

## Darlan v Britain

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<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,795328,00.html>

Last week Vichy's wily, grey little Vice Premier Admiral Jean François Darlan announced that France "will act to hasten the hour of peace." Since he also was openly of the opinion that Britain could not win the war, this was tantamount to saying that France would now openly help the Axis end the war by winning it. That Britain was well aware of her former ally's hostile intentions was evident:

- > Britain announced that French-mandated Syria, where 180 Nazi bombers were reported based, would be regarded as "enemy territory."
- > Britain announced that it would issue no more navicerts to French vessels.
- > A British warship seized the French tanker Sheherezade—bound from Houston, Texas, to Morocco—off the West African coast; and a Dutch ally intercepted the 8,379-ton French merchant ship Winnipeg—carrying a mixed cargo out of North Africa—off the island of Martinique. There were 210 Germans aboard the Winnipeg.
- > British planes bombed the sweltering French Tunisian port of Sfax, just across the Mediterranean from Sicily. Chasing part of an Italian convoy into Sfax, the British bombers set fire to the 3,313-ton Italian freighter Florida II and the 4,999-ton French freighter Rabelais, damaged harbor equipment and a phosphate storehouse, injured more than 40 people. Vichy angrily protested that the Italian shipping had been in Sfax less than the 72 hours permitted by international law, that the British had no right to attack the port itself. But a fortnight before, following Vichy's recent announcements regarding "collaboration" with the Nazis, Britain had warned Vichy that it no longer enjoyed the rights of a neutral State, had issued special warning against the Axis use of Tunisian waters.

Vice Premier Darlan's latest statement might have come from the clamorous mouth of Adolf Hitler himself. Lashing at British policy ever since the Versailles Treaty, Admiral Darlan worked heatedly up to World War II in which, he declared, Britain had seized 792,000 tons of French shipping valued at 12,000,000,000 francs.

"The sole object of all these brutalities," he said, "is to annihilate French maritime power, cut off the metropolis from the Empire and isolate her from the rest of the world. . . .

"In the more than improbable event of a British victory . . . British leaders might possibly afford to wait in the concrete shelters of their island or in distant Canada, but the French people would be doomed to slow death.

"With Marshal Pétain I refuse to accept such annihilation. . . . That London should treat us like a continental Ireland, even like a colony, matters little to me, for I intend to act in such a manner that France shall recover her place as a power in Europe and in the universe."

France's deeds continued to parallel Darlan's words. While French Ambassador to the U.S. Gaston Henry-Haye was solemnly assuring the U.S. Government that France would not go beyond her Armistice commitments to the Nazis, the Nazis were permitting Vichy to build an air force for defense of the French Empire. (Under the Armistice terms, all air equipment in the Unoccupied Zone was to be dismantled.) One grey rainy day old Marshal Pétain went to Aulnat airfield, near Clermont-Ferrand (France's Burbank-Akitin).