

French maginot line a defensive failure history essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

The plan of investigation is going to be an analysis and evaluation of the history behind the French Maginot Line and why it failed. To undertake this study, the following was used: visiting a local library and researching in the reference section, researching at Troy High School's Library, and going to a bookstore to purchase secondary sources. With these starting points, I found articles, journals, and documents, that may be able to offer important information and details to my research reinforcing my arguments. Through the usage of the information gathered in these sources, I will formulate a conclusion of the importance of why the French Maginot line was a defensive failure from Germany in WWII.

B. Summary of Evidence

The Maginot Line, named after French Minister of Defense André Maginot, was a French defense structure comprised of concrete fortification, anti-tank barriers, artillery armaments, machine gun turrets, and much more (Allcorn). France built this structure to protect its borders from Germany and Italy based on experiences during the First World War, and preliminary Second World War (Kaufmann).

The reasoning behind the construction of the Maginot line comes from the immense French losses during the WWI. By the time the war had ended November 11, 1918, the eastern sector of France was invaded and occupied by enemies for four years (Allcorn). Within these years, the war had caused the deaths of over one million French citizens and, as a result, had a major impact on demographics in France, such as a steep drop in the national birth rates (Maurois). Being a witness to the repercussion of the war, France asked itself a vital question: what could France do to defend itself in the future?
<https://assignbuster.com/french-maginot-line-a-defensive-failure-history-essay/>

The Maginot Line seemed to be the answer. If Germans were to attempt another invasion in France, a defense fortress like the Maginot Line would prevent them from doing so.

The construction of the Maginot Line consisted of multiple phases throughout the 1930's (Kaufmann). The STG (Service Technique du Génie) ran the project and was supervised by CORF (Commission d'Organisation des Régions Fortifiées) (Allcorn). The majority of construction was completed during 1939, costing about three billion francs (Allcorn).

The Maginot Line seemed to be the pinnacle of defense structures at the time: it was a linear structure, with a succession of forts constructed in an continuous line (Jurga). Each fort was placed about 15 km apart from the next, varying amongst terrain. Between each forts were casements, armored buildings from where machine-gun are fired, that further reinforced the Line's defenses (Jurga). The forts and interval casemates were adjoined by anti-tank barriers and barbed wires (Jurga). In essence, the ligne de principale résistance, with all of its forts, casements, and barriers, seemed to be the ultimate defensive structure.

In theory, an invading German army would have to battle the Line as wholly conjoined system, not as series of individual forts and turrets (Robertson). However, as the German Army drew closer to France, the French Commanders withdrew troops and artillery troops that connected the individual forts and turrets and deployed them elsewhere (Maurois). This choice weakened much of the Line's firepower and infantry. Hence, when the

Germans attacked, they did not battle the Line as envisioned by its constructors (Kaufmann).

The WWII German invasion plan of 1940 (Sichelschnitt) was created to deal with the Line (Allcorn). A decoy force sat opposite the Line to instigate the Phony War: for 8 months, the Germans gave the impression that they were planning to invade the French at the Maginot Line by shooting artillery salvos on an area nearby (Feuchtinger). In the meantime, another German force cut through the Belgium and the Netherlands, as well as through the Ardennes Forest, which lay north of the main French defenses (Allcorn). Hence, the Germans were able to avoid directly attacking the Maginot Line. On May 10th, German forces had penetrated deep into France continued to advance until for fourteen days (Kaufmann). The French Prime Minister, Marshal Philippe Pétain, realizing that France was overrun, proceeded to surrender and requested an armistice with Germany, which Adolf Hitler agreed to (Maurois).

C. Evaluation of Sources

Maurois, Andre. The Battle of France. Right Book Club, 1940. Print.

Origin: The author of this document is Andre Maurois, a French author born in Normandy, who served in the French army during several wars, including the First and Second World. Purpose: The purpose of this document is to describe what Maurois witness firsthand during his time in the Second World War, mostly the Battle of France and what lead up to it. During his times as a traveler for the French army, Maruois had several duties that required speaking to people from different nations, primarily the British and <https://assignbuster.com/french-maginot-line-a-defensive-failure-history-essay/>

Americans. Value: The value of this document is that it provides firsthand insight into knowledge of what occurred in World War II. A behind-the-scenes look at what happened during the war is provided as insight through this source. Not to mention that it also includes several different perspectives and ideas because Maurois spoke to people from various international countries. Seeing how Maurois spoke to French, American, and British soldiers throughout the war, including those that had posted at the Maginot Line, this document will provide me with useful information regarding the Maginot Line. Limitation: This document is limited in that it may be biased from a French perspective. Despite the fact that it includes the opinions of those who are from America or Britain, Maurois, as a Frenchman, could have easily filtered out facts or ideas that he did not appreciate.

Jurga, Robert. Fortress Europe: European Fortifications of World War II. Da Capo, 2002. Print.

Origin: The author of this document is Robert Jurga, an American historian who studies specifically the era of the Second World War. Purpose: The purpose of this document is to look into the different types of defense structures that existed throughout Europe during the Second World War such as forts, bunkers, anti-tank barriers, and more. It describes in detail the sizes and fortifications of notable defense structures that were constructed during this time period, including the Maginot Line. Value: This document is valuable because it provides detailed descriptions of the Maginot Line such as the specific structures, building phases, and groups important to the construction of the Maginot line such as the STG (Service Technique du Génie) and CORF. Limitation: This document is limited in that it may be

biased from an American perspective. Jurga, may have found certain defensive structures throughout Europe to be better than certain other ones. If he somehow considered the Maginot Line to be inferior, he may have put less effort into making a more detailed description of the design of structure.

D. Analysis

France had experienced catastrophic damage in World War I. After the Treaty of Versailles of 1919, France had a strong intent that it would never have to suffer from such a disaster again (Kaufmann). In 1920, both the government and military favored implementing a military tactic that would prevent any further German invasion (Allcorn). Many powerful figures in the French military, such as Marshall Foch, assumed that the German anger over their humiliating treatment at the signing of the Treaty of Versailles guaranteed that Germany would seek revenge (Kaufmann).

As a result, the French military intent was to solely embrace the power of the defense (Kaufmann). When André Maginot took government office in 1929, he lead France to spend a fortune (nearly 3 billion francs) to construct a complete defense blockade, the Maginot Line, across the German border (Allcorn). He rashly opposed any objections to his plan, his only argument that the structure would surely prevent any further terrible bloodshed, like that of WWI, should there be another war (Kaufmann).

The intended Line would run through the French-German and French-Italian borders (both foes during the war) and would have two functions: to deter an assault long enough to fully mobilize the French army, and to act as a bunker to fend off the assault (Kaufmann). Hence, any combat would occur on the

French borders, avoiding internal harm and occupation. However, France made a critical error when they ceased to construct northern fortifications, which is where Germans would invade from (Feuchtinger). This was because Belgium, an ally, was north of France, and it was unthinkable that either one build such a colossal construction on their shared boundary: the Ardennes Forest. Furthermore, the French had believed that even if the Germans invaded through Belgium, they had considered the Ardennes Forest to be impenetrable due to its hilly and woody terrain (Maurois). As a result, the French decision to not extend the Maginot Line across the Ardennes Forest partly contributed it to become a defensive failure.

On another note, many critics at the time claimed that the original design of the Line was too large and costly, which lead the project to become downsized (Jurga). Some of even proceeded that the only reason why the project did not extend across Belgium was because funds had been running out. In 1934, Chief of State Philippe Pétain obtained a billion francs for construction, and many people saw this as definite overspending (Allcorn). Seeing how much was invested into a project that did not fulfill its purpose, it becomes evident why many people consider the Maginot Line a defensive failure.

The errors of the French ultimately culminated in France's failure to suspect and deter the Nazi invasion plan, the Sichelschnitt. Germany gave the impression that it was going to attack the Line; it posted a diversion army across the Line, whose mere presence prevented French soldiers at the Line to be used as reinforcements elsewhere (Kaufmann). On May 10th 1940, Germany attacked the Netherlands, through Belgium. France, at this point, <https://assignbuster.com/french-maginot-line-a-defensive-failure-history-essay/>

was not worried-the war seemed to be according to plan, where troops at the Maginot Line would be used as a hinge to advance and deter the invasion through Belgium (Allcorn). However, the French did not expect that the German forces would cross Luxembourg, Belgium and go through the Ardennes. With well over one million troops and a thousand tanks, the German army easily crossed the “ impenetrable” forest (Feuchtinger). They were faced with small resistance, and the French army began to wither. By June, Germans had swung behind the Line and cut it off from the rest of France, leading France to surrender and ultimately manifesting the Line as a defensive failure.

E. Conclusion

Though the Maginot Line had been considered by the French as the perfect defensive structure that would fend off an enemy invasion, it is clear that was not the case. Several factors contribute to why the Maginot Line was a defensive failure against the German invasion: the belief that the Line would be the only invasion entryway into France for the Germans, the wrong assumption that the Ardennes Forest was impenetrable, the failure to see that the German army opposite the Line was a diversion, the incompleteness of the Line (failing to extend across Belgium and the Ardennes Forest), and the high cost and time-consumption that went into it. The French had become paranoid from the damage it took from the World War I and invested too much time and money embracing the concept of defense without considering other possibilities such as from invasion elsewhere. As a result, the Maginot Line, the seemingly ultimate defensive structure, failed to perform its duty: to defend France.

F. Bibliography

Allcorn, William. *The Maginot Line 1928-45*. Grand Rapids: Osprey, 2003. Print.

Feuchtinger, Edgar. *21st Panzer Division in Combat Against American Troops in France and Germany*. United States Military, 1940. Print.

Jurga, Robert. *Fortress Europe: European Fortifications of World War II*. Da Capo, 2002. Print.

Kaufmann, J. E., and H. W. Kaufmann. *Fortress France The Maginot Line and French Defenses in World War II (Stackpole Military History Series) (Stackpole Military History Series)*. New York: Stackpole, 2007. Print.

Kaufmann, J. E. *Maginot Line none shall pass*. Westport, Conn: Praeger, 1997. Print.

Maurois, Andre. *The Battle of France*. Right Book Club, 1940. Print.

Robertson, Harry S.. *Report on French Defenses: Maginot Line*. United States Military, 1940. Print.

H. Additional O. P. V. L's

Feuchtinger, Edgar. 21st Panzer Division in Combat Against American Troops in France and Germany. United States Military, 1940. Print.

Origin: The author of this document is Edgar Feuchtinger, a German General (Generalleutnant) during the Second World War. He was the Commander of the 21st Panzer-Division and participated in many critical German battles

<https://assignbuster.com/french-maginot-line-a-defensive-failure-history-essay/>

such as the Battle of Normandy. Purpose: This document is a debriefing of German General Feuchtinger by the United States after he and the rest of the German 21st Panzer Division were captured by the British. Feuchtinger kept records and logs of what he encountered throughout the war. The debriefing document includes what Feuchtinger had known about the Line at the time, including the number of forces encountered there and what kinds of artillery and weaponry the French had in possession. Value: The value of this document is that it provides firsthand insight into knowledge of what occurred in World War II. Not only is it from the perspective of a German, but a General, a critical military position which requires much knowledge and skill. This document will be able to provide me with inside details about the Maginot from a position that I would normally not be able to get from a document that is taken from an American perspective. Limitation: This document is limited in that it may be biased from a German perspective. The German general may have withheld important information due to the fact that the war wasn't actually over when he was being debriefed.

Robertson, Harry S.. Report on French Defenses: Maginot Line. United States Military, 1940. Print.

Origin: The author of this document is Harry S. Robertson, an American Colonel during the Second World War, who was part of the 75th Infantry Division and the 291st US infantry Regiment. Purpose: Harry S. Robertson's duty was to investigate the Maginot Line for American intelligence. Robertson, along with his unit, went inside the Line and took firsthand observations to debrief what they witnessed there such as weaponry, troop count, and artillery. Value: The value of this document is that it provides

<https://assignbuster.com/french-maginot-line-a-defensive-failure-history-essay/>

firsthand insight of what occurred in World War II. Unlike many other sources, Robertson was there to witness what the Maginot Line was like at the time of the War: he saw what types of armaments the French were in possession of or what the structural layout of the Line was like. More recent documents attempting to investigate the Maginot Line are not likely to provide as much detail as this document due to the fact they are not deduced from firsthand experiences. Limitation: This document is limited in that it may be biased from an American perspective. Due to the fact that it was an American's job to debrief what he sees in a French fortress, it is plausible to believe that Robertson may not have found the assignment to have been too interesting and that he may have failed to provide a completely accurate investigational analysis of the structure.