

The Second World War in the Army Museum

This pedagogical course aims at recounting the significant stages of World War II, shedding a light on France's situation in particular, from the 1940 defeat to the 1944 Liberation. It unfolds through three distinct rooms.

The Leclerc room (1939 – 1942) is dedicated to the « années noires » (dark years) during which the Axis perpetrates repeated aggressions. **The Juin room (1942 – 1944)** evokes the situation of occupied countries as well as the first allied victories. The events leading to the capitulation of Nazi Germany and Japan are presented in the **de Lattre room**. On this platform, a specific space deals with the discovery of the camps. The course ends with the "conclusive acts" of World War II.

Displayed objects and didactic material are organized in successive sequences. Each sequence is indicated by an introducing board briefly indicating the historical context. Audiovisual animations, a total of 32 projections, on both small and large screens, offer montages of filmed archives or specifically designed productions for the illustration of some sequences. The various military campaigns are illustrated through maps and sets of maps which allow following the course of events.

What happens before World War II is evoked in the last part of the Foch room dedicated to the interwar years. In 1933, Hitler legally rises to power in Germany and sets up a totalitarian regime. The nazi party provides for the press-ganging of the German population and the ideological indoctrination of the children. This militarization of society is part of the process of preparation to war launched by Hitler. Nazi Germany openly breaks the stipulations of the Versailles treaty, forms alliances with other dictatorships and directly steps in the Spain war.

Faced with the rise of perils, British and French liberal democracies experience strong pacifist trends and try to avoid a new general conflict in Europe. Thus, with the Munich agreements (September 30th, 1938), France and Great-Britain leave Czechoslovakia to Hitler, intending to give peace a chance. Before going to war, Hitler protects himself from any action of Stalin by deciding to sign the Soviet-German pact on August 23rd, 1939. On September 1st, 1939, the German army invades Poland in accordance with this agreement.



'Mein Kampf' ('My struggle'), in two volumes / 4.5 million of copies, 1933. Inv. 23358 et 23359 © Paris, musée de l'Armée / RMN-GP

On September 3rd, France and Great-Britain declare war on Germany.

Poland, quickly defeated in spite of a heroic resistance, is split between Germany and the Soviet Union.

You will find at the end of this document a map of the museum's rooms, with the localisation of numbered items.



Member of the nazi party outfit, Inv. Ha 92 © Paris, musée de l'Armée/ RMN-GP.

The Leclerc room: « the dark years » 1939-1942

France's defeat (September 3rd, 1939-June 22nd, 1940)

The phoney war (September 1939-May 10th, 1940) ①

On September 3rd, 1939, France and Great-Britain declare war on Germany, without setting up any major offensive however. The French general staff only considers static warfare behind the Maginot line, along with a sea blockade in order to paralyse Germany, as in World War I. This period of inaction is called "la drôle de guerre" (the phoney war) in French, "Sitzkrieg" (the sitting war) in German. An operation is decided, however, in April 1940, when Hitler invades Denmark and Norway to protect the "iron route" which feeds German



Leclerc room, tank turrets of a Renault R35 and a Panzer II behind © Paris, musée de l'Armée / RMN-GP

plants through Sweden. The French and the British send an expeditionary corps to back the small Norwegian army. It is mainly made up of alpine chasseurs and legionnaires for the French part. Their equipment, such as the new MAS 36 repeating rifle and their outfit appropriate for cold temperatures indicate a degree of modernity outside the scope of the majority of the French army of the time. Combats come to an end when the Anglo-French defeat in France leads to the recall of the expeditionary corps.

France's campaign (May 10th, 1940-June 22nd, 1940) ②

Two tank turrets, one from a Renault R 35, the other from a German tank Panzer II F-version, introduce to the display space dedicated to the France's campaign. French and German possess roughly the same number of tanks, which are of similar quality. Both armies differ mostly in the use of armoured vehicles. The French use their tanks along with the infantry, according to the successful tactic of 1918, whereas the German congregate them in armoured divisions in charge of breaking through enemy defences, along with assault planes. Mechanized infantry steps in as a complement. This tactic, both mobile and swift, takes on the name of "Blitzkrieg". In this particular context, allied numerical inferiority is more than worrying.

On May 10th, 1940, the German "Wehrmacht" enters Netherlands and Belgium. Paratroopers and glider-transported units seize bridges and airfields in order to prepare the arrival of armoured vehicles. Anglo-French troops' left wing, made up of the most modern elements of the French army, moves forward in Belgium where fierce fights take place. Simultaneously, Panzers divisions, in charge of the main effort, cross the Ardennes forest in Sedan and knock into French defences in a weakly fortified zone. The Panzers, supported by dive-bombing of the Stukas, reach the Channel on May 20th, in a scythe movement which isolates the Anglo-French wing from the rest of the French army, gathered behind the Maginot line. The Royal Navy succeeds in evacuating 330 000 men surrounded in Dunkerque (200 000 Britons, 130 000 French and a few Belgians), who have to leave their equipment on the beach, however. From then on, the German breakthrough proves to be decisive. On June 10th, Paris is declared an open-city, the Germans enter the city four days later. French defence collapses, the German divisions penetrate deep into the French territory. Voiced archive movies on large screens evoke the stages of defeat and the population exodus fleeing away from the bombings. Marshal Pétain, appointed head of government by the French President, can be heard announcing his decision to ask for an armistice on June 17th. Signed with the German authorities on June 22nd, it takes effect on June 25th.



General de Gaulle's appeal of June 18th 1940 ③

Great Britain takes up on its soil governments of several defeated countries, which have reached London in order to carry on the fight. It welcomes General de Gaulle, who addresses the founding appeal of "France libre" (free France) to the French, called "l'appel du 18 Juin" (the appeal of June 18th). The famous poster transmitting this event is displayed under a photograph of general de Gaulle in a BBC studio.

The text sums up the various speeches given by the general in June 1940: he refuses to give up fighting and condemns Pétain's government which, by signing the armistice, prevents France from taking part in what he already considers as a worldwide war, opposing the free world to the dictatorships.

Poster of the appeal of June 18th, printed in London, november 1940
© Paris, musée de l'Armée/RMN -GP.

In a room adjacent (a former Invalides' chaplain cell), Charles de Gaulle's literary works and officer career before 1940 are evoked.

A showcase is dedicated to the men who joined the general in order to carry on the struggle along with the Britons. Even if they were a small group (3000 men in July), these soldiers, sailors and airmen make up the core of the Free French Forces (FFL), gathered under the symbolic Lorraine cross. However, great powers recognize Vichy as France's legal government, which sentences de Gaulle for treason and desertion.



Insignia of the FFL with a Lorraine cross, Inv. 997.1105 © Paris, musée de l'Armée/RMN-GP.

French colonial empire at stake 4

The French colonial empire, which on the whole remained intact despite the defeat, becomes an issue for both Free France and Vichy. A few territories rally de Gaulle but northern Africa, where over 200 000 men are stationed, and most of the fleet remain faithful to Marshal Pétain. The outfit of a zouave from the Africa army, remained faithful to Vichy, is shown next to newspapers recounting general de Gaulle and the Britons' failure in front of Dakar, while trying to rally the AOF (French western Africa). Vichy's posters express hatred for Great Britain after the destruction of some of the French fleet, in Mers-el-Kebir, in July 1940. These events slow down a lot FFL recruitment.

France after the armistice (June 1940 – November 1942) 5



Poster of German propaganda 'Abandoned populations, trust the German soldier' Inv. 02G47 © Paris, musée de l'Armée / RMN-GP.

Armistices signed with Germany and Italy, along with the violations perpetrated by Germany, lead to a break-up of the French metropolitan territory, dismantled in a so-called "free zone", an annexed region and occupied zones with varied status. The disposition of showcases enhances this break-up.

In the showcase dedicated to occupied zones, the poster "abandoned populations..." points out the German will to make occupation troops look good. The original graffiti visible on this poster demonstrates that the French have been aware of the true nature of this occupation.

The showcases on the opposite deal with the non-occupied zone, where the Vichy regime is fully sovereign. Many objects illustrate the paternalist propaganda developed around Marshal Pétain, who has gained a great popularity among WW1 veterans. Symbols and slogans portray France's new regime. The "French State" replaces Republic's democratic values by those of an authoritarian and reactionary regime, which is also a xenophobic and anti-Semitic one.

The central showcase reflects the harsh reality of war, which have been common fate for the French: absence of war prisoners, bombings and persecution of the Jews in France. From May 29th onward, Jews have to

wear the yellow star in occupied zones.

Until November 1942, the Vichy government has all the attributes of a sovereign power. As soon as October 1940, negotiations are held with the occupying power and lead to the politics of collaboration with Nazi Germany.

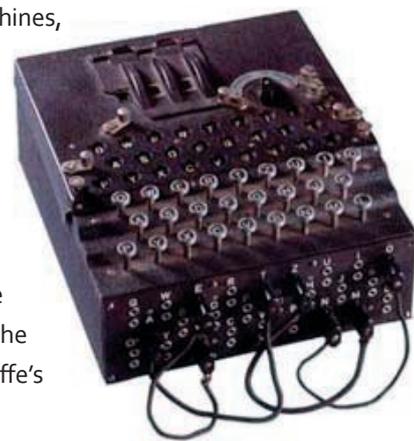


Jewish identity card, Inv. MA44 © Paris, musée de l'Armée/RMN-GP.

The battle of England (June 22nd, 1940 – June 1941) 6

Great Britain remains alone in the war against Germany. Winston Churchill, Prime Minister and Defence Minister, embodies the will to fight and galvanizes the Britons with his energy and his speeches: "I have nothing to offer you but blood, sweat and tears". Hitler, preparing for the invasion of England, tries to obtain air supremacy by destroying British planes. The Royal Air Force is strengthened by foreign pilots (Poles, Canadians, French...) but has only 1200 aircrafts to oppose against the 3000 German planes. However, this numerical inferiority is offset by the monopoly of a technical invention, the radar. A map of radar antennas laid out on the British seashore and the scale-model of a plotting room enable visitors to understand how radar intelligence is materialized by the R.A.F high command in order to guide British planes during Luftwaffe's attacks.

In addition to the radar, the Allies also have superiority in deciphering. "Enigma" encoding machines, used by the German army, are state-of-the-art technology for the time ; however, even before the war, German secret messages can be deciphered thanks to the efforts of Polish, French and British researchers. The Germans then launch a policy of terror, in order to break British morale by bombing cities such as London and Coventry. The "Blitz" fails, German losses are high and Hitler momentarily gives up occupying Great Britain.



Enigma encoding machine, Inv. DEP4509
© Paris, musée de l'Armée/RMN-GP.



Female auxiliary of the RAF Inv. GF45
© Paris, musée de l'Armée/RMN GP.

In this display space, two feminine uniforms testify for the new role women take on in the armies at war. During World War II, they are no longer confined in the nurse posts; one is auxiliary in the Royal Air Force, the other serves in the Luftwaffe's transmissions. USSR uses them as pilots or snipers.

Free France's first fights 7

The first combats of the Free French Forces take place in Africa, mainly against Italian occupation. Colonel Leclerc's columns leave Chad, take on Koufra oasis, a relay station between Italian Libya and Ethiopia. Along with the Britons, the Free French Forces fight over control of the Suez Canal and the Middle-eastern petroleum. The Renault small track vehicle, model 31 R UE, is salvaged by the Free French Forces in Damascus in June 1941, after the fratricidal combats opposing them to Vichy forces.

The modernized .75 canon, painted over with desert colours, equips the 1st Free French Brigade, led by general Koenig. It becomes famous by heroically defending the Bir Hakeim position, in the Libya desert, between May 26th and June 11th, 1942. This battle is also the first significant clash between a French unit and German troops since the 1940 armistice. Newspapers echo the telegram sent by general de Gaulle on June 10th, 1942: "General Koenig, be aware - and tell your troops that the entire France is watching you, and that you are its pride".



French 75 cannon used in Bir Hakeim, Inv. N324 © Paris, musée de l'Armée/RMN-GP.

War becomes worldwide

Germany invades the Soviet Union (June 1941 – December 1941) 8



Leclerc room, operation 'Barbarossa's space
© Paris, musée de l'Armée/RMN-GP.

On June 22nd, 1941, Hitler undertakes his great project of vital space extension, as he promised the « Aryan race » in *Mein Kampf*. Breaking the Soviet-German pact, the German army enters the Soviet territory. Stalin, who refused to trust allied warnings, is taken by surprise when Operation Barbarossa starts. The Red Army, in the middle of reorganization after the great purges of the 1930's, suffers severe setbacks. Stalin calls for a reaction of patriotic unity: the poster "*We will mercilessly defeat the enemy*" refers to the cruelty of German troops' behaviour towards civilian populations. German progress is swift until December, when Soviet armies recover and put up stout resistance ahead of Moscow and Leningrad. The Blitzkrieg fails in the Russian context of huge territory and terrible winter.

World War II, just as the first one, triggers a weapon race. The arms showcase highlights German and Soviet submachine guns. This weapon, considered during World War I as a trench "cleaner", demonstrates in 1939-40 a new efficiency in dense areas, such as towns and forests, and turns out to be handy for mechanized and airborne infantry. Submachine guns are therefore produced on a large scale for the cheapest price. New ammunition are developed when the PAK 37 antitank cannon, very efficient during the campaign of France, turns out to be unable to break through the soviet T34's armour. As soon as 1942, German researchers develop the hollow load ammunition, which solves the problem by concentrating the explosive force on a small impact point. Rocket-launchers will quickly also be equipped with this new ammunition.

The United States at war, from Pearl Harbor to Midway (December 1941 – June 1942) 9

Japanese imperialism expands from 1931 on at the expense of Manchuria, then of the rest of China. It clashes with US interests in the Pacific. Americano-Japanese relationships deteriorate so much that the United States take on retaliatory measures.

On December 7th, 1941, Japanese air and sea forces attack Pearl Harbor base, in the archipelago of Hawaii, by surprise, and destroy a great part of the US Pacific fleet. Admiral Yamamoto aims at compelling the United States to negotiate. The United States declare war on Japan. Germany and Italy, linked to Japan by an agreement made in September 1940, declare war on the United States. Japanese and American posters of the time express the violent resentment opposing the two countries.

The clash in the Pacific is at first both in the air and on the sea. Next to the scale model of the aircraft carrier USS Enterprise, the Museum displays US Navy qualified sailor James Kruse's uniform, and a heating suit of a Japanese pilot equipped with a seat parachute.

The US aircraft carriers weren't in Pearl Harbor, and thus haven't been destroyed, which allowed the United States to quickly rebuild their air and sea forces after the initial shock of the Japanese push. However, from December 1941 to April 1942, European and American possessions in Asia – Hong-Kong, the Philippines, Dutch India, Malaysia, Singapore and Burma – are taken over by the Japanese, who present themselves to the indigenous populations as liberators. However, US superiority in the Pacific is beyond doubt as soon as June 1942, when the Japanese are defeated in the Midway battle.

The Juin room : "the gray years" (1942 - 1944)

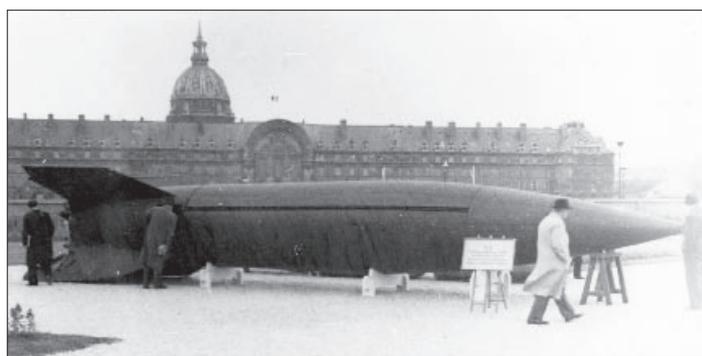
War's turning point : 1942-1943

The battle of the Atlantic (June 1942 - April 1943) 10

The Juin room starts with a large format photograph of one of the 18 shipbuilding sites able to build a Liberty ship in a dozen days. These mass-produced vessels are among the symbols of this industrial mobilization which makes the United States "the arsenal of democracies". The United States provide the United Kingdom with a considerable mass of products, arms in particular, which are shipped in convoys through the Atlantic Ocean. The graph of losses shows that it is only in the beginning of 1943 that the Allies succeed in thwarting German U-Boote's action and gain mastery of the seas.

USSR also receives important deliveries of tanks, planes, locomotives, vehicles and medicines; the whole represents 11 billions of dollars (never paid back) which allowed the Soviets to hold on, especially in 1942 and 1943, until their production system reaches full capacity.

In the staircase, models of V1 and V2 (scale 1/2) are displayed. The V1 is an unmanned plane with a programmed trajectory, carrying one ton of explosives. This new weapon is used for the first time in June 1944 by the Germans to bomb London, Antwerp and Paris. The V2, a lot more sophisticated than the V1, is the direct ancestor of today's missiles and space rockets. It is launched from the fall of 1944 on. The manufacturing plant of the V1 and V2 is located next to the Dora-Nordhausen camp, whose war prisoners and civilian deportees are used as workforce; 25 000 men treated as slaves, including 4 000 Frenchmen, died in the process.



A4 missile, called 'V2', in front of les Invalides in 1946-47 © C MAE.

El-Alamein, Stalingrad, Guadalcanal 11

From the middle of 1942 on, the advance of Axis troops is contained and the Allies start to take the initiative again. Three battles stop the progression of the Axis powers (July 1942 – April 1943). They are highlighted by three audiovisual projections on a large screen and materialized by equipments of the various belligerents.

El-Alamein : General Rommel's Afrikakorps and Italian troops launch an offensive against Egypt in May 1942, threatening the Nile valley. Free French Forces' fierce defence in Bir-Hakeim delay them and allows Britons to fall back on a fortified line. On October 23rd, General Montgomery launches a successful counter offensive in El Alamein and pushes Axis' forces back in the Cyrenaic province. The Afrikakorps and Italian forces were outnumbered (Afrikakorps : 50 000 men, Italian troops : 55 000, British 8th Army : 195 000).



Junin room, audiovisual projections
© Paris, musée de l'Armée.

Stalingrad : on the Russian front, the German 6th Army is ordered to take on the city of Stalingrad, fiercely defended by the Soviets. A great offensive of the Red Army leads to the surrounding of German forces, which is subjected to an implacable siege from November 19th, 1942 to February 2nd, 1943, surrender day. The impact of the battle of Stalingrad is huge in the entire world, and brings down the myth of an invincible German army, which counted up to 1,012 million men, as did the Russians.

Guadalcanal : the advance of Japanese troops is stopped on Guadalcanal island, taken back once and for all after terrible fights, by the Marines backed by an Australian unit (60 000 men against 36 000 Japanese), on February 8th, 1943.

Surrounding "Fortress Europe"

The Anglo-American landing in North Africa (November 1942 - December 1943) **12**

On November 8th, 1942, American and British troops land on the shores of North Africa. Elements of the French troops remained loyal to Vichy briefly resist them. As a consequence of the landing, Germans invade the non-occupied zone in France. The French fleet scuttles in Toulon on November 27th, in order to avoid falling in their hands. The French North Africa Army joins the Allies and takes back its place in the war.

The US kit displayed in three consecutive showcases is suggestive of the outstanding adaptation of the US Army to the conditions of modern warfare. It also indicates the concern about the comfort of the soldier's daily life. This kit is all the more important than it equips the French divisions which General Giraud was allowed to rearm at the Anfa conference (January 1943).



First showcase displaying the GI kit
© Paris, musée de l'Armée/ RMN-GP

The campaign of Tunisia (November 1942 – May 1943) **13**

From November 1942 on, the Allies attack Rommel German troops entrenched in Tunisia. The Britons and the Free French advance from the South, whereas the Americans, backed by the French Army of Africa, advance from the West. Surrender of the German-Italian troops is only achieved on May 13th, 1943, following very rough fights. The *Courrier de l'Air*, printed in London and dropped over France by the RAF, heralds "the enemy armies no longer exist".

General de Gaulle achieve the unity of fighting France **14**

Personal objects evoke General Giraud, whom the Americans try to oppose to de Gaulle for a while. But the latter, already head of the Free French Forces, gets the decisive support of the interior Resistance. Thanks to his personal prestige and his political skill, de Gaulle marginalizes Giraud and remains alone the head of the Comité Français de Libération Nationale (CFLN – French National Liberation Committee), then of the Gouvernement Provisoire de la République Française (GPRF – Provisional Government of the French Republic) in June 1944, of which Algiers is the capital. He prepares the political action and the administrator corps to be put in place as the country's liberation goes along. The Americans, however, do not recognize this government and provide for a military administration in France (AMGOT- American Government of Occupied Territories) and even an occupation currency, of which the bills are displayed in the next space.

The Red Army takes on the offensive (February 1943 – December 1943) **15**

Thanks to a mobilization of the entire population, and to an unprecedented industrial effort backed by the United States, Stalin lines up an evermore numerous army, equipped with modern materials. Great offensives are launched during the summer of 1943, pushing back the Germans towards Ukraine. On July 5th, 1943, in Kursk, the Red Army opposes 3 600 tanks to Wehrmacht's 2 700. Slightly inferior to the German Panther, but manufactured in greater numbers within a very short time, the T 34 gives the Russians the advantage. Next to the Soviet pilot and tankist outfits, personal objects recall the presence of airmen of the Normandie-Niemen squadron, sent by de Gaulle to fight alongside the Soviets. It remained the only Western unit on the Eastern front, on the Soviet side.

The Atlantic Wall 18

The concrete tetrapod put down in this room was part of the defence devices of the French shores of the Atlantic and the Channel. A wall photograph reminds the disastrous raid on Dieppe, led essentially by Canadian troops, on August 19th, 1942, in order to experiment landing techniques. From 1942 on, Hitler puts the *Todt* organization in charge of realizing the "Atlantic Wall", an expression of himself and Goebbels. The so-called wall is not a continuous defence line. Sea-shore is progressively equipped with a mix of fortified works, artillery batteries, various fences and minefields designed to prevent the enemy from landing and setting foot on the western seashores of Europe.

The landing in Normandy : operation Overlord (June 6th, 1944) 19

In England, the Allies gather hundreds of thousands of men, tons of weapons and materials in preparation of the greatest amphibious landing operation in History. It is preceded by operation Fortitude, aimed at confirming Hitler in the idea of a landing in the Pas-de-Calais, a region close to the British shore and equipped with great ports. The overwhelming logistic superiority of the United States, the quality and the quantity of amphibious materials, the specific equipments of the operation are presented in the immediate surroundings of the film dedicated to the landing. US General Eisenhower is at the head of this complex organization. In the night between the 5th and the 6th of June, three airborne divisions (23 000 men) are dropped to seize passage points. The 4th SAS, composed of Free French paratroopers, jumps over Brittany. On June 6th, 7 500 planes ensure mastery of the sky and proceed to the bombing of coastal defences. At dawn, 5 000 ships and 4 000 small crafts land 132 175 soldiers of US, British and Canadian divisions on the Normandy shores, along with 20 000 vehicles. The 177 men of the Kieffer commando are the only Frenchmen landed on that day. The decisive battle starts. Dearly conquered footholds allow moving in reinforcements. On the evening of D Day, the operation is on the whole a success in regard of its programmation.



A helmet, a shell case, a piece of military blouse, bottles of whisky and beer, found off Omaha Beach Inv. 2000.611-616. © Paris, musée de l'Armée/ RMN-GP

The De Lattre room: "the enlightened years" (1944 - 1945)

Liberation of France

The Normandy battle 20

The road sign « Zur Normandie Front » introduces the Normandy battle, made harder than planned by the dogged resistance of the Germans. Hedge warfare in the Norman bocage alternates with urban warfare. The rocket-launchers, displayed both in their US version, the "bazooka", and in their German version, the "Panzerschreck", throw a hollow-charge ammunition able to destroy an armoured-vehicle or to break through a wall. This efficiency makes them fearsome weapons both in ambushes and in urban warfare. Allied bombings precede fights on the ground, leading to important destructions and human losses.

The uniforms displayed put specifically forward men and women of the "2^e DB" (the French 2nd armoured division), which landed on the national soil on August 1st, 1944. General Leclerc's troops take part especially in the crushing of the German pocket of resistance around Falaise on August 19th. Therefore, French troops take part in the liberation of the national territory.

The Provence landing (August 15th 1944 – September 1944) 21



A Willys' Jeep used by general De Lattre de Tassigny, Inv. 20214bis © Paris, musée de l'Armée/ RMN-GP

On August 15th and 16th, allied troops, half of which are French, land on the Provence shores. They are commanded by general de Lattre de Tassigny and include several "indigenous" units of North – and black Africa. Algerian and Senegalese infantry corps are presented with their US equipments, especially one of the first talkie-walkie. The Franco-American progress swiftly. As soon as the 28th of August, cities as important as Toulon and Marseilles are freed. The French and the Americans push back the German forces northward faster than expected. On September 11th, 1944, allied forces coming from Normandy and those coming from Provence join together near Dijon. General de Lattre's jeep stationed in this room is one of the 640 000 copies manufactured during the conflict.



Maquis man of the FFI in Provence, inv. Ga 528 © Paris, musée de l'Armée.

The Maquis : organization and actions (August 1942 – December 1944) 22

In order to escape the STO (*Service du Travail Obligatoire*, mandatory work service in Germany), established on February 16th, 1943, many young French join the Resistance's maquis. "Maquis" refers to isolated zones, hard to access, from which resistants (called "maquisards") organize guerrilla and sabotage warfare against the German occupier. Disparate materials and equipments gathered here must not hide the fact that the Allies are reluctant to send weapons to Maquis, for they remain unconvinced of their military efficiency and wary of the political goals of the Resistance. For want of means, some maquis are ruthlessly crushed by the Germans, sometimes with the help of Vichy's militia. In prevision of the liberation of national territory, de Gaulle entrusts their organization and militarization into the Interior French Forces (FFI) to general Koenig. Maquis men, however, do not always have the human and military means to lead decisive operations.

During their retreat (1944 – 1945), German troops are harassed by the "maquisards". In retaliation, some SS-units perpetrate atrocities against civilian population : Oradour-sur-Glane, a martyred village in Limousin, is totally destroyed, and its 642 inhabitants executed on June 10th, 1944.

The liberation of Paris (August 1944) 23

Audiovisual materials, picture walls and displayed objects present the stages and the main actors of the liberation of the French capital. Colonel Rol-Tanguy, head of the Ile-de-France FFI, launches the insurrection of Paris as the allied armies approach the capital. A general strike is started and fights multiply between German forces and Parisians. In order to keep control of the insurrection and restore the regular institutions, de Gaulle sends, with the consent of the Allied command, the "2^e DB" towards Paris, where it arrives on August 24th. The following day, Leclerc's armoured vehicles help the FFI crush the last pockets of resistance.

German General von Choltitz decides to surrender, in spite of Hitler's orders to destroy Paris. In the evening, General de Gaulle is hosted at the "Hôtel de Ville" (city council) where he delivers a speech remained famous: "*Paris! Paris insulted ! Paris broken down ! Paris martyred ! But Paris freed ! Freed by itself, freed by its people with the support of the armies of France, with the backup and support of the whole France, which means fighting France, the only France, the true France, eternal France !*"

On August 26th, among an enthusiastic crowd, de Gaulle triumphantly walks down the Champs-Élysées. His government has in effect become the legal power in France. The Vichy regime no longer exists.



Silk dress with posters of «the Appeal of June 18th» made and worn during the Liberation of Paris. Inv. Ma 998573 © Paris, musée de l'Armée/ RMN-GP

The victory of the Allies – Towards Berlin (November 1944 – May 8th 1945) 24

In a pincer movement, the western Allies in the West and the Soviets in the East clutch the German troops and join on the river Elbe. Berlin is located in the Soviet conquest zone.

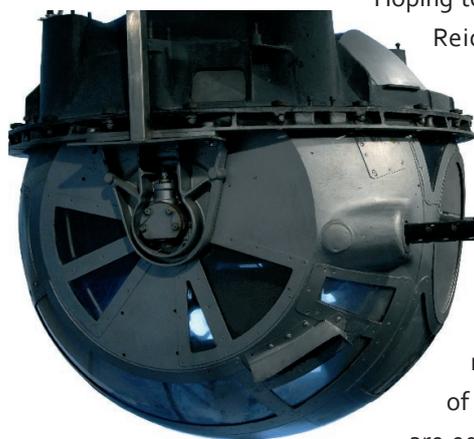
The Red Army beyond USSR borders

During the winter of 1944, the Soviets launch a vast offensive and push back German troops beyond USSR's borders. Romanians and Bulgarians turn against the Germans, whose situation becomes critical. A large part of the Balkans is taken over by the Soviets.

At first waging a war of numbers, the Russians endeavour to gain a material advantage as well: this goal is reached in 1944. On the German side, Hitler pins his hopes of victory in the use of new weapons such as V1 and V2, models of which are displayed in the staircase. Elite troops of the German army get the "Sturmgewehr 44", the first assault rifle ever made, which combines the skills of the rifle and those of the machine gun. Allied bombings on the Reich's industrial centers can't succeed in halting German arming efforts until the end of 1944.

The march to the Rhine and the battle of Germany

US winter equipments and audiovisual material remind of the German counter-offensive in the Ardennes in mid-December 1944, which disrupts for some time the advance of US troops. But German tanks do not have enough fuel to exploit their breakthrough, and stocks are running out. The crushing superiority of the Allies, in materials, logistics and manpower allows them to get back on track. In the West, their armies, among which the 1st French Army, cross the Rhine in March 1945 and fight on German soil.



American B17 bomber turret used for air bombings, Inv. Ma 998573
© Paris, musée de l'Armée / RMN-GP

Hoping to break the German population's morale, the Allies carry out heavy air bombings on the Reich's big cities, as soon as 1943. The massive destruction of downtowns leaves 300 000 people dead and another 7 millions homeless. This terror strategy doesn't succeed. Germans keep on fighting under Hitler's orders, who still has 7,5 millions men at his disposal in his armies when 1945 starts. His troops, however, are demoralized and exhausted.

The fall of Berlin and the German surrender

The advance of Soviet troops towards Berlin comes up against the fierce resistance of German troops. Kids from the "Hitlerjugend" and aging men are enrolled in the "Volksturm", the people's National Guard, which struggles against thousands of enemy tanks. Their uniform is taken from the stocks of clothing warehouses, and they are equipped with the "Panzerfaust", a light and efficient one-shot antitank weapon. Berlin is surrounded and, on April 30th, 1945, Hitler commits suicide in his bunker. Admiral Doenitz takes over from him. On May 2nd, the last defenders of the German capital surrender to Soviet armies which outrank them largely both in manpower and material. German troops surrounded by allied troops are compelled to surrender one after the other. Newspapers front-pages herald the German surrender, signed on May 7th in Reims, and solemnly renewed on the next day in presence of the Soviets, the Americans, the Britons and the French.

By order of General Eisenhower, all Nazi emblems are taken and destroyed as fast as possible. The eagle head, symbol of the Reich, displayed here, was overhanging the "Führerbau" façade in Munich, both siege of the Bavarian Nazi Party and Adolf Hitler's residence. This eagle head, embedded in the residence's masonry, was taken out with a blowtorch to be kept as a trophy.

War in Asia 25

From the middle of the year 1943, the Allies engage in the reconquest of Japanese-occupied territories in Southeast Asia and the Pacific.

The battles of the Pacific (November 1943 – September 1945)

Fights opposing US and Japanese troops for the mastery of the Pacific islands are deadly, for the Japanese oppose a dogged resistance to the advance of US troops. Japanese air force wins at first, thanks to the efficiency of the "zeros". But US aircrafts, especially the "Hellcats", quickly outrank them. Moreover, the superiority of the US Navy is not threatened, despite the kamikaze's sacrifice.

The Britons, who support Tchang Kai Chek's Chinese troops, engage in the reconquest of Burma, under particularly difficult conditions, against Japanese troops which are used to jungle warfare. The showcases once again testify for the tremendous industrial mobilization of the United States, which provide for more and more fit clothes, materials and ammunition to troops engaged on the European and Asian fronts. Meanwhile, Japan sorely lacks of raw material.

Japan's surrender

The Americans dread important losses for their troops if they invade Japan. They decide to try and break Japanese resistance will by using the atomic bomb they just developed. The atomic bomb displayed by the Museum is a replica of "Little Boy", dropped over Hiroshima on August 6th, 1945. In a few seconds, only one bomb kills 74 000 people and harms another 84 000, for a total population of 300 000. On the 9th, "Fat Boy" is dropped over Nagasaki. At the same time, the Soviets wage war on Japan. On August 10th, the emperor Hiro Hito addresses his people for the first time to announce the end of the war. Japan signs its surrender act on September 2nd, on the US battleship Missouri. General Leclerc is there, representing France.



Head of a nazi eagle. Inv. 1956
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Model of «Little Boy», the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima, August 6th 1945.
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The discovery and the liberation of the camps 26

This topic is approached in a distinct space located on the left side of this room. As they move forward, the Allies discover the horror of the Nazi concentration camps system, with the numerous concentration and extermination camps, located mainly in Germany and Poland.

From 1942 on, Hitler decides the total extermination of the Jews: it is called the "final solution". Ghettos in Eastern Europe cities, internment camps in the West are emptied and their occupiers transported to the death camps, the most sadly famous of which remains Auschwitz. There, those who were unfit for work were suppressed right away in the gazing rooms, then burnt in the incinerators.

An estimated 6 millions Jews were exterminated, in addition to other deported for racial motives, such as the Slaves and the gypsies. Numerous political detainees and resisters also perish in the camps. Approximately 40 000 French resisters, labelled by the Germans in the category "*Nacht und Nebel*" (Night and Haze), were deported in the concentration camps. There, they were forced to carry out the most painful work; many of them died of exhaustion and of the consequences of ill-treatment inflicted on them by their torturers.

The discovery of the camps and the Nazi concentration universe by the general public worldwide was an unprecedented moral shock.



Knives decorated by F.Pannetier who was transported to Ravensbrück camp, Inv. 997174-175 © Paris, musée de l'Armée/RMN-GP

Map of the Second World War rooms

