

Free France

VOL. 5, No. 12

JUNE 15, 1944

PUBLISHED BY THE FRENCH PRESS AND
INFORMATION SERVICE

An Agency of the French Provisional Government

501 Madison Avenue, New York 2, N. Y.

Phone PLaza 3-4361



FRANCE AT WAR

I—FRENCH AND ALLIED TROOPS CONTINUE TO ADVANCE IN ITALY

Communiqués from the Allied High Command

(A.P.) Naples, May 19 — Following the capture of Cassino the Eighth Army has been quick to exploit its success and has pressed the enemy vigorously back against the Adolf Hitler Line. French and American troops of the Fifth Army have continued their drive across the mountains south of the Liri River and are now in contact with the enemy on hill features which constitute the southern bastions of the line. On the coast, Americans have captured the town of Formia.

(NEW YORK TIMES, May 20, 1944)

(A.P.) Naples, May 21 — The offensive by the Allied armies in Italy continues without pause. Severe pressure is being maintained on the enemy all along the battle front.

Troops of the Eighth Army have driven in all outposts of the Adolf Hitler Line in the Liri Valley and now are in close contact with the main defenses. Reconnaissance shows the line is as strong as was expected and stiff resistance is being encountered.

Troops of the Fifth Army continue to drive the enemy back upon his main defensive positions. The whole of the Gaeta Peninsula has been cleared of the enemy.

The foremost French troops now threaten the Pico-Pontecorvo road.

(NEW YORK TIMES, May 22, 1944)

(A.P.) Naples, May 22 — Hard fighting to evict the enemy from the Adolf Hitler line continues. Troops of the 8th Army are encountering determined resistance from the enemy main defensive system all along the front. Polish troops are fighting in Piedmonte, a strong point in the northern sector of the line.

French and American troops of the 5th Army have pressed forward and beaten off enemy counter-attacks in the Pico area. In the coastal sector American troops have occupied Monte San Biagio.

(NEW YORK TIMES, May 23, 1944)

(A.P.) Naples, May 24 — The second phase in the battle of Italy has begun. In the early hours of May 23 an attack by the Fifth Army Allied Bridgehead Force was synchronized with an attack by the Eighth Army to break the Hitler Line in the Liri Valley.

While Fifth Army troops continued their attacks against the right flank on the enemy's main defensive positions, the attack of the Eighth Army was made by a Canadian Corps which effected a breach in the Hitler Line north of Pontecorvo after extremely heavy fighting against great opposition.

The Canadian Corps has greatly distinguished itself in this, its first action as a corps.

Steady progress has been made by French and American troops in the mountains and coastal sectors against the right wing of the main German defensive positions.

(NEW YORK TIMES, May 25, 1944)

(A.P.) Naples, May 29 — It is evident that the enemy is doing all in his power to resist our advance against the Valmontone-Velletri line south of Highway 6. Despite this, British and American troops of the Fifth Army have made a substantial advance southwest of Velletri against increasing opposition.

French and American troops of the Fifth Army continue to drive the enemy north to the mountains toward Highway 6.

British and Canadian troops of the Eighth Army have made some progress in the Liri and Sacco Valleys while New Zealand troops have advanced in the mountains to the north and occupied Belmonte.

(NEW YORK TIMES, May 30, 1944)

(A.P.) Naples, May 30 — Navy — Enemy dumps, troop concentrations and roads to the North of the

Anzio area, were bombarded yesterday by a cruiser of the French Navy. The result was successful.

(NEW YORK TIMES, May 31, 1944)

General Eisenhower Congratulates de Gaulle on French Forces

Following the spectacular advances of French divisions fighting with the Fifth Army in Italy, General Dwight D. Eisenhower sent the following telegram to General Charles de Gaulle:

"Although I have never for an instant doubted that, from the very moment of its entrance into battle, the French Army would distinguish itself, and consequently I have always urged the re-armament of the French divisions, it is particularly agreeable to me, as it must be for you, to see our confidence confirmed in such a striking and spectacular manner.

"I want you personally to know how proud I am of the courageous action of the French expeditionary corps in Italy. I am sending separately a message to General Juin congratulating him on the superb action of the troops under his command.

"To you and to all those who have shared in the preparation of these fine divisions for the fight against the common enemy, I send my best wishes and sincere congratulations."

General de Gaulle's answer — I received with pleasure your congratulatory message on the French troops. At this time I assure you once again that the French Government is proud to have placed its Army under your Inter-Allied high command in the western theater and that it has full and complete confidence in your ability to lead the armies of liberty to a speedy and total victory.

(Commissioner of Information, Alger, May 27, 1944)

Break through the Gustav Line

The part played by the French Expeditionary Forces in the offensive launched on May 11 by the Allies, with the objective of taking Rome, is summed up in an account given by Pierre Ichac, war correspondent. The account covers the tactical elaboration of the plan of action devolving on the French Forces and the break through the Gustav Line. We are quoting below the most important passages.

Getting ready for action — We had an inkling something was going to happen! Therefore, when the weekly conference of war correspondents was announced for Thursday afternoon, May 11, we were expecting some big news. It was with some misgivings that we entered the office of the Chief of Staff. A large map of the sector was concealed by a blue hanging. The Chief of Staff lifted the hanging, and gave us his comments.

I have under my eyes some notes taken that day. To me they represent the most brilliant justification of the

success of the French offensive. I have thus the proof today that, just as had been foreseen, its evolution, its execution and its effect have been thoroughly successful.

Here are, according to my notebook, the main points of what General Juin's Chief of Staff told the war correspondents at 16 o'clock on Thursday, May 11 — seven hours before the offensive was launched. First of all, several considerations of a general character. Our program: Break through the German front. Experience has shown that it is poor tactics to engage in a headlong attack on a well-defended position, where the enemy is waiting. We shall, on the contrary, resort to striking in a spot where the enemy would not imagine we would concentrate our principal effort: we are going to attack in the mountains. You know our divisions, and the training they have had in this kind of warfare.

Here then are three main points of our program. Take the Monte Majo massif. On this massif, our regiments, after having taken Faito and Cerasola, will continue their parallel advance in the northwest direction, on two lines of mountain ridges. We shall then advance directly west in order to take the Fammera mountain and our armored tanks will open fire at the Castelforte Ansonia. Finally, the whole French Force will make a drive to break through the Pontecorvo line. The conditions governing success are: the element of surprise, the violence and speed of attack.

The Chief of Staff looked at the map, and added: "No such difficult operation has ever been undertaken!" All of us were sufficiently familiar with the new sector, bristling with peaks, cut by valleys and banks . . . We were all of the same opinion. At the time I am writing this — Friday, May 18 — we have not as yet had any official news. It seems, however, that we are really close to Pontecorvo . . . the distant, inaccessible Pontecorvo, the heart of the Hitler line. Tomorrow it will probably be the Gaete Tower. And our progress will continue to gain in speed.

Faito and Cerasola — What strikes the eye when one traverses the battlefield, is the desolate landscape, crushed by our artillery fire. The French Army this time had an abundance of materiel, and the 71st German Division which it was facing, and which had fought at Stalingrad, could make bitter comparisons with the Russian front. All the enemy counter-attacks converged on Feuci, around Faito, on Lagrifolio, Girofano, Cerasola, and on the Massa Ruggere Perou basin. Hundreds of German corpses littered the ground. According to moderate estimates, there alone fell almost three complete battalions. The survivors were made prisoners. These losses, suffered in a limited area, are nevertheless very grave; two of the destroyed battalions represented the reserves available in the rear of the sector. Back of these, the mountain was practically empty. The enemy was dashing, but was relatively weak at Faito, flanked by fire on the adjoining peaks; he was both numerous and well-armed at Cerasola. Only the surprise element of a

night attack could be effective. The barbed wire, the mines, the deep casemates, the machine-guns and the trench mortars, the accurate fire of the artillery, part of which still remains on the mountain, made Cerosola the center of German defense. The sharpshooter battalions, clinging to its slopes, and those, farther left, who tried to follow the road out of Faito, resisted heroically the deluge of mortars and shells. The night attack, though it enabled us to break through, had left behind little nests of resistance held by determined numbers of snipers and sharpshooters. This had been the Gustav Liné, and it took two days' fighting to break through it. Decisive days, which should make us think of the day when, having pierced other German defenses, we shall enter the eternal city. Castelforte, San Andrea, Ausonia, Esperia — the villages are always the same. At the base of a massif, and more frequently, at the outlet of a narrow valley, the mountain had raised an offshoot, a little peak, which towers over the passage.

It was necessary to force all these passages, take all these villages by siege, one by one, following the two principal lines of our attack, to the right and to the left. The tanks and the infantry, supported by the artillery, which has made a mass of grey ruins of this place, had to climb under anti-tank and shell fire from self-propelled guns, and the corpses of the German gunners have remained there.

It was often necessary for the army engineers to clear or rebuild the road while the battle was raging to enable the tanks to pass, so that the bulldozers were working under enemy fire. . . .

(Commissioner of Information, May 27, 1944)

The French Navy Takes Part in the Offensive

On May 11, 1944, the French Navy was present with its gunners and "Fusilliers Marins," on the banks of the Garigliano river which had to be crossed. For several weeks the entire first group of naval gunners had been at the front. Then the first regiment of "Fusilliers Marins," whose constituent nucleus had been formed under fire at Bir-Hacheim, arrived with General B's division. The sector where the "Fusilliers Marins" action took place was, roughly speaking, situated near the Tiger bridge (a pontoon bridge spanning the Garigliano) and extended north and south along the Garigliano and its tributary, the Liri, to Pontecorvo. The First Regiment of "Fusilliers Marins" which operated with light and heavy tanks was ordered on reconnaissance, scouting, and mopping-up operations.

The enemy was strongly entrenched in the mountain range lying on the other bank of the Garigliano. The hills begin at an altitude of less than 1500 feet, and are dominated by Mount Maio (over 3,000 feet high). At 11 P.M. on May 10 a heavy and rapid shelling of enemy positions began. The first battery of naval gunners fired more than 1800 shells during that night. From our battery which was almost in line with the Tiger bridge, and about 180 yards from the Garigliano, we could observe the pounding of the German positions, which burst into flames at various points. The shells fell on Faito (which was taken, abandoned and retaken before dawn), on Mount Maio, San Andréa, San Apollinaire and on Maroni. Lieutenant Commander X patrolled this section a few days later with his tanks.

General de Gaulle, in Italy, salutes soldiers killed in the service of France



The men who fired the guns were naked to the waist, deafened, and a bit groggy from the rapid firing, but they were smiling. I heard one petty officer say, "I can't believe it, but this is it." During that night 400 guns fired together on objectives that had been carefully spotted during days of apparent inaction.

In the evening we saw the tanks of the First Regiment of "Fusiliers Marins" go by on the road, that ran alongside the gun emplacements. Most of the men wore their red pompon caps, a few had British helmets. A small French flag with the cross of Lorraine waved on the tanks. The men were going to take their positions on the Garigliano. They crossed over on the Tiger bridge and occupied a kind of no-man's-land of boggy and mined ground. From there they carried out reconnaissance operations.

The first impact of the battle was terrific for the light tank squadron commanded by Naval Lieutenant X. Only a man who took part in this action in the first 1800 yds. of the Garigliano bend, to the right of the Tiger bridge, has the right to tell this story. Some tanks bogged down, others burst into flames under the combined fire of mortars, heavy machine guns, and anti-tank guns.

The squadron of light tanks was cited "à l'ordre de l'Armée" and will have Garigliano written on its flag. The squadron Commander received the Légion d'Honneur from General de Gaulle. This Commander was

always the first in scouting missions, he never had a moment's rest and was always the first in line with his Sherman tanks. In one of these tanks we met the Commander of the regiment, a Lieutenant Commander.

(Commissioner of Information, Alger, May 30, 1944)

II—FRENCH FRONT

The latest news from France shows that, in spite of drastic measures of repression, such as arrests and executions, the total destruction of villages "that are supplying the Maquis," and its losses, Resistance is holding out firmly. Resistance meets the German attacks by planned withdrawal operations, passing through the holes of the net which the Gestapo has spread throughout France, in order to save its strength for more important fighting. Sabotage operations, commanded by military necessity, are being continued, as well as defensive battles waged by patriots who have been betrayed by Militia spies or ambushed by German troops. Meanwhile, the organization of the French Forces of the Interior is in progress.

A Communiqué from the Underground Paper "l'Ardèche Combattante"

The following is a notice that was posted in the square of each Commune of the Ardèche department, announcing that an agreement had been signed between the Secret Army and the Guerrillas and Partisans. The notice reads as follows:

Naples: American, British and French flags are hoisted together.

