
Acknowledgments

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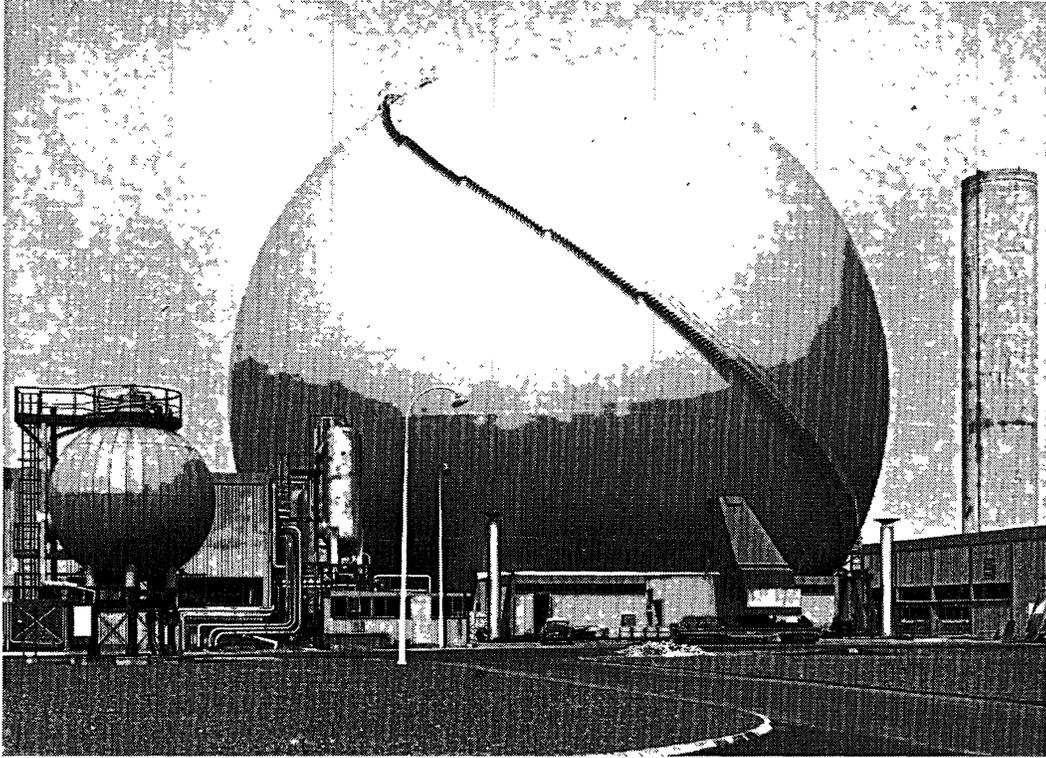
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The Radiance of France



The EDFI reactor at Chinon. Source: EDF Photothèque.

Introduction

France cannot be France without grandeur.

—*Charles de Gaulle*¹

It would be good if it were French research that produced the first useful and humane applications of this diabolical marvel. To master these terrifying forces of unlimited destruction, to have this stupendous invention metamorphose itself into a humane discovery through the filter of our national genius, this would bring honor to our country.

—*Raoul Dautry, first Administrator-General of the Commissariat à l’Energie Atomique, October 1945*²

In June of 1940, German troops marched into France for the second time in less than thirty years. On June 17, Marshal Pétain announced that he would seek peace with Hitler. Charles de Gaulle launched the Resistance the following day in a broadcast from London. Thus began four years of opprobrious occupation and fractured resistance. In June of 1944, Allied troops landed on the beaches of Normandy to liberate a nation humiliated by defeat, ravaged by war, disgraced by collaboration, and only partly redeemed by resistance.

France had lost nearly a million and a half people in the war. The industrial infrastructure was in shambles. Food was scarce and expensive. France had lost its self-respect. It had also lost its standing among world leaders—a loss made glaringly obvious by de Gaulle’s absence at Potsdam and Yalta. The bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki highlighted the enormous technological gulf between France and the United States. The consequences of the war for the French empire remained unclear, but prospects already looked grim in Indochina. The embarrassed, destitute nation resigned itself to accepting American economic aid in the slow and painful task of reconstruction. To use Robert Frank’s phrase, France entered the second half of the twentieth century “haunted by its decline.”³