

PHD RESEARCH

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Fortified Position of Namur (FPN) in May 1940. From Brialmont to the 18 days' campaign (1888-1940) -

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At the start of this research, the role of the Fortified Position of Namur (FPN) had not led to any broad historical study. Based on the systematic analysis of Belgian, French and German public archives, on previously unpublished private and iconographic sources, and on over 300 oral testimonies, this thesis describes the defense of the FPN in 1940. By the end of the Great War, the Belgian defensive system had proved ineffective and the demilitarization of the Meuse's fortifications was planned. But under the leadership of General Galet, military authorities agreed to restore and upgrade the old forts. Intended to break the enemy offensive in the center of Belgium, FPN was assigned an important garrison by the creation of the 7th Army Corps in 1939.

On May 10, the Reich invaded Belgium. Namur saw the arrival of French troops within the framework of the so-called "Dyle maneuver". In 1940, the defense of FPN can be divided in two successive stages: from May 10 to 15, the troops awaited for the enemy attack; from May 15, following the retreat of the infantry, the forts were left to their own devices under orders to offer maximum resistance. May 12 was a watershed moment for several reasons. On May 13, the Germans crossed the Meuse eventually causing the collapse of the 9th Army, and forcing French troops to leave the FPN on May 15 and retreat

towards Flanders. The first forts to endure the fire of the 269th Infantry-Division were those of the northern FPN. The forts of the South and the *Entre-Sambre-et-Meuse* would face the 211th Infantry-Division. Gradually destroyed by bombing aviation and artillery, gradually deprived of their means of defense, the forts were forced to surrender. The first to cease fighting was Marcholette on May 18 while Fort Dave would endure the longest (until May 24).

The thesis' conclusions tackle the following issues: On May 10 1940, was the FPN prepared? What was the relationship like between French and Belgian soldiers in Namur ? Were there similarities between August 1914 and May 1940? What were the consequences of the retreat of May 15? What was the impact of the forts' capitulation? Why and how did provincial governor Bovesse leave Namur May 12, 1940? Did the FPN resisted fully, consider the resources it had available?