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Charles de Gaulle Biography & Questions

*(adapted from spartacus-educational.com)*

*Read the biography below and answer the questions that follow in complete sentences.*

Charles de Gaulle was born in Lille, France, on November 22, 1890. The son of a headmaster of a Jesuit school, he was educated in Paris. He was a good student and at the Military Academy St. Cyr, he graduated 13th in the class of 1912. Commissioned as a second lieutenant, the 6 feet 5 tall de Gaulle joined an infantry regiment commanded by Colonel [Henri-Philippe Petain](http://spartacus-educational.com/FWWpetain.htm) in 1913.

In the [First World War](http://spartacus-educational.com/FWW.htm), de Gaulle was wounded twice in the first few months of the conflict. Promoted to the rank of captain in February, 1915, de Gaulle fought at [Verdun](http://spartacus-educational.com/FWWverdun.htm) where he was wounded again and on March 2, 1916 was captured by the [German Army](http://spartacus-educational.com/FWWgermanA.htm). Over the next 32 months, he was held in several prisoner of war camps and made five unsuccessful attempts to escape. After the [Armistice](http://spartacus-educational.com/FWWarmistice.htm), de Gaulle was assigned to a Polish division being formed in France where he served under [Maxime Weygand](http://spartacus-educational.com/FRweygand.htm). He fought against the [Red Army](http://spartacus-educational.com/RUSred.htm) during the Russian [Civil War](http://spartacus-educational.com/RUScivilwar.htm) and won Poland's highest military decoration, *Virtuti Militari*.

De Gaulle lectured at the French War College where he worked closely with [Henri-Philippe Petain](http://spartacus-educational.com/FWWpetain.htm). Over the next few years the two men demanding a small, mobile, highly mechanized army of professionals. De Gaulle's military ideas appeared in his book, The Army of the Future (1934). In the book he also criticized the static theories of war that was exemplified by the [Maginot Line](http://spartacus-educational.com/2WWmaginot.htm). The book was unpopular with the politicians and the military who favoured the idea of a mass army of conscripts during war. In 1936, de Gaulle was punished for his views by having his name taken of the promotion list. In 1938, de Gaulle published France and Her Army. This book caused a disagreement with [Henri-Philippe Petain](http://spartacus-educational.com/FWWpetain.htm) who accused de Gaulle of taking credit for work done by the staff of the French War College.

On the outbreak of the [Second World War](http://spartacus-educational.com/2WW.htm) de Gaulle took over command of the 5th Army's tank force in Alsace. Due to his success against the Germans, on June 5, 1940, the French prime minister, [Paul Reynaud](http://spartacus-educational.com/2WWreynaud.htm), appointed de Gaulle as his Minister of War. When there was a change in government during World War II, and the new government, led by Henri-Phillippe Petain, planned to seek an armistice with Germany, de Gaulle called for French people to continue fighting against the [German Army](http://spartacus-educational.com/2WWgermanA.htm).

President [Franklin D. Roosevelt](http://spartacus-educational.com/USArooseveltF.htm) in the USA recognized the new French government, but [Winston Churchill](http://spartacus-educational.com/PRchurchill.htm) refused and backed de Gaulle as leader of the "Free French". [Petain](http://spartacus-educational.com/FWWpetain.htm) responded by denouncing de Gaulle. De Gaulle made attempts to unify the resistance movements in France and by 1943, had managed to unite eight major resistance movements. In June, 1943, the French Committee of National Liberation (FCNL) was established with de Gaulle and [Henri Giraud](http://spartacus-educational.com/FRgiraud.htm) as co-presidents. De Gaulle had difficulty working with his co-president and by July, 1943, had limited Giraud's power to command of the armed forces. [Franklin D. Roosevelt](http://spartacus-educational.com/USArooseveltF.htm) and [Winston Churchill](http://spartacus-educational.com/PRchurchill.htm) were furious when de Gaulle's announced on May 26, 1944, that the FCNL will now be known as the Provisional Government of the French Republic. Roosevelt and Churchill refused to recognize de Gaulle's action.

Despite objections from Britain and the USA, de Gaulle's Provisional Government was recognized by Czechoslovakia, Poland, Belgium, Luxembourg, Yugoslavia and Norway. De Gaulle was then allowed to help administer the liberated portions of France and entered Paris on August 25, 1944. De Gaulle was upset by not being invited to the [Yalta Conference](http://spartacus-educational.com/2WWyalta.htm), but he was allowed to represent France as one of the four countries to sign the final instrument of surrender with Germany. France was also given one of the four occupation zones in Germany.

On November 13, 1945, the first Constituent Assembly unanimously elected de Gaulle as head of the French government. He held the post until resigning on January 20, 1946. He then formed the right-wing group, the Rally of the French People (RFP). After initial success, it declined in popularity and de Gaulle left it in 1953 and it was disbanded two years later.

After his retirement from politics de Gaulle wrote the first three volumes of his memoirs. He returned to politics in 1958 when he was elected president during the Algerian crisis. He granted independence to all 13 French African colonies but the Algerian War continued until 1962. De Gaulle decided that France should have its own atom bomb and repeatedly blocked Britain's attempts to join the European Economic Community. In 1966, de Gaulle withdrew France from the integrated military command of [NATO](http://spartacus-educational.com/USAnato.htm) because de Gaulle did not want to participate in a NATO plan to arm the NATO North Atlantic fleet with nuclear missiles, as it conflicted with a French plan to base much of its nation’s nuclear arsenal in their navy.

Following student riots against his government and negative results in a referendum, de Gaulle resigned from office in April, 1969. In retirement he completed his memoirs. Charles De Gaulle died on 9th November, 1970.

1. Charles de Gaulle had a very complex relationship with Henri-Philippe Petain. Describe their relationship and why it was complicated.
2. How was de Gaulle involved with World War I?
3. How was de Gaulle involved with World War II?
4. What role did de Gaulle have in the French government after 1945?
5. Why did de Gaulle withdraw France from NATO?