

FALL GELB CAMPAIGN

HISTORY

Following the German invasion of Poland in September 1939 (which started the Second World War in Europe), a period of inaction called the Phoney War set in between the major powers. Adolf Hitler had hoped that France and Britain would acquiesce in his conquest and quickly make peace.

Hitler ordered a conquest of the Low Countries to be executed at the shortest possible notice. This would stop France from occupying them first, and prevent Allied air power from threatening the vital German Ruhr Area. It would also provide the basis for a long-term air and sea campaign against Britain.

Franz Halder presented the first plan for *Fall Gelb* ("Case Yellow") on 19 October. This was the pre-war codename of plans for a campaign in the Low Countries. Halder's plan has often been compared to the Schlieffen Plan, which the Germans attempted to execute in 1914 in the opening phase of the First World War.

When General Guderian was invited to contribute to the plan during informal discussions, he proposed a radical and novel idea. Not only his army corps, but most of the *Panzerwaffe* should be concentrated at Sedan. This concentration of armour should subsequently not move to the north but to the west, to execute a swift, deep, independent strategic penetration towards the English Channel without waiting for the main body of infantry divisions. This might lead to a strategic collapse of the enemy, avoiding the relatively high number of casualties.

The German Army was divided into three army groups. Army Group A commanded by Gerd von

Rundstedt, composed of 45½ divisions including seven armoured, was to execute the decisive movement through the Allied defences in the Ardennes. It consisted of three armies: the 4th, 12th and 16th. It had three *Panzer* corps; one, the XV, had been allocated to the 4th Army, but the other two, the XXXI (Reinhardt) and the XIX (Guderian) were united with the XIV Army Corps of two motorised infantry divisions, on a special independent operational level in *Panzergruppe Kleist*.

The main tool of the German land forces was combined arms combat. In contrast to the Allies, they relied on highly mobile offensive units, with balanced numbers of well-trained artillery, infantry, engineer and tank formations, all integrated into *Panzer* divisions

. Germany initiated *Fall Gelb* on the evening prior to and the night of 10 May. During the late evening of 9 May, German forces occupied Luxembourg virtually unopposed. Army Group B launched its feint offensive during the night into the Netherlands and Belgium.

The French command reacted immediately, sending its 1st Army Group north in accordance with Plan D. This move committed their best forces. By the time the French 7th Army crossed the Dutch border, they found the Dutch already in full retreat, and withdrew into Belgium to protect Brussels.

