

Newsweek

August 13, 1945: p. 50

France: Jackal's Return

The game was up. At the Prat de Llobregat airfield outside Barcelona the traitor sat heavily on a camp stool, waiting desperately for a last reprieve. It did not come. The Franco government had found Pierre Laval too hot to handle. Just three months after the former Vichy chief of government fled to Spain to escape retribution for his crimes, the order from the Spanish Foreign Office came through formally "inviting" him to "abandon Spanish territory."



Laval testifies only for Laval, not for Pétain

'If Pétain Can . . .': As mechanics sweated over the same unmarked Junkers 88 in which he had flown from Bolzano last May, Laval collapsed with fear. But after doctors quickly revived him, he made one last effort to escape by offering his two Luftwaffe pilots 1,000,000 francs (\$20,000) each if they would take him to Portugal instead of Allied territory. Laval swore he would pay them in "good money instead of devaluated francs." The Germans refused.

Laval shrugged: "I suppose if Pétain can face the music I can." But later he shouted: "It is unfair . . . delivering me to my country." Shortly after dawn next morning, Spanish police bundled Laval and his sobbing wife into the plane. It landed some four hours later at an American 65th Division airfield at Hörsching near Linz, Austria.

Dressed in a dark blue pin-striped suit and leaning heavily on a cane, Laval stepped from the plane. He looked older than his '62 years. His rumpled clothes hung in folds—he had lost almost 40 pounds—and a collar several sizes too large drooped around his emaciated neck. But his lips still curled open in the familiar sneer, showing teeth almost black from tobacco stains.

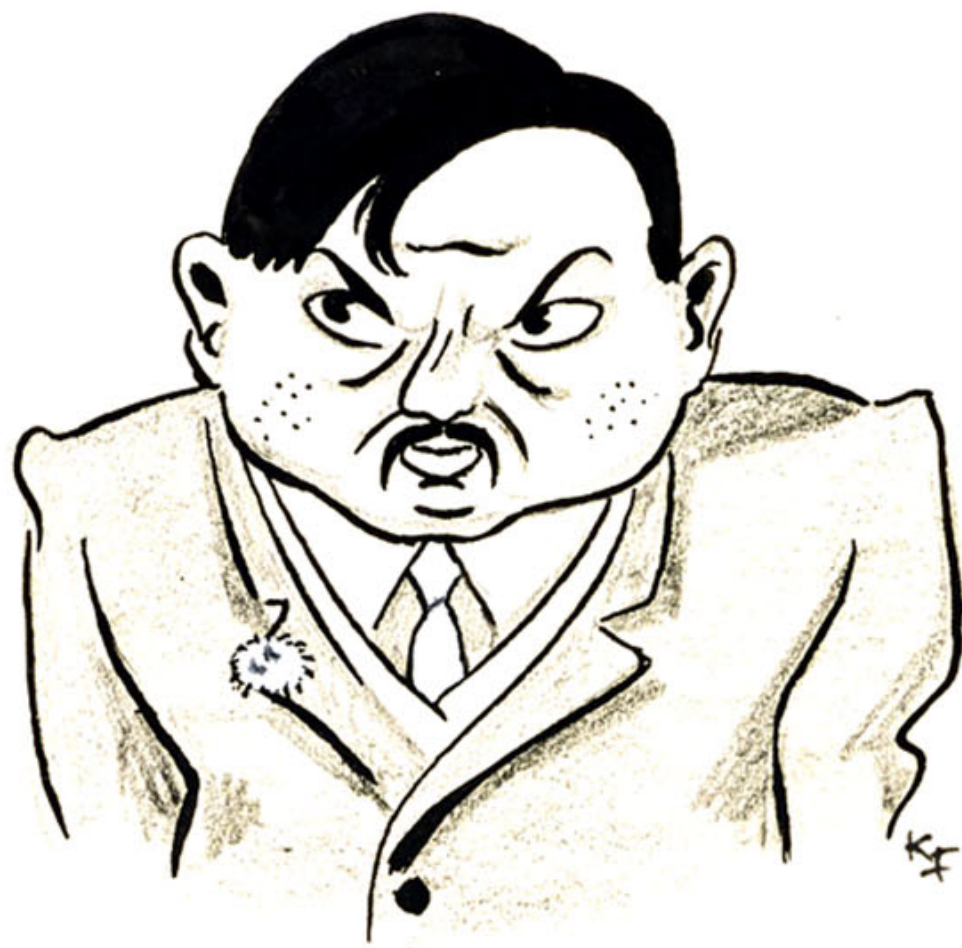
The Spoils: American officers promptly searched him and found \$10,000 in American \$500 bills. As a suicide precaution,

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Laval Captured

they took away his penknife and tiepin that he always wore in his cravat, then shipped him off in an American plane to Paris. There, at Le Bourget airport, while a magistrate arrested him, the heavy French police guard burst out into cries of "*salaud*" and "*à bas Laval*."

Laval and his wife were placed in separate cells in Fresnes Prison. Outside the prison a small crowd howled and spat on the ground. When an examining magistrate sealed his fourteen pieces of baggage, Laval broke into tears. The suitcases supposedly contained evidence for his defense. For, although a special Marseille court sentenced him to death in absentia in October 1944, he undoubtedly faced another trial for treason. In the trial of his former Vichy chief, at which he testified "only for Laval," the traitor gave a preview of his own brazen defense.



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