRANCE

By the end of the war, France was war-weary but jubilant, proud of her restored honor but tortured by the memory of collaboration. At first opportunity, those seeking to address this shame had shaved the heads of French women who had associated with Germans. They would continue to hunt down collaborators with more passion than prudence in a process of *épuration* (purification) that would cost an estimated 30,000 to 40,000 lives. Many an important Resistance operative who had *masqueraded* as a collaborator would fall prey to this backlash, when the few people who knew his real role were either dead or unwilling to testify on his behalf.

Continuing to push his “allies,” de Gaulle had prodded them into allowing France an occupation zone in conquered Germany. This would later be combined with the U.S. and British zones to form West Germany.

In 1948, France participated in the Marshall Plan – an American aid package aimed at restoring the economies of Europe. It would soon return to economic health, though the social and political fallout of *les années noires* (the dark years) would continue to haunt the country for decades to come.

Operation Anvil-Dragoon

South of the grand Allied penetrations, the Resistance had kept the Germans busy. One large Maquis unit moved to ensure that the Wehrmacht couldn’t flee into Spain. (They intended to, until they discovered that Franco would not greet them warmly, but planned to disarm and intern them.)

If the interviewer believed the candidate could pass for a French national, the applicant's file was passed to MI5 for a security check.

Once the background check was complete, the applicant was called to a second interview, where the true nature of the job was revealed. The interviewer did not mince words – the applicant stood a 50% chance of being killed in the line of duty. Applicants were given several days to consider.

The rigorous training consisted of four weeks of small-arms practice and physical training, then a two-week parachute course in Manchester. Graduates were sent to Arisaig in the Western Highlands

of Scotland where they learned commando tactics and unconventional warfare. Radio operators received 14 more weeks at Oxfordshire.

SOE-F and -R/F operatives were then sent into France – often by parachute – to make contact with Resistance groups, train and equip them, and carry out specific missions as assigned by SOE or the BCRA leadership in London. They were instructors, spies, saboteurs, and soldiers, who often worked alone or with untrained civilian patriots whose loyalty they could never take for granted.

SOE-F and -R/F operatives make great PCs. A template appears on p. 36.

WOMEN OF THE SOE-F

SOE-F dispatched 39 female agents into the field. They were ordinary women: wives, mothers, dancers, fashion designers. Two outstanding examples are described below. Both were posthumously awarded the French *Croix de Guerre* and the British George Cross.

Violette Szabo

Violette Bushell, the daughter of a French mother and an English father, spent much of her childhood in Paris, but was raised in south London. In 1941, at the age of 20, she met Capt. Etienne Szabo, an officer in the French Foreign Legion. The couple married, but her husband was killed at El Alamein in 1942, shortly after the birth of their daughter.

Heartbroken and angry, she immediately accepted an offer by the British SOE to “go into enemy occupied France and make life bitter for the Germans.” After extensive training – including parachute training that left her nursing bandaged legs – she was flown into Rouen, where she was arrested twice while assessing the current state of the French Resistance. She was rushed back to London upon completion of her first mission – but not until she had purchased gifts for her daughter along the Champs Elysées.

In April 1944, Szabo – codenamed “Louise” – parachuted into France a second time. Together with several other SOE operatives and French Resistance fighters, she was trapped in a house in southwest France. Surrounded by the Gestapo, she grabbed a Sten gun and as much ammunition as she could carry and engaged the Germans in a blazing firefight that left many of them dead and many more wounded. She was captured only after running out of ammo and strength.

She was repeatedly beaten and tortured, but refused to give away any secrets. She was trans-

ferred to the Ravensbruck concentration camp, and in 1945, at age 23, she was shot in the back of the head along with two other female SOE agents. She had not revealed a single secret.

Noor Inayat Khan

Noor Inayat Khan was a princess. Born to an American mother and Indian father (Pir Inayat Khan, a direct descendant of Tipu Sultan, the last Muslim sovereign of South India), Noor was raised primarily in Paris, where she gained some repute as a Paris Radio children's-story writer.

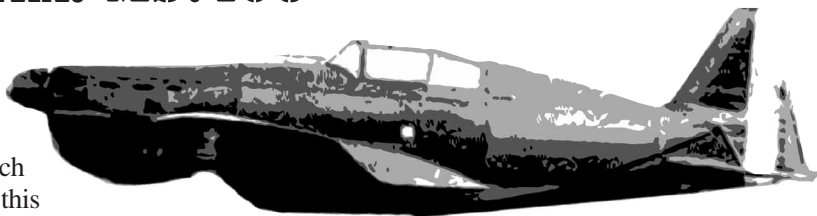
With the German invasion of France, she moved to London, where she became an assistant section officer in the Women's Auxiliary Air Force. Her knowledge of France and fluency in the language landed her a position with SOE-F, and on June 16, 1943, using the codename “Madeleine,” Noor was smuggled into occupied France as a radio operator.

The Gestapo made countless arrests in the Resistance group to which she had been assigned. Noor was given the opportunity to return to England, but refused, unwilling to abandon her comrades and leave them without a radio link to London. In October, she was betrayed and taken to Gestapo headquarters. Despite an intense interrogation, she refused to divulge any information; she even made two unsuccessful attempts to escape during her stay there. In November, she was shipped to Germany (the first SOE-F agent so deported) and imprisoned at Karlsruhe. Her cell was separated from the main body of the prison, as she was considered especially dangerous and crafty.

On Sept. 12, 1944, the 29-year-old Indian princess was taken to the Dachau concentration camp and shot. She uttered a single word before she was killed: “*Liberté.*”

MORANE-SAULNIER MS.406

The MS.406 was not the best plane in the *Armée de l'Air*, but it was the most common in 1940. Its saving grace was that it was easy to fly. French pilots also found it easy to die in this underpowered and undergunned mount.



The fighter entered the prototype stage in late 1935 as the MS.405. At the time, it was a revolution in French aircraft design. The government ordered 1,000 planes in March 1938, but many of them went to fill export deals with several countries, notably China, Finland, and Turkey. When the war broke out, France had four squadrons, with three 25-plane groups in each, flying the MS.406.

The 406 retained its previous-generation roots from the original 405. It could hold its own – barely – against the earliest Messerschmitt Bf-109s, but usually fell prey to those improved 109s taking part in the Battle of France. Overall, France lost more than 400 MS.406s during the invasion against 175 confirmed kills for the plane.

The MS.406 continued to serve with the Vichy government, but French industry was reallocated to producing German designs and the aircraft drifted into obscurity. A total of 1,064 were built from 1938-1947.

The plane uses 29 gallons of gasoline per hour at routine usage. Fuel and ammo cost \$45.

MS.406.C1

Subassemblies: Medium Fighter chassis +3;
Light Fighter wings +2; 3 retractable wheels +0.
Powertrain: 642-kW aerial turbo/supercharged gas engine with 640-kW prop and 108-gallon self-sealing tanks.

Occ: 1 CS Cargo: 4.1 Body, 2.4 Wings.

Armor	F	RL	B	T	U
All:	2/3	2/3	2/3	2/3	2/3
Cockpit:	0/+0	0/+10	0/+20	0/+10	0/+10

Weaponry

20mm Long Air AC/HS.404 [Body: F] (60).*
2×Air LMG/MAC M34 [Wings:F] (300 each).*
* LMGs linked and all three guns linked together.

Equipment

Body: Medium radio transmitter and receiver; navigation instruments; autopilot.

Statistics

Size: 27'×35'×9' Payload: 0.5 tons Lwt: 2.7 tons
Volume: 200 Maint: 56 hours Cost: \$12.8K
HT: 9. HPs: 120 Body, 70 each Wing, 12 each Wheel.

aSpeed: 302 aAccel: 7 aDecel: 19 aMR: 4.75 aSR: 2
Stall Speed 72.

gSpeed: 225 gAccel: 11 gDecel: 10 gMR: 0.5 gSR: 2
Ground Pressure Very High. 1/8 Off-Road Speed.

Design Notes

The design purchases 500 rounds of MG and 90 rounds of 20mm ammunition. The historical values have been used, instead.

Variants

The MS.405 was essentially a prototype for the MS.406. (Each of the 16 MS.405 prototypes varied slightly. Numbers 13 and 15 were shipped to Switzerland as pattern aircraft for the Swiss D-3800 while prototype number 16 became the standard for the MS.406.) The most notable difference between the MS.405 and MS.406 was the plywood/aluminum skin on the prototype, and a different engine (with a troublesome radiator). Despite these and other subtle differences, treat the MS.405 as an MS.406 with an aSpeed of 275.

The MS.410 was a product-improved version with a redesigned wing, a more reliable oil cooler, and 2×Aircraft LMG/MAC Modele 34 in each wing. Some 500 aircraft were scheduled to be converted, but only five had undergone the upgrade by the time France fell.

At least 96 captured MS.406s entered service in the Luftwaffe as trainers. These are identical to the French-service plane except for the installation of German electronics. Sixty-nine were upgraded to the MS.410 standard under German supervision, but many lacked the upgraded radiators. Two later went to Finland, 44 to Croatia, and 52 to Italy.

Switzerland built 74 MS.412s (D-3800s) that were little more than MS.405s modified with Swiss electronics, the better engine from the MS.406, and belt-fed (instead of drum-fed) machine guns in the wings. Later, 207 Swiss D-3081s were built using most of the MS.406 features, and the upgraded radiator of the MS.410.

The 41 MS.406 and MS.410 airframes in Finnish service were modified to use captured Russian 820-kW Klimov M-105P engines, skis, and a German 20mm Medium Air AC (MG151/20) in place of the Hispano-Suiza cannon. The resulting plane was known as the Mörkö (“Ghost”).

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