

## FRANCE AT WAR

### I—THE BELFORT FRONT

*Although the French troops have been given little mention in the official Allied communiqués, they are taking part in the battle developing on the Franco-German frontier. French troops of General Patch's American 7th Army, under the command of General Jean Delattre de Tassigny, and the Leclerc Division came together in the Langres region. On September 26, the United Press announced from Allied Supreme Headquarters that General Delattre de Tassigny's French forces, hitherto known as "Army B," have been designated the French First Army. Units of the FFI (estimated by General Koenig, their commander, as numbering 200,000) armed and organized, will go into action beside the French regulars in the attack against Germany. The French are now manning the front in the Belfort region. The FFI have coordinated their activities with those of the Allied forces on every sector of the French front in the North and East. General Koenig's Headquarters announced on September 17, that "operations in the Vosges Maquis began on September 16, coordinated with the development of the Allied offensive. In Côte-d'Or and Haute-Marne, the FFI, operating with the Allied Armies, have been completely successful in all actions undertaken."*

**General de Gaulle on the French Front** — General de Gaulle visited the eastern front inspecting French troops. At Besançon, he spoke in praise of the fighting spirit and determination shown by French soldiers in battle and warned them not to expect too rapid a German defeat. "Do not be surprised if the war lasts many months more. Contrary to hopes raised prematurely the end of the war in Europe cannot be expected before next spring."

(Radio-Paris, September 21, 1944)

**French Army Driving on Belfort** — (AP) September 27 — Although the French forces in this sector have advanced several miles in the past twenty-four hours, the grim opposition offered by the Germans indicates the enemy is prepared to pay any price necessary to delay full-scale attack on their Belfort gap positions as long as possible. The Nazis have pressed hundreds of civilians into service, taking them from the fields where they were harvesting crops and putting them to work digging mile after mile of anti-tank ditches and building earth-works.

(New York TIMES, September 28, 1944)

**French and American Operations in the Vosges** — (AP) Supreme Headquarters, Allied Expeditionary Force, September 29 — In the battle for the historic southern gateway to Germany through the Belfort gap and the Vosges passes to the North, French and Americans of the 7th Army were pressing steadily up the slopes of the Vosges mountains and along the northwestern approaches to the Belfort gap.

(New York HERALD TRIBUNE, September 30, 1944)

**Advance on Belfort** — Supreme Headquarters, Allied Expeditionary Force, October 1 — Against heavy opposition French troops of the American 7th Army fought their way through Belfort in the Vosges and moved up to the approaches of the Chevestray Pass north of Belfort. . . .

(New York TIMES, October 2, 1944)

**Fierce Fighting on the German Frontier** — American newspapers of September 29 stated that the German soldiers defending the Belfort sector were all young men and fanatical Nazis, who have put up a savage fight. Those taken prisoner were full of arrogance. American war correspondents with the troops in the sector note that such behavior of German soldiers contradicts the belief that the morale of the Wehrmacht is beginning to crack. On the contrary, the fierce resistance offered everywhere along the German frontier, is a proof that the Germans' fighting spirit is not yet broken.

(Summary of Operations, French Military Mission, September 29, 1944)

**Autun Captured by French Troops** — On September 13, the Times of London published the following dispatch from its special correspondent at Besançon, under the headline "French Success at Autun," with a sub-heading "German Atrocities":

A French colonial regiment won a spectacular success at Autun yesterday in forcing the surrender of 3,500 Germans with their arms and equipment and headed by their colonel. The Germans were southwest of the city, trying to get past, and at first attacked the French outer defences with the fury of desperation. The French commanding general sent a squadron of armored cavalry in the direction of Lascelle to outflank the Germans, while engaging them with the infantry and artillery holding the town. Taken by surprise, the Germans were thrown into confusion. The squadron of tank-destroyers brought them to their knees. In this engagement, the son of General Delattre de Tassigny, a French Cinq serving as a private with special permission because he is below age, was wounded. In the same area, the Germans poured petrol over five young men of the FFI whom they had captured, and burnt them alive in the village square. This revolting story is given without doubt as to its veracity, for examples of such barbarity are too numerous and from sources too disinterested to be doubted. Here in the Jura, it is unnecessary to listen to the French for such stories. The English and the Americans and the evidence of one's own eyes will tell all and more than one wants to know. This morning your correspondent met an English officer, who has been on a mission here for the past few months, who averred that, from what he had seen and verified the Germans had been undertaking in this region a policy of systematic depopulation with the intent to colonize. . . ."

(TIMES, London, September 13, 1944)

**How a Second Battle of Verdun Was Prevented —** *Fernand Léguet is the Patriot who, by saving a bridge near Verdun, made possible the lightning American advance in this sector. Here is his own story:*

"In the morning the Germans had placed 500 kilos of explosives on the Beaurepaire bridge, and were ready to blow it up. I was determined to prevent this, so I hid and watched the bridge from 8 a.m. until noon. When the last two German tanks drove over, the sentries guarding the bridge started toward their command post to give the signal. That was the moment I had been waiting for. I crawled through the bushes and cut the wires, and then started to disconnect the fuse in the first charge at the entrance of the bridge where I was right out in the open. I had hardly finished when the first American tank arrived and roared across the bridge in pursuit of the enemy."

Fernand Léguet is 37 years old. Born at Fleury, near Douaumont the heroic commune which was destroyed to the last stone in 1916, he was cited in Army dispatches in July 1919. Growing up amid the devastation of war, he then was employed for 18 years at the Verdun arsenal.

*(French Information Services, London, September 21, 1944)*

### **Results of Patriot Action in Paris**

On August 18, the Paris FFI had in all 370 machine guns, 700 rifles, 4,000 revolvers and 30 trucks, absurdly little when compared with what the enemy had. But this did not prevent the launching of the battle on August 19 for the capital's liberation.

However, the best soldiers in the world cannot fight without weapons and as a result of individual efforts and group attacks the Patriots a few days later got possession of 1,500 machine guns, 7,000 rifles, 6,000 revolvers, 400 trucks, 12 cannon, seven caterpillar trucks and 11 tanks, all in good condition and all seized from the Germans. Hundreds of men lost their lives in making this wonderful haul, but thanks to their self-sacrifice, their comrades were able to resist, to revolt, and finally, to conquer.

This was, by no means, all that the FFI did. By sabotaging certain trains they made it possible to save many art treasures that the Germans had stolen from French museums and were shipping to the Reich. The FFI also saved many factories, silos, buildings and historic monuments which were in imminent danger of destruction by fire. In addition the Resistance freed thousands of political prisoners saving them from the fate that awaited them.

*(French Information Services, London, September 25, 1944)*

### **Number of Prisoners Taken by the French**

A National Defense Headquarters communiqué — The number of prisoners taken by the First Army and by the FFI between August 15 and September 24, is 59,000. Included in this total are 1,100 officers, including Generals Doje, Feldkommandantur of Marseille; Scheffer, of the 244th Infantry Division and Seldbert,

Feldkommandantur of Besançon, commanding the defense sector of the French Riviera.

Prisoners taken by General Leclerc's Second Armored Division and by the FFI operating with other armies, are not included in this list.

*(Office of the Commissioner of Information, Paris, October 2, 1944)*

## **II—THE FFI COMPLETE MOPPING UP IN FRANCE**

*Brest, Le Havre, Boulogne, Calais are now liberated which should greatly ease Allied communications. But there are still some islands of German resistance to be wiped out. On the Atlantic Coast, Lorient and St. Nazaire have not yet been cleared. Five to six thousand Germans still remain on Pointe de Grave at the Gironde estuary, entrance to the port of Bordeaux, and a force of about 30,000 at La Pallice, at the northern extremity of the port of La Rochelle.*

South of the Loire, General Delattre de Tassigny's troops effected a junction with Leclerc's Division; the FFI took 18,000 German prisoners. (Communiqué from General Koenig's Headquarters.) FFI operations are continuing in the frontier regions of the Alps, particularly in Savoie and in the Maurienne region where the Germans are holding out in order to allow the maximum number of their troops to cross the frontier. In the center, in Corrèze, and in the South, especially in Ardèche, the FFI have resumed mopping-up operations. There can be no doubt that the German aim is to maintain military elements in France which will take advantage of communication difficulties and the present isolation of certain regions to try to foment disorder, in the hope of creating political anarchy. But the Committees of Liberation, charged with civil administration in liberated cities and villages, and the Regional Committees of Military Action which direct FFI activities have the situation well in hand.

Their liaison with the National Resistance Council, from whom they receive instructions is the guarantee of order necessary to carry on the war.

### **Reports on FFI Activities**

Though some large units of the FFI are organized and equipped with modern material for participation in military operations against Germany at the side of regular French troops, FFI units in the provinces, who are completing the mopping-up of the country still have often to use crude weapons. Below are reports on their activities:

**An Underground Tank —** (From an AFI war correspondent) — As we were driving along the Moulins highway we suddenly saw coming rapidly toward us a tank of unidentifiable design. As the region had been liberated by the FFI but had not yet been occupied by the Allied Armies, we could not help being a little suspicious. But then we could see that it was carrying the French colors and that the letters "FFI" were painted on its side. Its crew gave us the following explanation:



*Planet News*

*German convoy destroyed by the FFI*

This was one of four tanks secretly built in a workshop in the suburbs of Clermont-Ferrand. The chassis was that of a camouflaged farm tractor. The armor consisted of one plate of soft steel and another of hard steel which had been made in another section of the same workshops and then concealed. Both the chassis and armor had been kept hidden inside the factory until the FFI could weld the parts together. Armed with a 37-mm. cannon and heavy machine guns these tanks were excellent for raids and reconnaissance. Thus at times, France is fighting with materiel of her own make.

*(French Information Services, London, September 19, 1944)*

***In the Ardèche Maquis*** — (From AFI war correspondent Jean-Marie Gerbault) — The Ardèche, like Savoie, is FFI territory. Privas was liberated several days before the Allied landings. There was considerable fighting at Annonay and Le Cheylard; the terrain is well adapted for guerrilla warfare with plenty of suitable places for observation posts as well as for hiding. The Maquis kept watch from the heights and swooped down in lightning attacks, sabotaging enemy convoys. The Maquis in its purest form, I think, was that of the Ardèche. There it came into being quite spontaneously; it was the local people who furnished its leaders and its resources. I found that there was perfect communion between the guerrilla troops and the villages in which the members

of the Ardèche Maquis lived. These men wear a khaki uniform of British cut. I was much impressed by their discipline and calm, though on the night I spent with them there was one alarm after another and a constant coming and going of patrols. It is difficult to get the Maquis to talk; they say that there is nothing to tell, they just came along to give a little help where it was needed. "It's nearly over now; the Boches have gone, and we must get back home; it's time to think about harvesting and the bad fall weather."

I said that these men are all from the land; between raids they put down their machine guns and go back to work in their fields, then return with some bread and cheese in their haversack. But I was astonished to find among them, in a company composed almost entirely of peasants, and on the most comradely terms with them, two Russian officers and one Moslem. The former were prisoners of war who had been compelled to fight in the Wehrmacht and had deserted to join the Maquis. They could not speak French, but gave advice on strategy by means of gestures and a few words of German. The Moslem, a non-commissioned officer who had been mentioned in Regimental dispatches in 1940, was drafted by his "protectors" for the forced labor service. He asked for a postponement but the Germans told him: "You had better not do any explaining if you don't have a

gun." So he went into the Maquis to find a gun and he is now explaining himself very well.

(French Information Services, London, September 23, 1944)

**Maquis and American Soldiers** — After four years of silence during the occupation, Andrée Viollis, a well known French woman journalist before the war, has begun a series of articles in the Paris daily *Ce Soir*. The first describes the cooperation of the Maquis with the American Seventh Army in the Rhône Valley:

It is now possible to speak of the flying column under the command of Brigadier General Frederick Butler, which, with the aid of our admirable lads of the Maquis, raced at lightning speed from the beaches of the Mediterranean to that green Valley of the Rhône where the first great battle of the southern front was fought. Along narrow mountain roads armored cars and motorized infantry averaged 64 kilometers a day, more than 400 kilometers a week. General Butler comes from San Francisco. He is tall, straight, with an aquiline nose; he speaks little, but acts rapidly, and well.

"We have perhaps done a good job," one of the American soldiers of the flying column said to me, "but your boys of the Maquis did as much and more. They had so harassed and frightened the Boches, destroying their tanks, setting fire to their ammunition and supply convoys, cutting their sentinels' throats, that it was almost with a sigh of relief that the wretches saw our column arrive, and surrendered."

There were, nevertheless, several heavy engagements; in the first, the Maquis had already brought a German garrison to the point of collapse, but they did not have enough arms and ammunition to complete the job. An old story, unfortunately. At the very moment when they were about to be compelled to cease fire, and the Germans were preparing to counterattack, a flood of American troops came up and crushed them.

The lads of the Maquis did not suspect that they had made a prize capture, the first General to be taken since the southern invasion, and what a General! He was no less than the corps commander responsible for all the coastal defense from Nice to Toulon, General Neuling himself.

The Americans had only to gather up this prize and the column was on its way. In advance were small groups of scouts who made contact with the commanders of the Maquis, who immediately summoned their troops. On the first day 500 French fighting men had joined the Americans. On the second day Digne and Sisteron were taken and the Durance river crossed. And always new groups of Maquis.

In every town, large or small, the work had already been done, a German garrison had been captured or encircled. "We had only to accept delivery," my American friend went on. "The inhabitants awaited us with pride, to hand them over. While we were advancing along steep mountain roads, nearly every hour there



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Nurses attached to the French Second Armored Division in France

came tumbling down the mountain paths the gallant men of the Maquis herding before them troops of ragged and demoralized Boches."

Perhaps the fiercest action was at Digne, where for thirteen hours they fought from street to street and house to house. And there also, without knowing it, the Maquis had caught in its trap another General, General Hans Schubert, commanding the Basses-Alpes region. There was bitter street fighting at Gap also.

When the Americans reached Grenoble, the Maquis, who were amazed to see them sweep on so rapidly, tendered them 1,500 Boche prisoners as a gift of welcome. At Rives, north of Grenoble, the Maquis also gave the Americans proof of their pluck. Fifteen of these lads, armed only with rifles, attacked a German artillery position, killed the soldiers and turned the guns against German Headquarters, which soon fled in disorder.

You should have seen those men of the Maquis during the German retreat up the Rhône Valley! They climbed trees along the road armed only with grenades which they carried in their knapsacks, and as long as the grenades lasted they hurled them on the tanks or transport moving along; then, taking advantage of the confusion, they slid down the trunks, jumped up the embankments and disappeared in the woods.

But what losses they suffered! How many of them were shot after being tortured! In passing through a village we witnessed the burial of one of the two sons of the local butcher. The Boches had laid open his abdomen and bound him to a tree where he died after terrible agony. What refinement of cruelty!

"When the history of the liberation of France is written," concluded my American friend, "the most splendid and most important chapters should be devoted to these magnificent lads who fought on so long, without shoes, without clothes, without arms, with their bare hands, who suffered and died for their country's freedom."

As for Brigadier General Butler, everyone knows how, arriving stealthily, by night, on the heights dominating the Rhône Valley between Montélimar and Loriol, he destroyed a good part of the German 19th Army and the Second Panzer Division. When asked his impressions of the battle, he said laconically: "Oh, that was damned difficult to work out, but also damned amusing. And the whole operation cost us only about fifteen men, ten after reaching the Rhône Valley. Without counting the thousands of dead, we took 3,000 prisoners. The Germans hardly expected us. They knew neither where we were, nor where they were. Just imagine that at Gap we surprised their headquarters men peacefully seated drinking their coffee. Really very amusing."

And, returning his pipe to his mouth, General Butler turned and left.

(CE SOIR, Paris, September 28, 1944)

### III—MILITARY NEWS

#### *The French Fleet*

September 9 — In a statement to the Press in Paris,

Louis Jacquinot, Commissioner of the Navy, revealed that the French fleet, far from having been annihilated, comprises 300 ships some of which have been modernized in the United States; also 3,000 officers and 50,000 men whose training has been completed by four years of battle. The whole represents about half of the pre-war fleet.

(London-Radio, September 9, 1944)

**Fleet Returns to Toulon** — September 14 — Units of the French fleet steamed triumphantly back to their home port of Toulon today. Douglas Willis, a BBC correspondent, points out that in less than three weeks after the Germans left the port, blocking the entrance and scuttling more than 120 ships and laying hundreds of mines in the port area, the harbor has been made usable again. "When the first construction battalions of the French, American and British Armies and Navies saw the colossal destruction," he said, "they shook their heads, but with the aid of thousands of German prisoners and French civilians, the technicians did the job."

Radio-Brazzaville announced that the cruiser *Georges Leygues*, with colors flying, came back to Toulon for the first time in four years, with Admiral André Lemonnier, chief of staff of the French Navy on board. The battleship *Lorraine* and eight other warships, cruisers and destroyers also entered the roads.

(French Press and Information Service, New York, September 16, 1944)

**Louis Jacquinot Reaffirms That France Will Participate in Fighting in the Pacific** — At a press conference Louis Jacquinot, Commissioner of the Navy, spoke of the important part played by the Fusiliers Marin (Marines) in the underground battle of the Resistance, and stated that the French Marines will fight on until both Germany and Japan have been defeated. Below is the gist of M. Jacquinot's statement:

Navy radio operators operated secret stations. Entire companies of Fusiliers Marins with their own officers were parachuted into France. One Marine company of 120 men fought near Châlons-sur-Saône; it had been secretly formed and armed by a Naval lieutenant. At the beginning of September it engaged 1,500 Germans entrenched in a village; 60 Germans were killed as against ten Marines. Of these latter six were wounded men who were shot by the SS.

In the Toulouse region a company of 300 Fusiliers Marins who had participated with the FFI in the liberation of this sector, has now been provided with officers and equipment and is ready to fight on the Rhine front.

Free French Marines participated in the battle of Toulon after having served in Italy.

In preparation for the Pacific campaign and the winning back of French Indo-China, one of the two regiments of Fusiliers Marins will be re-formed. The large number of volunteer enlistments is proof of the fact that the French flag will not be absent from the battle of the Pacific.

(French Information Services, London, September 21, 1944)



*Planet News*

*Frenchman returning to his homeland lovingly touches his native soil*

### ***The Normandy Group in Russia Celebrates the Liberation of Paris***

Moscow, September 6 (AFI) — The aviators of the Normandy group who have been fighting on the Russian front since 1943, celebrated the liberation of Paris with their Soviet comrades. The Soviet AA guns at the airfield where the squadron is based, fired a four salvo salute; at the same time the skies were illuminated by a display of fireworks. The French crews were then invited to fire a fifth salvo themselves.

During the banquet that followed, the Chief of Headquarters of the Soviet air unit to which the Nor-

mandy group is attached, proposed a toast to early victory and in a brief address "urged the guests to make the best of the time remaining before an armistice to destroy as many Germans as possible."

(FRANCE, London, September 7, 1944)

### ***General Delattre de Tassigny Decorated***

When General de Gaulle visited the eastern front in France, General Jean Delattre de Tassigny, commander of French troops on the eastern front, received the Croix de la Libération, the highest decoration awarded by the Provisional Government.

(New York HERALD TRIBUNE, September 27, 1944)