

# Laval Admits Being Most Hated Frenchman, Testifying for Petain

PARIS, Aug. 5 (AP).—The treason trial of Marshal Petain enters its third week tomorrow with the defense reopening the case for the aged Vichy Chief after a two-day interruption for the testimony of Pierre Laval. Laval, No. 2 man in the Vichy Government, was summoned by the President of the High Court, and technically was a witness for neither the prosecution nor the defense. Laval, however, provided testimony on behalf of Petain, asserting that the Vichy Government softened the hardships of occupation for France and obtained concessions from the Nazis. Germany would have "asphyxiated" France otherwise, he contended. For all the hostility against him personally, Laval's arguments caused some jurors, representing the French Resistance Movement, frequently to nod their heads in apparent assent.

Some 35 defense witnesses remain to be called. They include Gen. Alphonse Juin, one-time commander of French forces in North Africa, and Cardinal Lionard. But defense counsel maintain their "key witnesses" will be documents.

Marshal Petain has letters and telegrams written during the Nazi occupation that he kept secret even from Laval, his right-hand man, defense counsel expects to prove two con-

teptions—that Marshal Petain actively co-operated with Britain and the United States against Germany, and that the Marshal gave direct aid to the Allies when they landed in North Africa.

## Minor Change in Charges

The defense already has brought about a minor alteration in the charges against Marshal Petain to a Prosecutor Andre Mornet has ceased insisting on premeditation in the accusation that Petain "plotted against the safety of the State."

In the early phases of the trial M. Mornet sought to show that as early as the fall of 1939 Marshal Petain was scheming to obtain power. Prosecution witnesses, how-

ever, failed to substantiate the assertion that the defendant was over friendly with Gen. Franco while he was French Ambassador to Madrid or that he had anything but formal diplomatic relations with German emissaries there.

Picturing himself as an unwilling tool of the Germans, Laval testified Saturday that he had prevented the Gestapo murder of two former French Premiers.

The arch-collaborator, who has been sentenced to death by a Marseille court, asserted he saved Leo Blum and Paul Reynaud from German firing squads and professed ignorance of the murder of George Mandel, celebrated martyr of anti-

German resistance.

Though acknowledging in effect that he was the "most hated man in France," the swarthy, white-tied ex-fugitive contended he and Marshal Petain saved France from "asphyxiation" and asserted he twice refused to enter a military alliance with Germany, once at the time of the Anglo-American landings in North Africa.

Digging into the secrets of the Vichy regime, Laval maintained that French forces in Africa resisted the Allies "to prevent a German attack" and revealed that two American diplomats—one of them the former ambassador to Vichy, Admiral William D. Leahy—had demanded an explanation for Laval's notorious "I desire a German victory" speech. Laval, who wound up his two days of testimony only a few minutes before the 12th day of Marshal Petain's trial ended, declared he saved M. Blum and M. Reynaud from German firing squads by protesting to the Germans.

## Saving of Blum, Reynaud

He said that, as Chief of the Vichy Government, he learned the two former Premiers of the Third Republic "were going to be shot by the Germans in reprisal for the condemnation in Algiers of Pierre Pucheu (Vichy Minister of the Interior)."

Laval asserted he also protested to the Germans and demanded an investigation when he learned that the Mandel had been murdered. He said he heard about the murder from Joseph Darnand, Chief of the Vichy Gestapo, who Laval asserted was "imposed upon us" by the Germans.

"Mandel was my friend," Laval cried. "I regretted his murder and I suffered when I learned of it." Laval also denied any connection with the mysterious death of the former Minister of Education, Jean Zay. "Jean Zay also was my friend," he said.

Laval also claimed he tried to get former Premier Edouard Herriot released from a German prison, carrying the case to Adolf Hitler himself, who, however, "gave me a negative response."

Laval, asserting that the Vichy Government made the best of a bad situation after the Franco-German armistice, declared the worst actions of Vichy resulted from direct orders of the Germans. Since France was prostrate, the Germans

could have "asphyxiated" her. Hence, he claimed, Marshal Petain could only negotiate, trying wherever possible to dull the edge of German demands.

## Realizes He Is Hated

Referring to the sending of 150,000 French workers to Germany—for which French public opinion holds him mainly responsible—Laval said that in return he obtained the liberation of 50,000 French prisoners of war.

"I realize those who were sent to Germany feel nothing but hatred for me," he said. "Many more who stayed behind also hate me for this. But is it the aim of a chief of Government to seek popularity, or is his duty to serve his country?"

Some of the workers who refused to go to Germany stayed behind and joined the Maquis, presiding Judge Paul Mongibeaux pointed out. To this Laval replied he had protested to the Germans against a decision to call the Maquis "terrorists." Marshal Petain's attitude toward the Maquis "was that of an honest man," Laval said. Marshal Petain, he added, also protested.

Laval claimed he won exemption for French women from a European-wide Nazi order for a general mobilization of labor and persuaded the Germans to withdraw a demand that all French Jews should be deprived of their nationality.

When Laval implied that French Army commanders in North Africa presented only token resistance to the Allies in 1942, Marshal Petain's lawyers quickly added that they would produce "secret telegrams" despatched by Marshal Petain to North Africa ordering the army there not to offer serious resistance. Laval said the Marshal was the "only person qualified" to answer questions regarding them.

## Never Saw Dieppe Telegram

Another telegram figured heavily in Laval's day-long testimony. It was the message which Marshal Petain is accused of having sent to Hitler congratulating the Germans on the outcome of the 1942 Canadian attack at Dieppe and asking permission to fight alongside the Germans.

Laval said he had never heard of such a telegram and expressed disbelief that Marshal Petain would have authorized anybody else to send it in his name. In fact, he went on to say, he twice refused when the Nazis offered to permit France to fight alongside the Allies.

Coming to the defense of Marshal Petain, Laval said the old general was "not free." He said Marshal Petain was ordered by the Germans to "make statements in opposition to the Allied action in North Africa," and added:

"I also was instructed to speak publicly on the subject. I did not refuse. I made my declaration the day of the landings. The Germans were not satisfied and they told me it was no real protest."

Regarding his "I desire a German victory" speech June 22, 1942, Laval for the second day claimed that Marshal Petain changed the broadcast text from "I believe in a German victory," an allegation which the marshal indignantly denied Friday.

"A few days after that broadcast," Laval revealed, "Admiral Leahy and Mr. S. Pinkney Tuck (counsellor at the American Embassy at Vichy) came to see me. I explained the reason for that statement, what I meant by it and the practical effects of it."

Judge Mongibeaux, in an effort

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to get from Laval the reasons for the broadcast, was met by the reminder from Laval that long after the broadcast Marshal Petain said: "From now on Laval and I walk hand in hand. All subjects of discussion between us have been solved."

Laval came to Marshal Petain's defense at another point. He shouldered the blame for the secret tribunals in which French resistance fighters were tried. He said he organized the courts because French magistrates were afraid to try the cases openly.

But Laval insisted that under cover of their secrecy, a great many French patriots were freed as well as convicted. He said he knew of "only one case" of French torture chambers where underground leaders were taken, and also intimated that neither he nor Marshal Petain was aware of the actions of Darnand's Vichy Gestapo.