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Montana's Reaction To The Fall Of France In 1940

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MONTANA'S REACTION TO THE FALL OF FRANCE IN 1940

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF BACHELOR OF ARTS IN HISTORY

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

BY

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## CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ...................................... ii
INTRODUCTION ........................................ 1

Chapter

1. THE FALL OF FRANCE ........................... 5
2. THE UNITED STATES AND MONTANA, 1939-1940 ... 13
3. THE FIRST PEACE TIME DRAFT: 
   THE SELECTIVE TRAINING AND SERVICE ACT .... 19
4. THE BASE-DESTROYER DEAL AND MONTANA ........... 29
5. LEND-LEASE IN MONTANA ......................... 35

CONCLUSION .............................................. 42
END NOTES ............................................... 46
BIBLIOGRAPHY ............................................ 53
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In Loving Memory of My Father
Allan T. Grimm
INTRODUCTION

On June 16, 1940, France was defeated and fell to the Nazi war machine. The fall caused a shock wave of disbelief around the world. The Germans appeared undefeatable. The only obstacle that stood in the path of Germany's total control of Western Europe was England, a small island country with limited resources. Great debate arose in Montana and the rest of America as to whether America should continue to remain neutral and whether America was prepared to go to war. These issues helped to create an feeling of worry in Montana and the rest of the United States. The time period between the fall of France and the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor saw sweeping changes and great controversy in America.

The populace of United States, which was predominately isolationist throughout the 1930s due to in part to World War I, feared that it would be drawn into the fray. Many American citizens voiced their isolationist beliefs by protesting any U.S. involvement in foreign affairs. On April 6, 1935, 50,000 World War One veterans paraded through the streets Washington, D.C., demanding peace and neutrality. Only a few days later, 175,000 American college students protested for peace as well. Despite the beliefs of many American citizens, during the late 1930s the United States started slowly moving towards involvement in Europe. President Franklin D. Roosevelt said in 1939, "These are without doubt the most hair-trigger times the world has gone through in your life time or mine, . . . I do not even exclude June and July 1914."1
Americans felt trapped by U.S. foreign policy. There was debate over whether or not America should help the allies or even enter into the war.

While Americans worried over their own neutrality problems, France was also troubled during 1940. The news that France had fallen reached the rest of the world with little warning. The French made a valiant fight, but were not prepared emotionally or physically for the battle that ensued. The Germans entered Paris on the 13th of June 1940. Three days later, on June 16th, France capitulated to Germany. The collapse of France created a panic that swept through Europe and across the Atlantic to the United States. U.S. citizens now realized that England was all that stood between Hitler and the conquering of Western Europe.

Public reaction in America was swift and sure. Writing years later, Noel Barber, author of The Week France Fell, noted that one American remarked, "I remember as a girl in Omaha, Nebraska, being more concerned about the fall of France than I was about Vietnam until the later years of that war. We felt that if France fell, we might. We never felt that way about Vietnam." This type of reaction was felt in all the states, including Montana, where a battle over isolationism raged.

American citizens realized after the fall of France that the United States was not ready to take on the military prowess of the German war machine. Montanans shared this view. An editorial in the form of free verse was printed in the Great Falls Tribune on June 30, 1940 soon after the fall
of France. Entitled "When Guns Are Silenced," It professed in part:

Some day the guns of Europe will be silenced, the task of reconstruction will get under way and mankind will look bitterly back at a past and indict itself for not being able to settle its differences without resort to war. And they'll drift around to the thoughts of another conflict, sit around the conference table, and exchange understandings on how the next one should be fought. They'll draw up an accord, perhaps, that will bind powers not to bomb civilians and Red Cross ambulances.

The document will be signed amid much ceremony and appended to the nebulous collection that we call international law. For the time being all will be agreed that the mean things they did in this war shouldn't be repeated in the next.

But let the next war come along and somebody will fall back on the same philosophy that guides Nazism in its prosecution of this war, the somewhat handy belief that in the end if justifiable then any means to attain it likewise may be justified.

... How can this concept spell anything but defeat for moral forces acting in peacetime to make war more human? Can a power that follows that line of reasoning affix its name with any sincerity to an agreement to be good the next time? ... The fear of retaliation is about the only factor that can keep a power of this sort under control. Were it not for superiority in airplane numbers today, the German war machine would not be thinking very seriously about leveling British cities with bombs. We in America are about to launch an intensive arms improvement program and should amass a lot of materials in a short time if things go the way they are planned. And after we get everything we want, let's hope that we'll not fall all over ourselves in a rush to a conference table to decide how much of
the machine should be scrapped so that we can come down to the military and naval weight of other powers.\textsuperscript{5}

This change in American society from isolationist to one that might intervene was caused by the fall of France. The realization that America was vulnerable to Hitler prompted many Montanans to turn away from isolationism. The fear that the war inspired helped lead to the passage of much of the legislation that would ultimately protect the United States and prepare it for war. This legislation included the Conscription Act, the Base-Destroyer Deal, and Lend-Lease. All of these actions affected every Montana citizen and changed the political thinking of the time. With the fall of France, many Montanans became aware that America might have to fight against Hitler or face that same fate that had befallen France.
CHAPTER 1

THE FALL OF FRANCE

The fall of France in 1940 caused many in the United States to become concerned about world affairs. After a period of almost complete isolation, Americans realized that war would come whether they wanted it to or not. The fall of France was caused not only by German advantages, but also many weaknesses within the French government. France was not prepared for a war or the sudden moves of the Third Reich.

France began to have serious concerns about Germany long before 1940. France entered the First World War with mixed emotions. The French did not want to go to war but wanted to settle things with Germany once and for all. The cry of "Il faut en finir" was as much as rallying cry in 1914 as in 1939. However, the French put down their weapons with much more enthusiasm in 1918 than they did in taking them up in 1914. The premier of France, Georges Clemenceau, abandoned the thought of debilitating Germany in 1919. A decimated France was forced to accept British and American assurances that they would defend France from further aggression.

The fear that Germany was still a threat in 1919 caused Europe to place harsh conditions on Germany in the Treaty of Versailles. The treaty unilaterally disarmed Germany, prohibited the formation of a German air force, allowed the allies to occupy the German Rhineland for fifteen years, created the Polish corridor out of East Prussia, made Germany pay heavy reparations for all war damages uncured by the
allies, and forced Germany to acknowledge that it was responsible for causing the war in 1914. Even with these strong measures placed against Germany, France was still fearful.

The French government's fear stemmed from the demographic make up of Germany. The population of Germany exceeded 60 million people, compared to France's 40 million. Germany contained a larger industrial base with the capacity to quickly raise a modern army. The final reason France continued to fear Germany was that its largest ally in World War One, Russia, lay in waste. France could not look to Russia for support. Moreover, because of the Communist Revolution in 1917, it looked unlikely that Russia would ever support France again. France turned internally for defense.

France was divided over many issues politically and militarily between 1919 and 1940. The reconstruction of the Army fell to the divided government of France. Clemenceau wanted younger officers and a stronger army. General Petain, the Minister of War, wanted an experienced army. Clemenceau, a strong anti-militarist, did not want this but was more concerned with his reelection campaign in 1919. However, he was not elected. His plans to set up a small military body to rule the French military fell by the wayside. The final decree issued on January 23, 1919, created a body consisting of the Marshals of France as life members, joined by many generals of high reputation retained long after they had passed retirement age. It also added ten to twelve divisional generals. All of these people held the right to vote. The
French government had created an aging and cumbersome group that could not effectively control the French defensive system.3

Along with the changes in the army, there were many political changes in France. The most profound change occurred in the spring of 1936, when a new government came to power. A loose grouping of left and center-left parties, the Popular Front government was committed to stopping fascism. However, during the summer of 1936, France was plagued by a slow economy and an over-valued franc. In addition, the left and right parties of France had little use for one another. The slow economy and a divided government continued to split the country politically.

The Popular Front government not only had problems at home but abroad as well. When the Belgians revoked their military accord with France and Russia continued to remain distant from France, France’s Popular Front government began to court the dictatorships they earlier condemned. In 1936 and 1937 France considered a relationship with Stalin’s Russia. Although these talks did not succeed, it became apparent that France was desperately seeking an ally. Britain continued to promise aid to France but would not sign a treaty to assure this.4 The problems that France faced on the diplomatic front led France to focus on becoming stronger internally.

The French government started to strengthen national defenses in the autumn of 1936. This was the first time France had rearmed since the First World War. The government
strengthened armaments on the frontier with Germany and near Belgium. Money was allocated to the army for an expanded armored force. France's almost nonexistent air force expanded as well. These actions were taken for defensive purposes only and not to stop German rearmament.5

However, the French had trouble rearming. France was not a country of industry. A parliamentary committee in 1921 stated that France and almost no machinery. The committee reported:

- No Country can be a Great Power unless (among other things) it is an arsenal—that is equipped with a reasonably complete outfit of weapons of modern warfare. A native machine-tool industry is an essential requirement of an arsenal.6

The French government ignored this warning. Even as late as 1936, France had little industry and none of it was aimed at war. The manufacturing of shells stopped in 1920 and only one company still manufactured steel for weapons. The industry that existed worked with machinery from before the war, much of it decaying or broken. This lack of industry caused France to be unprepared for war.

As 1938 approached, France was no more ready to defend itself against Germany than it had been after World War I. In the fall of 1938, Hitler seized the Sudetenland from Czechoslovakia and France lost another ally. The French looked to Poland, France's remaining ally. The alliance with Poland was based on two treaties signed in 1921. The French government feared that Germany would attack Poland and force France into war. This fear came to reality on September 1, 1939, when German ground forces entered Poland. France
realized that its army was not strong enough to help Poland and instead turned to preparing for war.7

The average French citizen did want to go to war, but calmly accepted the fact that war now was inevitable. The New Yorker reported the calmness with which France had mobilized its forces:

The are no flags, flowers, or shrill shouts of “Viv la patrie!” as there were in 1914. Among the men departing now for the possible front, the morale is excellent but curiously mental. What the men say is intelligent, not emotional. “If it’s got to come, let’s stop living in this grotesque suspense and get it over with once and for all. . . . Few Frenchmen are thrilled to go forth and die on the Somme as usual—this time for Danzig, yet all the French seem united in understanding that this war . . . is about the theory of living and its eventual practice.

The American Ambassador to France, William Bullit, reported the same problem to President Roosevelt in Washington, D.C. He wrote:

The whole mobilization was carried out in absolute quiet. The men left in silence. There were no bands, no songs. There were no shouts of “On to Berlin” and “Down with the Hitler!” to match the shouts of “On to Berlin” and “Down with the Kaiser!” as in 1914. There was no hysterical weeping of mothers, and sisters and children. The self-control and quiet courage has been so far beyond the usual standard of the human race that it has had a dream quality.8

The French tried to avoid war, but when it became apparent that war was evident, they mobilized with little fuss and prepared to fight. Even though the French could not contemplate defeat, the war did not last long for them. Jacques Maritain, author of France My Country: Through the Disaster, reported how the French believed they would win against Germany. He wrote:

Rarely had a nation embarked upon a war with such high
hopes as to its ultimate outcome. The French people expected frightful sufferings, but the idea of defeat seemed unthinkable; they were certain of victory. This early confidence, seemingly justified by the apparent stalemate of the first months, became a routine so firmly rooted that the great majority of the people could not shake it off until the very end. Letters written three days before the Germans marched into Paris and received here after the disaster were still full of optimism.9

France believed that Britain and other allies could gather more resources than Germany. They rallied around the belief that this would be a war of self-defense not a war against fascism or even Germany. France was ready to defend its borders, but not much else. The French government did not want to fight an offensive war. However, the surprising German offensive against France was too much for the ill equipped and unprepared country.

The Germans moved into France in May of 1940. The French were unprepared for this attack and despite their best efforts they were unable to stop the Germans. The Germans moved through the Ardennes forest rather than through the Saar, which was heavily enforced by the Maginot Line. The Germans succeeded in taking France through Belgium, something for which the French forces had not been prepared. The Germans had superior fire power over the French, and much of the French Army moved too far forward in Belgium, allowing the Germans to sneak by them.10

As June 1940 approached, the Germans made their way through France. On June 10, 1940, they ringed the city of Paris, forcing the French government to declare Paris an open city. The French would not defend Paris but instead tried to
concentrate on the remaining areas France still controlled. On June 14, 1940, the Germans entered Paris, taking control
of the city. It became apparent to the rest of the world that
France would not be able to hold its own against Germany.
France fell on June 16, 1940, to the Germans. The president
of France, Henri Pertain, announced the capitulation on June
17, 1940, when Ptain gave a speech that ended French
participation in the Second World War:

At the call of the President of the Republic I assumed,
beginning today, the direction of the government of
France.
I say that by the affection of our admirable army, which
is fighting with a heroism worthy of its long military
traditions against an enemy superior in numbers and
arms, by the magnificent resistance with which it has
fulfilled our duties to our allies, by the aid of the
war veterans whom I am proud to command, by the
confidence of all the people, I give to France my person
to assuage her misfortune.
In these painful hours I think of the unhappy refugees
who, in extreme misery, clog up our roads. I express to
them my compassion and my solicitude.
It is with a broken heart that I tell you today it is
necessary to stop fighting.
I addressed myself last night to the adversary to ask
him if he is ready to seek with me, as soldier to
soldier, after the actual fighting is over, and with
honour, the means of putting an end to hostilities.
May all Frenchmen group themselves about the government
which I head during these trying days and control their
anguish in order to be led only by their faith in the
destiny of the fatherland.11

Ptain's speech not only ended the fight in France but
reverberated around the world. The United States came to the
realization that Germany could actually win the war. This
forced many changes within the United State in both policies
and practices. The United States could no longer remain aloof
and uninvolved in Europe. Lastly, England now stood alone
facing Germany, and many Americans were concerned the British
would not be able to stand against the superior German military force. If the British were to succeed in defeating Germany, they needed American help. Before long Roosevelt would have to convince the American people to break with their isolationist position and offer aid to Britian.
CHAPTER 2

THE UNITED STATES AND MONTANA, 1939-1940

The United States had become predominately isolationist during the intervening years between the First and Second World Wars. Isolationism was a habit for the United States. Its origins started after the Revolutionary War. The United States enjoyed a degree of isolation based upon its geography. The Atlantic and Pacific Oceans served as barriers between the United States, Europe, and Asia. Also, the United States was insulated by economics. Economically sufficient, the United States did not need to trade with Europe in order to survive. Americans viewed Europe as corrupt and autocratic, the opposite of everything for which the American Constitution stood. These views of Europe were propelled by the economic crisis that took hold in the United States in the 1930s. The Great Depression left Americans little time to worry about problems abroad.¹

However, the one thing that most Americans were sure of was that they would never go to war again. The United States would not follow Europe into war as it had in 1917. In order to prevent this, the United States Congress passed Neutrality laws. The idea behind these laws was simple. The United States would simply terminate trade with any country involved in a war. However, this idea presented a few moral dilemmas. Could the United States with-hold food and medical supplies from civilians of beligerant nations? Also, the economic cost of these acts would further damage an American economy
already ravaged by the Great Depression. The First Neutrality Act was passed by Congress in January of 1936. The act forbade all arms sales but did not ban essential supplies needed by civilians. Three additional Neutrality Acts passed between 1936 and 1939. However, the isolationist sentiment that defined the early 1930s began to wane as the war in Europe approached.2

The change in American society from isolationist to one that might be willing to intervene was caused by the fall of France. Many states, including Montana, had remained strongly isolationist until this point. The realization that America was vulnerable to Hitler prompted many Montanans to turn away from isolationism. Americans, however, did not totally give up their isolationist views. Though few wanted America to fight in any war, they were willing to play a more active role as a supplier. Even after the fall in France, only 14 percent of the American public favored direct intervention, according to a Gallup poll taken on July 7, 1940, after the French surrender.3

In Montana, the hope to remain neutral was still strong. Montanans were faced with two conflicting ideas: that of interventionism and isolationism. Many Montanans in the face of such controversy chose to ignore the conflict. Long-time Montana resident and World War Two veteran Hal Stearns remembered, "Areas were so remote [in Montana] their vision wasn’t great about things in the capital . . . mostly because of their isolationism [in terms of location]."4

As the news that France had fallen poured into Montana,
Montana Senator Burton K. Wheeler, a Democrat, reacted with strong isolationist sentiment. He stated in an article in The Billings Gazette that “Preservation of the American way of life looms on the horizon as the greatest problem before the people of the United States. . . . European destruction is bound to have repercussions in the United States. . . . The paramount issue in the United States is going to be whether we can maintain our American way of life and preserve civil liberties.” However, Montanans and the rest of America were well aware that the fall of France left Britain and even the United States vulnerable to Hitler’s armies. Herbert Hoover gave a speech entitled “Our Future Economic Defense” in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, on September 18, 1940. In this speech Hoover supported national preparedness for the United States. He did not advocate entering into the war in Europe, instead he pointed out that the United States must be realistic and at least make some preparations in the case of war:

. . . national preparedness in any direction must be based upon some anticipation of forces and events. I am fully aware of the tentative nature of anticipation. But in the situation today we must have preparedness in economic ideas as well as in arms if we are to defend America. It is not too early to begin to think.

Many Americans began to believe that the United States had a responsibility to help Britain withstand the Nazi aggression. However, they did not want to directly involve any American citizens. Roosevelt wanted to aid the British, but could not do so directly. He discussed America’s neutrality in a fireside chat on September 3, 1940.

I hope the United States will keep out of this war. I
believe that it will. And I give you assurance and reassurance that every effort of your Government will be directed toward that end. . . . I cannot ask that every American remain neutral in thought. . . . Even a neutral has a right to take account of facts. Even a neutral cannot be asked to close his mind or his conscience.\textsuperscript{7}

While Montanans and the rest of America discussed how to best prepare to help Britain after the fall of France, Roosevelt and many other important politicians ran for reelection in 1940. This election was of special concern to Montana and the rest of America. The year 1940 would mark the beginning of Roosevelt's third term. Many Americans wanted Roosevelt to run again; they felt that he had the experience and would do what was right for the United States. However, many politicians felt that a third term would break with tradition, and destroy the Democratic party. Montana's own Senator Burton K. Wheeler felt that Roosevelt should not run for a third term. During a conversation in the Oval Office, Wheeler warned Roosevelt of the implications of a third term:

\begin{quote}
I then told FDR I thought it would be a mistake for him to seek a third term... . . I explained that it would be a mistake for him personally, and for the Democratic Party as well. . . . I added "Mr. President, I am worried about the future of this country, and I am worried for fear that some reactionary Republican, or some reactionary Democrat will come into power. While I feel you would be making a mistake running for a third term, nevertheless, if you are nominated, I will take off my coat and work for your reelection."\textsuperscript{8}
\end{quote}

Would Roosevelt run for office, or, if he decided not to run, who would replace him? Many Americans felt that Burton K. Wheeler would be the best choice. \textit{Current History}, in March of 1940, ran an article entitled, "Wheeler and the Liberals." The article stated that "Burt Wheeler is the only
field candidate stronger today than a month ago. . . . Senator Wheeler is the second best bet after the President." 

Although Wheeler said he would not run in any primary which included Roosevelt, the possibility of a Montanan being able to hold the office of president brought the election home. The controversy over a third term was represented in many political cartoons. When the president decided to break with tradition and run for a third term, Wheeler ran for reelection to the senate. Roosevelt accepted a third term based upon the idea that America needed his experience and leadership. His campaign slogan read: "Better a third term than a third rater." He ran against Wendell Willkie, a Republican who promised that America would stay out of the war, but continue to help Britain. The two candidates' platforms were similar, but the American people, including Montanans, believed that they needed the leadership of Roosevelt. He was reelected on November 5, 1940. Roosevelt was reelected in Montana with 145,698 votes, compared to Willkie's 99,579 votes. Roosevelt carried 48 of the 56 counties in Montana.

Wheeler was also reelected to office with strong isolationist sentiment. He received 176,753 votes. Montanans also elected to Congress Janette Rankin, an isolationist Republican. She received 56,616 votes compared to the 47,352 received by her opponent. This election provided the evidence that Montanans were not ready to turn their back upon isolationism. Montanans were behind the isolationist
movement, even though the rest of the country continued to slowly give up the idea of remaining isolated from the problems in Europe.

Wheeler, a driving force within Montana as well as national politics, advocated a negotiated peace with Germany to avoid war. On December 30, 1940, Wheeler broadcasted a reply to a “fireside chat” of Roosevelt’s. Wheeler proposed an American initiative to bring peace and outlined an eight point plan.13 His fight against entry into any kind of action in Europe was supported by the America First Committee. Wheeler and the America First Committee, spurred on by the fall of France, tried to limit American involvement in Europe.

Still, many Americans, including those in leadership positions, were afraid of what the fall of France would mean for America. In an attempt to calm American fears, Congress began to act decisively as soon as the news reached it that France had fallen. These changes, including the first peace time draft, Lend-Lease, and the Base-Destroyer deal, affected Montanans as well as the rest of the United States and led to eventual American involvement in World War II.
CHAPTER 3

THE FIRST PEACE TIME DRAFT:

THE SELECTIVE TRAINING AND SERVICE ACT

The United States passed a conscription act in September of 1940. This act was the first peacetime conscription in the history of the United States. The law required the registration of males between the ages of 21 and 36 for service in the armed forces. Those chosen to serve would do so for one year. The law also stated that none of the men would serve outside of the Western hemisphere, thus preserving neutrality to some extent. The drawing took place in the Departmental Auditorium in Washington, D.C. A glass container held colbalt-blue capsules; each capsule held a draft number. After each number was drawn it would be attached to a large cardboard sheet and photographed to insure that the draw was impartial.

President Roosevelt stood atop the stage and spoke to the American people. He avoided using the words draft or conscription as he explained the Selective Training and Service Act. Roosevelt's words were meant to comfort the American people and remind them that the draft did not mean that war was inevitable. "Ever since that first muster," he emphasized, "our democratic army has existed for one purpose only: the defense of our freedom. It is for that one purpose and that one purpose only that you will be asked to answer the call to training." Thus, the draft commenced at noon on October 29, 1940. The first number drawn was 158; some 6,175
American men held that number. The drawing continued into the morning of October 30, 1940. At 5 a.m. it was discovered that five capsules had been left out and a mini drawing had to be held. The perfect draft process was not so perfect. Even if the draft process was not perfect, the American people were fairly receptive to the idea itself.3

When France fell in June of 1940, the American government became concerned about the preparedness of the American war machine. As late as April 3, 1940, Congress had cut the modest military budget by 10 percent. The United States was unprepared for war and England now stood alone. Americans, glued to their radios, listened as British Prime minister Winston Churchill vowed to fight on:

We shall not flag or fail. We shall go on to the end. We shall fight in France, we shall fight on the seas and the oceans, we shall fight with growing strength and growing confidence in the air, we shall defend our island, whatever the cost may be, we shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the street, we shall fight in the hills; we shall never surrender.4

Most Americans reacted to these events with sympathy for the allies and a realization that American was unprepared. A national obsession with military preparedness developed after the fall of France. When President Roosevelt asked Congress in May of 1940 for fifty thousand new airplanes a year, he received an ovation from congressional members. British citizens reported a, “near hysteria . . . in many sections of the [American] press and deep anxiety in practically all.” 5

Americans had a reason to be concerned. America could only muster eighty thousand troops and did not have one
airplane that could match the planes that the Germans used first against the French and now against the British. This realization led to a congressional appropriation of five million dollars for defense. Several prominent citizens broke from the isolationist camp and supported the rearmament of the United States. These included Robert E. Wood of Sears and Roebuck, Henry Ford, Charles A. Lindbergh, and publishers William Randolph Hearst, Robert R. McCormick, and J.M. Patterson. It seemed that everyone in America was clamoring for national defense.  

However, some isolationists contested the law because they believed it led America one step closer to war; moreover, it was the first draft ever passed in peacetime. Many Americans believed that Roosevelt was using the issue of national defense to cause hysteria and move America toward war. To these critics the bill seemed to be too drastic a measure. But President Roosevelt saw it as a preparation for America’s likely entrance into war. One of those who supported the act was Hugh Johnson, a popular commentator and friend of Roosevelt, who declared over the radio:

...we will never again be fools enough to send a single American mother’s son to double-crossing Europe. It isn’t a question of that now. It is a question of a double crossing Europe threatening us. With our strength of men and resources we can take a defensive position which nobody will ever dare threaten.

Criticism of this bill was common, especially from the mothers of American men eligible under the act. An article ran in the National Affairs section of Time on July 28, 1940. The article told of Lord Halifax, the British ambassador to
the United States, and his reception by a mother opposing the
draft.

... Halifax asked pleasantly, "you are against
aiding England?"

Said the picket, "I have nine sons. Seven of them are
eligible for the draft and some have been taken. I will
give every one of my sons gladly to defend this country
but I will not give one of them to fight a war for
another nation."9

On August 15, 1940, Senator Wheeler, of Montana, charged
that conscription was "The greatest step toward regimentation
and militarism ever taken by the United States. ... [It]
slit the throat of the last Democracy still living." 10 While
many protested the law, few of the men called to serve in it
seemed to mind. A public opinion poll taken by George Gallup
stated that of males between the ages of 16 and 24, 80
percent would have no personal objections to spending a year
in the military.11

The Selective Service Act of 1940 reached the floor of
the Congress on June 20, 1940, presented by Representative
James W. Wadsworth of New York and Senator Edward R. Burke of
Nebraska. These men were chosen because neither man had close
ties with the White House and because both men supported
Wendell L. Willkie in the Presidential campaign. Burke and
Wadsworth gave the appearance of being impartial on the issue
of conscription. Formal hearings on the Burke-Wadsworth Bill
took place on July 3, 1940. General of the Army John J.
Pershing wrote a letter that stated, "If we had adopted
compulsory military training in 1914, it would not have
necessary for us to send partly trained boys into battle
against the veteran troops of our adversary... Certainly we could have ended the conflict much sooner, with the saving of many thousand of lives and billions of treasure." The letter helped boast support for the bill within both Congress and at the White House.

Supporters believed that the bill would do three things for the American people. First, the bill would protect the integrity of American institutions; secondly, it would insure the independence of the American people; and lastly, selective service represented the most democratic method of service. These three premises were hard to prove but also hard for opponents to disagree with them. Supporters arranged for many other influential witnesses to testify in front of Congress. On Friday July 12, 1940, General George Marshall explained to the committee:

The War Department is strongly of the opinion that some such bill is necessary, and particularly at the present time, that the bill... put forward... is in general accord with the War Department’s ideas as to selective service and training; that it can be accommodated to the several more or less minor points that we think should be adjusted by the process of amendment.

If the bill passed, it would double the number of soldiers from 225,000 to approximately 500,000 and the national guardsmen from 230,000 to 400,000, filling all the units currently available in the army. These helpful testimonies led to the final passage of the bill on September 16, 1940.

The Lawyers Committee to Keep the United States Out of War issued a brief entitled the “Peacetime Conscription Act.”
This brief tried to show that peacetime conscription was unconstitutional. The brief, sent to Senator Burton K. Wheeler, stated that the federal government did not have the power to compel military service. According to the brief, the government possessed "no inherent power, no express power, no implied power, and that such power is incompatible with the general nature and object at the Constitution." The Lawyers Committee stated that "Conscription in peacetime is an unprecedented violent, irremediable upheaval of our whole social, political, and economic life. . . ." This view was shared by many pacifists and isolationists. While the Selective Service Act was debated in Congress, many pacifists and others formed a coalition against the Conscription Act. This uneasy time provided the perfect platform for the opposition to voice their views on conscription.15

The War Resisters League and the Fellowship of Reconciliation sent members to testify in front of Congress against the Selective Service Act. The Keep America Out of War Congress, or KAOWC, provided the most effective resistance to the Burke-Wadsworth bill. In mid June 1940, KAOWC's governing committee organized a Committee Against Conscription. The committee, headed by Edwin C. Johnson, secretary of the Committee on Militarism and Education, issued a "Declaration against Conscription." The Declaration denounced selective service, claiming conscription produced totalitarianism, and was a departure from American tradition. The declaration was published by Johnson in several newspapers after being read before the Senate Military
Affairs Committee. As the summer progressed, Johnson corresponded with members of Congress, and tried to keep the opposition alive.

Women also became involved in the opposition to conscription. Dorothy Detzer of the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, or WILPF, immersed herself in the anti-conscription fight in July of 1940. Detzer was a good friend of Senator Wheeler and a strong supporter. She favored a six-month trial period for voluntary enlistment. Detzer believed that conscription masked the Roosevelt administration’s desire for intervention in Europe.

The youth of America also became interested in the anti-conscription movement. Members of the Youth Committee attended an anti-conscription rally on August 1, 1940. The Youth Committee concentrated its efforts on local campaigns. These campaigns focused on generating letters and telegrams against the draft and counseling potential conscientious objectors.16

These efforts were unsuccessful because most Americans paid little attention to the debates over the Selective Service Act in Washington D.C.; the public had already decided to support conscription. Montana was beginning to hold the same beliefs as the rest of the United States.

However, Montana’s famous senator, Burton K. Wheeler, opposed the Conscription Act. The Montana public was bombarded with opposing views. Wheeler was one of the most popular senators Montana had ever elected to office. Wheeler received letters from all over the state of Montana
supporting him unconditionally. Mrs. J.C. Beach of Columbia Falls, Montana, wrote on October 27, 1940: "... [I] wish to state that we have always supported him [Wheeler] in the past and expect to do so in the future, as we have found the Senator a man among men and an ... American." Some Montanans supported Wheeler’s position on the Conscription issue. However, many did not favor Wheeler’s position. Wheeler’s views cost him votes in Montana; people feared America’s unpreparedness, and insolation began to fall by the wayside. Nat Allen from Rye Gate wrote that

If the Senator was sincere in his recent argument about the conscription bill, no one has any need for the posting of election cards, since, as the Senator said: "it will slit the throat of the Last Democracy still living" and goes on to speak of the inscription on our headstone. I have posted cards for every democrat that’s running, but I cannot conscientiously do so for Wheeler.18

Wheeler’s strictly isolationist views were becoming less popular in Montana as time passed. Many Montanans who had not supported the Conscription Act had changed views. Wheeler was informed by the Governor of Montana, Roy E. Ayers, that Montana now supported the Selective Service Act. Ayers wrote to Wheeler:

... I find in my travels considerable discussion concerning the National Guard Bill and the peacetime Conscription Bill. At first there was very little favor for either one of these bills, but as time has gone on there is very little opposition to the National Guard Bill and the opposition to the Conscription Bill is decreasing as the German attacks on England are increasing. The opinions on the Conscription bill as the situation is now, are at last 50-50. I have noticed papers throughout the State, including many weeklies, which started out against the Conscription Bill, have turned completely around.19
Wheeler soon realized that Montanans were no longer isolationists, but the Senator had gone public with his views against conscription and could not change them to suit his constituents. Wheeler privately acknowledged that Montanans had changed in a letter to Governor Roy E. Ayers. He wrote:

I appreciate that sentiment is changing to a considerable extent with reference to conscription. I voted for the National Guard Bill but I am opposed to this peacetime conscription, and I am afraid I would be opposed to it even though sentiment in Montana was for it.\(^{20}\)

Wheeler refuted a Gallup Poll that was printed in *Time* magazine. Wheeler wrote a letter to the editor of *Time* on September 2, 1940. This letter stated that the poll taken was not reliable and asked leading questions. The poll, which Wheeler referred to, stated that 64 percent of Montanans supported conscription. This number was much higher than the 50-50 split that Governor Ayers reported in his letter.\(^{21}\) Wheeler could hardly believe his beloved Montana had forsaken him. Wheeler’s letter was answered by George Gallup in *Time* on September 16, 1940. Gallup took another poll, this one showing that 62 percent of Montanans supported conscription. Wheeler stopped vehemently opposing the Conscription Act when it became clear that his constituents would not support his views. Since no Montanan wanted war, Wheeler focused his campaign on keeping America out of war while not mentioning conscription again.\(^{22}\)

Although the Selective Training and Service Act was controversial at the time, most Montanans, like most other Americans, ultimately supported its passage. A Gallup poll
taken on July 10, 1940, and reported in Harper’s Magazine, asked “Do you think every able-bodied young man twenty years old [that is men between the ages of 21 and 25] should be made to serve in the Army or Navy?” Fifty-two percent of Americans answered yes. As the summer of 1940 passed the percent of Americans that supported the Conscription Act continued to climb. On August 30, 1940, another Gallup Poll was taken and reported that over 68 percent of Americans would have no objection to spending a year in some branch of military service.23

A majority of the American public supported the Conscription Act and had since after the fall of France. The controversy that raged in the United States government touched the American public. Yet, citizens of Montana followed the example of the rest of America, even when presented with a contrary view by Senator Wheeler. The fall of France pushed the United States into developing the first peacetime draft. The actions of the American government helped prepare the U.S. military for war and also calmed American fears that Europe could threaten the United States. However, the Selective Service Act of 1940 was not the only step the Roosevelt administration took to prepare for war. The Base-Destroyer Deal and Lend-Lease would help strengthen American allies and prevent the United States from entering the war in 1940.
As the controversy over the Conscription Act raged in the United States the Destroyer-Base Deal was announced on September 3, 1940. This deal provided out-dated, four-funnel destroyers to Britain in return for sites on which the United States could build military bases. These sites were located in Newfoundland and the Caribbean. The deal prompted debate in the United States because the exchange was carried out by a single executive order; it was not approved by Congress. It was the first actual aid sent to Britain, and it was in "gross violation" of the Neutrality Acts that were still effect. This deal ended all precepts of neutrality by the United States government. Although, many citizens still remained strongly isolationist, the government abandoned isolationism in favor of the nation's self-interest. The Roosevelt administration had finally realized that it was the last hope Britain had of beating Hitler and keeping American soldiers out of the war.¹

The Base-Destroyer Deal had been a long time in the making. England and France had both requested American ships before the fall of France. On May 15, 1940, Winston Churchill, the new prime minister of Great Britain, sent a request for the loan of between forty and fifty old destroyers to the United States. The demand was not honored at the time because Roosevelt felt he did not have enough
public support to back such an action. Throughout July and August 1940, Roosevelt and Churchill carried out negotiations. Britain's government hoped that the United States would give the Royal Navy some reconditioned destroyers located in U.S. Navy yards up and down the East coast. British losses continued to grow as these talks progressed. In ten days alone in July 1940, four British destroyers had been sunk and seven more damaged. Britain was attempting to replace the lost destroyers, but those ships would not be finished until late 1941. As the situation grew worse, Churchill sent a desperate message to Washington. Addressed as "Strictly Secret and Personal," sent on July 31, 1940, the message painted a grim picture of England's situation:

It has now become most urgent for you to let us have the destroyers, motor boats and flying boats for which we have asked. The Germans have the whole French coast line from which to launch U-boats, dive-bomber attacks upon our trade and food, and in addition we must be constantly prepared to repel by sea action threatened invasion in the narrow water, also to deal with breakouts from Norway toward Ireland, Iceland, Shetland, and Faroes. Beside this we have to keep control of the exit from the Mediterranean, and if possible the command of that island sea itself and thus to prevent the war spreading seriously into Africa.

While Churchill pleaded with Roosevelt for the destroyers, the political situation in American made compliance difficult. Roosevelt was bound by the Constitution to respect the wishes of Congress and, unfortunately for Britain, a measure had been passed that stated that destroyers could only be sent to Britain if the navy certified that they were of no use to the United States.
Officials in the navy did the exact opposite and asserted that the destroyers were potentially valuable for American defenses and should be retained and repaired. Roosevelt believed that special legislation would have to be passed in order to send the destroyers to Britain, and that was unlikely to happen.4

However, as the summer of 1940 progressed, Roosevelt became concerned about the United Kingdom’s ability to defeat the Germans; he became convinced that England needed the destroyers to survive. Roosevelt began to plan a way around the congressional directive. A group of private citizens suggested that Roosevelt could exchange the destroyers for military bases on British territory in the Western hemisphere. Roosevelt’s cabinet also liked the idea, as it appeased both the war hawks and the pacifists. The deal was to be sold to the public as a way to strengthen America’s national defenses.5 Britain, however, was unwilling to support a deal that would link bases and destroyers. Churchill felt that the public would believe that Britain was selling out to the Americans. Finally, a deal was arranged. Britain would freely give the United States the bases on lease. This allowed the British government to claim that it made generous concessions to the United States government, and Congress was satisfied with the exchange of fifty old destroyers for bases throughout the Atlantic Coast.

Signed on September 5, 1940, the deal was reported to the American people the following week and appeared in both LIFE and Time magazines on September 16, 1940.6 LIFE’s article,
The idea of sending old U.S. destroyers to Britain was only an asent whisper when in the issue of July 15 LIFE posed the question and listed its pros and cons. On Sept. 3, with a thunderclap suddenness, it became a blazing reality and part of the biggest accomplished fact in the whole vast U.S. rearmament program. At one bold stroke President Roosevelt, acting strictly on his executive own, transferred thirty destroyers to Britain and acquired in exchange 99-year leases for U.S. naval and air bases on eight British-owned island or island groups from New Foundland to British Guiana.

So enormously will these bases strengthen America’s Atlantic defenses, so vast are the possibilities now opened up for America to become aggressively dominant in both great oceans, that hardly anyone disputed the President’s assertion that his deal was the nations most important defense measure since the Purchase in 1803. Political shock at the method of its making was overwhelmed by popular approval of its swift accomplishment.  

The article proved to be true. A majority of citizens in Montana and the rest of the United States supported the deal. The following quote from a Gallup Poll posed this question to the American people about the Base-Destroyer Deal. "England needs destroyers to replace those which have been damaged or sunk. The United States has some destroyers which were built during the last war and are now being put back into active service. Do you think we should sell some of these ships to England?" Sixty-one percent answered yes. Americans realized that since France had surrendered to the Germans, England was all that stood between the United States and war. Montanans were also aware of this issue. In an article by David Lawrence entitled "The Washington Scene," the Billings Gazette reported on June 23, 1940, that the United States should support Britain with war materials:
The time has come for the military and naval experts to inform the American people that an invasion of the United States by several hundred long-range bombers is a simple matter to execute from air bases like Greenland or from those in the Caribbean now owned by England and France. . . . Nobody in the Roosevelt administration, least of all the president has favored sending American troops overseas, but merely the export of war materials. But if the British fleet comes to this side of the Atlantic and America has an opportunity either to acquire that fleet or to get the benefit of its protection, will the congress vote to spurn the offer and let Hitler have the British fleet? These are practical questions which involve not mere conflicts of opinion as to whether the United States will or will not go to war. They involve what America can or will do when confronted with task of protecting American men, women and children and American cities against the threat of air raids from near-by-bases in the possession of the Nazis.9

This article revealed the fears of many Americans, including Montanans, that the United States was vulnerable to attack from German forces. The Base-Destroyer Deal alleviated some of these fears. If America had a military presence on those islands closest to the United States mainland, direct attack by German forces would be unlikely. The destroyers given to Britain would help shore up British defenses and further protect the United States and keep America out of the war.

Even though most Americans and Montanans supported the Base-Destroyer Deal, some did not. Those who opposed the action included Senator Wheeler from Montana. In an article in the Billings Gazette entitled "America Argues About Sending Aid" and published on June 16, 1940, Senator Wheeler stated:

If Hitler wins, he will have the same problems that the Allies will have if they win--feeding hungry populations--endeavoring to prevent great revolutions

33
from sweeping through the conquered countries. . . . Those problems will be more than sufficient to occupy Hitler of the Allies. Let us face these realities instead of bogey stories about air bases from which giant hordes of planes will bomb . . . St. Louis and New Orleans. 10

In an November 4, 1940, article in The Great Falls Tribune, Wheeler declared:

Our problem is two-fold. . . . First we must build up an adequate defense so that no nation or combination of nations will dare attack us, and second we must solve our own economic problems at home. We must put millions of people who want work, back to work. The billion now being spent for national defense—while necessary—cannot in the long run build up a lasting prosperity. I am for preparedness but not for getting into the bloody conflict across the water. . . . The American people sympathize with Great Britain in its present struggle but . . . our own safety comes first. 11

Despite the comments of Senator Wheeler and other isolationists, most Americans and Montanans supported the Base-Destroyer Deal— not as a step toward war, but as a way to prevent war and protect the United States. The fear that Britain would not be able to defeat Germany and could even be subdued by Hitler’s forces caused Americans to begin to put aside their isolationist tendencies and turn towards helping support England in its fight. The Base-Destroyer Deal was seen by Americans and Montanans as way of preventing war and allowing England to continue the fight in hopes that the United States would never have to go to war. The Lend-Lease Act was also considered to be a preventive measure. It would assist England while enabling the United States to avoid a direct confrontation with the Axis powers.
CHAPTER FIVE
LEND-LEASE IN MONTANA

Lend-Lease was proposed when the United States government realized that the British were running out of money for defense and, without outside help, would be vulnerable to Hitler. In September 1939 Britain held over four and half billion in dollars, gold, and investments. All of these forms of currency could be used to buy war supplies in the United States. Some of this money belonged to British citizens and had been appropriated by the British government. In the sixteen months following the war, Britain tried to replenish its war chest by exporting luxury items to the United States. The British realized close to two million dollars from these products. However, Britain spent nearly four and half million dollars on war supplies. The British had begun the war by carefully spending their precious dollars but the fall of France ended the policy. Now that England stood alone in the fight against Germany, war supplies became a necessity. By the end of 1940, Britain had almost exhausted its war chest. The British did not have the resources to refill the war chest and it became clear to the Roosevelt administration that something more had to be done to help the British.\(^\text{1}\)

Roosevelt decided it was time for the United States to participate in a large scale assistance program. With the Versailles Treaty still fresh in American minds, Roosevelt decided that lending the money was not the answer. Roosevelt's proposed program was termed "Lend-Lease."
Lease called for the United States to lend military equipment to the Allies and it would be returned or replaced when it was no longer needed. The program was an idea that came from the U.S. Treasury Department. Lawyers from that department found an statute from 1892 that stated "that the Secretary of War, 'when in his discretion it will be for the public good,' could lease Army property 'not required for public use,' for a period not longer than five years." Roosevelt first described the position of the United States to reporters on December 17, 1940:

There is absolutely no doubt in the mind of a very overwhelming number of Americans that the best immediate defense of the United States is the success of Great Britain defending itself; and that, therefore, quite aside from our historic and current interest in the survival of democracy in the world as a whole, it is equally important from a selfish point of view and of American defense, that we should do everything possible to help the British Empire defend itself.

Roosevelt introduced the plan to the American people by describing his plan in simple terms. Roosevelt used the analogy of one neighbor lending another his garden hose to put out a fire. "What do I do in such a crisis," Roosevelt asked. "I don’t say to him before that operation, ‘neighbor, my garden hose cost me $15; you have to pay me $15 for it’. . . I don’t want $15—I want my garden hose back after the fire is over." However, Roosevelt’s biggest challenge was yet ahead, introducing Lend-Lease to Congress.

On January 6, 1941, Roosevelt gave his annual State of the Union address. He told Congress, “I find it necessary to report that the future and the safety of our country are
overwhelmingly involved in events far beyond our borders.” After this message he asked Congress to appropriate funds for the manufacturing of additional weapons and war supplies that were to be turned over to those countries fighting the Axis powers. On January 8, 1941, the Lend-Lease Bill was brought to Congress and stamped with the number H. R. 1776. The most important debate during World War Two was about to commence in Congress.

This measure stirred controversy; Montanans and Americans watched as the isolationists and interventionists fought over what direction the country should take. Interventionists felt that this measure would help the Allies and keep America out of the war. Isolationists, however, were not so sure. Mothers knelt on the steps in front of the capital with signs that read, “Kill Bill 1776 Not our Boys.” Montana Senator Burton K. Wheeler remarked that this plan would “. . . plow under every fourth American boy.” Unlike the Base-Destroyer deal, Lend-Lease was debated “over every cracker barrel in the land.”

The debate that was waged throughout the country also raged in Montana. Senator Wheeler adamantly opposed the Lend-Lease Act. Montanans were once again caught between the wants of the American people and the influence of Montana’s own Senator. Senator Wheeler said in an speech entitled “The American Enabling Act of 1941” that:

If the final vote shows that I am in the minority, that I am in the 1941 “little group of willful men”, I shall take comfort not only in the inner conviction that I am right but from the fact that according to all present indications, the little group of 1917, consisting of only eleven senators who opposed the Armed Ship Bill
and of only six senators who voted against the War Resolution, has at least grown to several times its former size. Now we may claim to speak for millions upon millions of our fellow citizens, yes, for the overwhelming majority of Americans, the countless farmers and workers over the entire country. They challenge us to tell them whether the forgotten man of 1932 is destined to be the unknown soldier of 1942. They do not own newspapers or radio networks or moving picture plants with which to saturate the country with propaganda. In this sense they are inarticulate. . . . We stand today at a crossroads. So far it is given ordinary mortals the power to see, both roads which stretch ahead of us are fraught with danger. There is no sure road to safety. But if we take one road—the road for which this bill before us is a sign post—what lies ahead is clearly obvious. Down that road lies involvement in Europe’s wars, eventual commitments to help bring order out of chaos in all the world, the shouldering of a back-breaking debt for all our people, possibly, if not probably, death in some foreign land for the flower of our young men, the end of democracy and civil liberties, certainly, not only for the duration but perhaps for generations until our war-torn economy will be able to once again to feed our people.7

However, Wheeler was not the only person who publicly denounced the Lend-Lease Bill. On March 4, 1941, the Mothers of America appeared on an NBC News radio broadcast. The organization declared: “It [Lend-Lease] is for the defense of foreign nations. At the same time, it authorized the President to plunge this country of yours and mine—stripped of weapons—into a war without further consulting the Congress or the people.”8 Those who opposed Lend-Lease did so because they felt the bill would push America into the war in Europe.

However, there were many people who supported Lend-Lease, including Herbert Hoover. He stated in a letter to the Congressman Sol Bloom of the House of Representatives:

Let me repeat that I am in favor of extending every practicable aid, short of war, to Britain to enable her
to maintain her independence. I do not approve of our joining in the war. There is unfortunately growing up in the country a bitterness of discussion which it seems to me in the interest of national unity could be allayed by the Committee. This division lies largely in the interpretations and implications in respect to the powers proposed to be conferred in this bill and its meaning. For example, citizens of high patriotic thought and experience, who desire to support the President, believe that under the bill and even without any supplemental action by the Congress: that battleships and other naval vessels could be given away; that our defense could be virtually impaired by giving away Army equipment; that equipment and materials provided in the bill could be transported through the war zone in American ships convoyed by the American Navy; that commodities and articles could be purchased in other countries with our money; that alien ships now in sanctuary in our harbors could be seized; that it opens American ports to repair of belligerent vessels and makes such ports bases for belligerent operations and may become the objective of them; that the program of gifts to Britain could begin before the very considerable resources now available to the British Government in the United States had first called upon ad payment or collateral; that the bill could cancel parts of the labor laws, the Johnson Act, the Neutrality Acts, the Hague Conventions, and possible other laws; that it empowers involvement in war as distinguished from a declaration of war by the Congress. . . . It seems to me urgent that these matters should be at once clarified because the public mind is apprehensive and confused.9

Hoover also pointed out that many Americans were confused by Lend-Lease. His letter also highlighted the two main issues that were used in opposing Lend-Lease. First, those who opposed the bill claimed that Lend-lease would involve America in the war. Second, it bestowed too much power upon the president. Many Americans, including some Montanans, were confused by Lend-Lease, a bill that seemed to be composed of few rules and guidelines. Americans wanted to support Britain, although they felt there had to be a better way. The debate over Lend-lease continued to rage as the
spring of 1941 approached.

On February 8, 1941, the Lend-Lease Bill passed the House of Representatives with a vote of 260-165. Most of the opposition came from the western states, including Montana, where more representatives voted against the bill than for it. This trend was repeated in the Senate vote, which was 60-31. There were four members who abstained.10 The split in votes echoed the mood of the entire country and the state of Montana. A Gallup poll taken December 29, 1940, reported that sixty percent of Americans favored aid to Britain. A poll taken on February 10, 1941, stated that fifty-four percent of Americans favored Lend-Lease, while twenty-two percent were out-right against it, and fifteen percent offered qualified support of the bill.11 Although Lend-Lease did not have unanimous support, it passed Congress. Roosevelt signed the Lend-Lease Bill into law on March 11, 1941. He summed up his long battle over Lend-Lease with these words:

Let not the dictators of Europe or Asia doubt our unanimity now. . . . Yes, the decisions of our democracy may be slowly arrived at. But when that decision is made, it is proclaimed not with the voice of any one man but with the voice of one hundred and thirty millions. It is binding on us all. And the world is not longer left in doubt. . . .12

The passage of the Lend-Lease Act was the final step toward involvement in the war. Most Americans continued to fear that Germany would win the war against Britain and would then pose a threat to the United States. Lend-Lease was seen a way to prevent America from becoming involved in the war. If the U.S. could economically support Britain, perhaps the British could defeat Germany without any American loss of
life. Lend-Lease pushed the American public away from isolationism. Americans realized that if Britain were to fall, the United States would be all that stood between the Germans and total control of Western Europe. The above beliefs caused the isolationist movement to begin to lose a good deal of its appeal. An article published in the Billings Gazette on June 17, 1941, stated:

Edward J. Flynn, Democratic national chairman, said today a personal survey of national opinion showed a growing trend in favor of President Roosevelt's foreign policy and away from "perhaps misguided" isolationist theories preached by Senator Burton K. Wheeler, Democrat, Montana, and Col. Charles Lindbergh. . . . [Flynn stated] "six months ago the Midwest was strong isolationist but I believe opinions have been changing quickly in the last few weeks. A program of education as to the real dangers that beset the nation will change them even more." Flynn defended the right of isolationists to espouse their cause and indicated he "did not question" their loyalty to the United States. "When this country does away with the right of free speech, I no longer want to live here. . . . It might be, however, that such men as Lindbergh and Wheeler are perhaps misguided."13

Lend-Lease led the country, including the state of Montana, further away from isolationism. The movement toward involvement in the European crisis that had begun with the fall of France ended with Lend-Lease. Americans realized that they had to become involved in order to save both Britain and the United States.
CONCLUSION

When France fell in June of 1940, the United States was finally forced to take notice of the events in Europe. No longer could the policy of isolationism take center stage in foreign affairs. The United States government had to take action to prepare for war. Since the military was undermanned and ill prepared, more military spending was allocated by the Congress and a mechanism for drafting soldiers was created. The Roosevelt administration also had another agenda—to keep out of the war.

The American public did not want to become directly involved in the European conflict, but realized that the United States government had to help Britain in the fight against Germany. Roosevelt set up two programs to do this, the Base-Destroyer Deal and Lend-Lease. All of the measures taken by the United States government helped strengthen the United States and also prepared it for when war would come, in December of 1941.

The Selective Service Act of 1940 was the first peacetime draft in the history of United States. After the fall of France, many in the Roosevelt administration realized that the United States was inadequately prepared for war. The military had been demobilized after World War I, which left the United States with a small standing army. The Burke-Wadsworth Bill helped to solve this problem. It registered men between the ages of 20 and 35 for military service. The passage of the Selective Service and Training Act on September 16, 1940, relieved American fears that the United

42
States was not prepared to defend itself against Hitler and the rest of the Nazi war machine. This action also showed the American people that there was one more democratic government, in addition in Great Britain, that would fight against totalitarian regimes in Europe. The Selective Services Act prepared the American military to protect the United States and American interests against Hitler.

The Base-Destroyer Deal, which was an executive action by Roosevelt, helped shore up a flagging British Navy. The British had been hard hit by Germany, which sunk many of Britain’s destroyers. The United States and Britain made a deal in which the American military would give Britain fifty refurbished World War I vintage destroyers in return for eight military bases along the Atlantic coast. Roosevelt told the American people that this was a good deal for America and most Americans agreed. People felt that these bases would be better in American than in British hands, where the bases were threatened by Hitler. Americans feared that if Hitler put military forces on these bases, the United States would become extremely vulnerable. The Base-Destroyer Deal gave Americans confidence that the United States was protected from direct attack and also helped Britain continue the fight against Germany.

In order to help Britain and other countries fighting totalitarianism throughout the world, the Roosevelt administration proposed Lend-Lease, a program that would give or lease American supplies to other countries. This would enable Britain to continue fighting Germany and therefore
keep the United States out of the war. The fall of France left England vulnerable to Hitler and this program would provide badly needed supplies. The controversy that arose in the United States over Lend-Lease raged until the day it was signed into law on March 11, 1941. Senator Wheeler gave a speech in New Haven, Connecticut, on May 1, 1941, against Lend-Lease:

As a nation we seem ready to sacrifice democracy in the name of saving XX democracy—we seem willing to exchange the heritage of 1776 for the philosophy of the bill H.R. 1776—we seem to be drifting closer and closer to a one man government.

Senator Wheeler's sentiments were shared by some Americans; however, most Americans supported Lend-Lease. The fall of France left Britain in a position of vulnerability and Lend-Lease helped strengthen Britain while and keeping America out of the war, at least for the time being.

The fall of France helped launch the Selective Service Act of 1940, the Base-Destroyer Deal, and Lend-Lease. All of these programs helped prepare the United States for the attack on Pearl Harbor that would soon ensue. If the above measures had not been put in place after June of 1940, the United States would have been even more ill prepared for war than it was, and perhaps could not have fought a two front war and won. The fall of France was a crucial turning point for the Roosevelt administration and enabled the United States to survive the Second World War intact.

The changes in policy after the fall of France affected all of the United States, including Montana, where heavy
debate raged over isolationism. Montana Senator Burton K. Wheeler supported isolationism and many Montana citizens felt caught between Wheeler and the needs of the nation. Significant numbers of Montanans were drafted and eventually fought in World War II. The fall of France galvanized America and Montana into action and produced an effective war machine at home and abroad. The fall of France touch the lives of many Montanans and pushed many citizens to slowly give up isolationism and moved America toward a greater in Europe. On May 14, 1940, E.B Coolidge of Great Falls, Montana wrote to Senator Wheeler:

... By the way, as I told you before, we have been in the war for the past six months but have not realized it nor have we been willing to admit it. Are you Senators and Congressmen going to sit idly by and let our civilization be destroyed, when so many of you have a wishbone where your backbone ought to be? There is not limit to what this crazy Hitler will do and he must be stopped at all costs regardless of expense or sacrifice and it is up to you boys to do your stuff and act quickly.5

The fall of France pushed the American Congress to act by supporting aid to allied countries and shoring up American defenses. It also changed American attitudes about the fight in Europe. The fall of France in June of 1940 ended a decade of American isolationism and changed America forever.
END NOTES


5“When Guns Are Silenced,” The Great Falls (Montana) Tribune, 30 June 1940, 4.

CHAPTER 1

1Young, The Making of the Twentieth Century: France and the Origins of the Second World War, 7. “Il faut en finir” translates as, it is necessary to finish it.

2Ibid., 9-10.


5Ibid., 29.


7Ibid., 45-60.


CHAPTER 2


Wiltz, *From Isolation to War, 1931-1941*, 49-53, 75.


Wiltz, *From Isolation to War, 1931-1941*, 74.


CHAPTER 3


3 Ibid., 2-3.

4 Ibid., 9.

5 Ibid., 10.

6 Ibid., 11.

7 Bailey, *A Diplomatic History*, 717.


12 J. Garry Clifford and Samuel R. Spencer, Jr., *The First Peacetime Draft*, 83-84, 102-103.
13Ibid, 110.

14Ibid, 224.

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