

# Free France

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## FRANCE AT WAR

### I - ON THE RESISTANCE FRONT

#### The Battle in Haute-Savoie

*Joseph Darnand, Under-Secretary of State for the Maintenance of Order, armed with full powers from Pierre Laval ("Free France", Vol. 5, No. 3, page 127) is determined to wipe out the centres of resistance located along the Swiss frontier. He has organized definite military operations which will be centred in Haute-Savoie and extend to the adjacent departments.*

*A force composed of French police, Gardes Mobiles and militia, supported by German troops, will be commanded by the Superintendent of Police, Colonel Lelong, "Director of operations for the maintenance of order." The occupation authorities, with the help of collaborationists, have set themselves the objective to liquidate all centres of active French resistance, because the danger which they represent for the Germans in the event of an invasion. This is to be done in the name of the usual Vichy slogans, "The Bolshevik peril," and "the danger of terrorism and anarchy."*

*The following is a brief account of the progress of these operations as reported in the neutral press and according to Vichy reactions, and information reaching Switzerland and London.*

#### Haute-Savoie in a State of Siege

Since the end of January, Haute-Savoie has been in a state of siege. Orders signed by Colonel Lelong were posted January 31 in Annecy and the other towns in the department, informing the population about the measures being taken in order to rid the region of bands of "terrorists":

"The renewed outbreaks of terrorism in your department, and a growing feeling of insecurity have led the government to the consideration of ways and means to quell the one and relieve the other. Vigorous ac-

tion will be taken. The first measures were the subject of an order given by me on January 28, 1944. However these must not be a cause of alarm among these loyal citizens, who are anxious to see the country they love with good reason, return to the calm and quiet indispensable for its recovery.

"Since I am in charge of directing the operations which will, I hope, bring back among Frenchmen the peace, which is necessary now more than ever, I can assure you that only French forces entrusted with the maintenance of order will take part in enforcing the measures these operations will entail.

"I count on everyone to understand clearly. Let those who do not desire to see French blood again shed uselessly — as has already happened so often in Haute-Savoie — listen to the voices of instinct and reason. It is not too late to take the right road.

"You are reminded that any persons found carrying a weapon, or in possession of arms or explosives, will immediately be brought before a Court Martial whose judgment is final and will be executed within 24 hours. During the occupation, when hostilities may break out in any district, residents are warned that they must stay in their houses with the windows closed, and hold themselves in readiness to answer any summons and comply with any demands for requisitioned articles. Any hostile behavior, or attempts to conceal any 'outlawed' persons will be severely punished by action against the individuals concerned as well as their property.

"Annecy, January 31, 1944, by the Superintendent of Police, Director of operations for the maintenance of order —

— Colonel G. Lelong."

## French Police and German Troops Occupy Haute-Savoie

Huge detachments of gardes mobiles filled one whole train. According to well informed sources, the whole of the Haute-Savoie region is to be occupied by soldiers. Since the morning of February 2, German soldiers, French gendarmes, and Gardes Mobiles have been patrolling the principal roads. Curfew has been ordered throughout the department from 8 P.M. to 5 A.M. There have been several police raids in Annemasse, Evian, Thonon, and other villages.

(TRIBUNE DE GENEVE, February 2, 1944)

On February 1, trains crowded with soldiers, arrived in different towns. Two train loads with Gardes Mobiles belonging to the reserve, and of militiamen, and one train filled with German soldiers have already arrived in Annemasse. Besides these, eight long troop trains, which had left Lyon via Bellegarde, are travelling along the Franco-Swiss frontier toward Annemasse, carrying motorized equipment and German soldiers in battle dress.

(LE COURRIER DE GENEVE, February 2, 1944)

Three troop trains which passed Annemasse on their way from Lyon, were directed to Thonon in the Upper Arve Valley. French police carefully searched all passengers and baggage at the Annemasse station, and all vehicles and persons travelling along the main highways were also stopped at cross roads, and searched. Operations against the Maquis are expected to begin at any moment. The Gardes Mobiles and militia have taken up their positions. Some of the Wehrmacht troops who had been quartered in the sixth region have left for an unknown destination. German troops have been reinforced in all large towns. North of Annecy, operations have already begun. Some persons accused of murders have been arrested. The police have seized a sum of 50,000 francs, stores of arms, explosives, and food cards.

(JOURNAL DE GENEVE, February 3, 1944)

### Patriots Delaying Occupation of Haute-Savoie

Eight troop trains transporting French police and German troops to the Haute-Savoie were forced to make a detour and take the Bellegarde route through St. Julien to Annemasse and Thonon, owing to a derailment caused by sabotage on the Chambéry-Aix-les-Bains line. The locomotive was lying on its side, and one carriage was completely destroyed. Troop trains were compelled to go back and take the Aix-les-Bains-Culoz-Bellegarde route. The occupation of the Haute-Savoie was seriously delayed in consequence. Another derailment on the LaRoche-Chamonix line was reported. Damage is said to be considerable.

(TRIBUNE DE GENEVE, February 3, 1944)

### Military Plan for Surrounding the Maquis

Bert Wylér, London "Herald Tribune" correspondent in Bern, describes the scene he witnessed from Lausanne:

"I have been watching the battle of the Savoy mountains which is going on across Lake Geneva. There, German troops, aided by Darnand's militia and the Vichy police, are trying to wipe out French patriots who are resisting the German forced labor decree. I can hear the thunder of the field artillery and the rattle of the machine guns. I can see German speed boats constantly patrolling the coasts, searching for any partisans who may try to escape by boat. And through my binoculars I can see, in the direction of the little lakeside town of Thonon, a large forest fire caused by a German flame thrower attack.

"The Nazi plan is apparently to form a safety belt stretching from Chamonix to Chambéry and the Swiss frontier. Germans and Mobile Guards are moving concentrically in this area to comb the entire Savoy department. All roads are barred with tank traps and barbed wire, and barricaded with felled trees. Crossings are manned by armed patrols who examine everyone closely. Even French militiamen are examined, as it is known that many partisans are disguised in militia uniforms. So dis-

guised, some of the partisans have entered Gestapo headquarters at the Hotel du Lac in Thonon and acquired important information. All Germans and the French militia have to use a password which changes daily, sometimes even hourly."

*(French Information Service, London, February 7, 1944)*

Information reaching London from Switzerland is to the effect that violent fighting has begun between Mobile Guards, militiamen, and the patriots belonging to the Maquis. They have been in action at various places, particularly at Faverges, La Clusas, and Le Petit Bornand. The French police, under the direction of the Gestapo, have carried out huge raids in several towns. At Annecy several hundred men under the age of fifty were arrested and transferred to an unknown destination, probably in Germany.

*(French Information Service, London, February 14, 1944)*

## Police Operations

The following report from Lausanne was received in London: "Operations are continuing methodically in Haute-Savoie where French militiamen and Gestapo agents are working together to 'restore order.' Proceedings always follow the same pattern: Suspects are rounded up and arrested, arms are confiscated; and when one district has thus been thoroughly combed the police go on to the next. For psychological reasons, it is generally the French militiamen who are sent to private homes to interrogate individuals, but the Gestapo are never very far away. These police operations are naturally not relished by the inhabitants, for they constitute a real intrusion, often under humiliating conditions. Every individual is ipso facto suspect. No one may go out without permission. Everyone has to give strict obedience to orders, and there is no hope of escape. It is too soon to judge of the efficiency of this vast police operation, but it is hardly likely that the situation will improve. On the contrary, every day people lose their lives or their property for having shown sympathy to the Partisans. Reprisals are continuing and acts of violence increasing."

*(French Information Service, London, February 8, 1944)*

The Savoy area is being systematically occupied, one village at a time. It is believed that the majority of the French police forces and Darnand's militia has been ordered to carry out a punitive expedition against the Partisans who are hiding out in the French Alps. They have arrived in such large contingents that billeting has become a problem, and the food situation, particularly, has caused complications. Everyday life has been seriously disorganized. The telephone may be used only to a very limited extent, and a special permit must first be obtained before a cable can be sent. Local mail is closely censored, and a letter sent

from Annecy to Annemasse, which is only a few miles away, may take as long as two or three days to reach its destination. Business is seriously handicapped, and in several places it has been impossible to keep the local industries running, because workers were prevented from leaving their homes while the investigation was going on. People sit in their homes expecting that any moment they will hear a knock on the door and that the Gestapo and Vichy police will march in and arrest some member of the family. Among the peasantry there is hardly one individual who is not directly affected by this search, either because some relative has joined the Partisans or has already been arrested for questioning. Our informant gives as his opinion that there will be a revolt if this atmosphere of general unrest lasts much longer.

(SVENSKA, Stockholm, February 9, 1944)

During the past few days Gestapo police and French militia men have made a number of raids in Annemasse, Gaillard, Ambilly, and Ville-la Grand. On Monday, February 7, prisoners who had been held in a hotel in Annemasse were removed and are believed to have been sent to Lyon. The Gestapo surrounded the old church of Ville Cafrard which had been transformed into a monastery, and compelled all the priests living there to find refuge elsewhere.

(JOURNAL DE GENEVE, February 8, 1944)

#### Execution of Patriots.

The A.F.I. agency cables from the French frontier that the execution of 16 patriots has taken place in Haute-Savoie. The newspaper "La Suisse" also announces the same news: "Sixteen patriots arrested in Haute-Savoie have been condemned to death as guerrilla fighters by the German Court Martial. They have been shot."

(LA SUISSE, February 8, 1944)

The Swiss press announced on February 9, that a young leader of the Maquis, known as "Simon", had been executed. A message, coming from France through London has brought details about this patriot, a man of 24, which it is not possible to reveal, but the report states that "Simon" has been proposed for the highest distinction that France at war can bestow, the Ordre de la Libération, with the following citation: "A splendid soldier belonging to the Resistance, has fought without respite since June, 1940. Was taken prisoner and escaped three times. An amazing leader, organized and commanded a group of guerrilla fighters in Haute-Savoie which was famed for its daring and sense of honor. Repeatedly gave proof of his courage and sangfroid in the course of countless successful operations. On December 22, 1943, killed three Germans, two of them officers, who attempted to arrest him. Has ceaselessly led his group in a struggle against those who are persecuting the French people, that is, the militia, the Gestapo agents, and the German troops of occupation. In the course of a recent action, was wounded, taken prisoner, and carried to hospital with three bullets in his abdomen, under the guard of 45 German soldiers.

His group tried to make a surprise raid and rescue him, but they were betrayed, taken prisoner, and executed on the spot. 'Simon', a young hero, fallen on the field of honor, was an embodiment of the unyielding spirit of Resistance."

(FRANCE, London, February 10, 1944)

French frontier (A.F.I.): "At Annecy the Germans have posted a notice announcing that Joseph Planes and Louis Baco have been shot for giving 'aid to the enemy.'"

(FRANCE, London, February 11, 1944)

Following an attack made upon a German in the little town of ---- in Savoie, a Frenchman, veteran of the war of 1914-18, who had won the Croix de Guerre and the Médaille Militaire, was taken as a hostage and later shot with 20 other prisoners. When his family went to identify the body they saw traces of blows on the victim's face and found that both his wrists had been broken.

(French Information Service, London, February 14, 1944)

### Punitive Measures Extend to the Ain Region

It is reported from Bellegarde on February 14, that police operations in the Bugey region are being carried out at the same time as the raids in Haute-Savoie. This has placed Bellegarde in a particularly difficult position. For the last three days the police have had control of all the roads. They allow the maximum of travellers and supplies to come in, and the minimum to go out. Several business people and taxis, coming from the neighborhood into Bellegarde were told that they would not be allowed to return. A few were permitted to proceed, if they could show a permit signed by the Mayor to prove that their journey was connected with the provision of supplies for the population. All packages coming from the Gex region were opened, examined, and stored. This is probably done in order to try to discover the instigators of sabotage of trains and similar acts. It is learned that curfew has been advanced two hours in the region around Bellegarde, also that train traffic between Bellegarde and Culoz, and Bellegarde and Nantua, has been suspended until the situation returns to normal.

(LA SUISSE, February 14, 1944)

News from Switzerland which has reached London, says that serious incidents have taken place in the Ain region, but that the occupation authorities are maintaining absolute secrecy about events which led to the death of several individuals. The police have thrown a cordon around Bellegarde and only a very few persons have been allowed to leave the town. The station restaurant has been changed into an office where people are questioned.

(French Information Service, London, February 14, 1944)

Official French sources confirm that the Ain and Haute-Savoie departments are occupied by 6,000 German soldiers. It is confirmed also that the Ain department is occupied by German soldiers exclusively. In the Haute-Savoie they are policing only the neighborhood of the Swiss frontier.

*(French Information Service, London, February 14, 1944)*

### Morale of the Maquis is Excellent

Heavy snow-falls have impeded the progress of the punitive operations, and are making conditions very difficult for the Maquis. The militiamen, most of whom come from the South of France show but little enthusiasm for the task of climbing around mountains in a search for invisible patriots. On the other hand, the morale of the Maquis is excellent. At their request the directive committees of Resistance have issued the following proclamation to the nation: "Men and women of the Ain, Rhône, Ardeche, Iseère, Savoie, Haute-Savoie, Drôme, and Saône et Loire departments, our Resistance fighters are today in the front lines fighting against the occupation."

*(French Information Service, London, February 15, 1944)*

### National Solidarity Appeal by Leaders of the Maquis

As soon as operations started in Haute-Savoie, the responsible leaders of the Maquis in that department issued an appeal to patriots calling upon them to use every means possible in order to bring help to the men of the Maquis fighting against the occupation troops and their accomplices. This appeal was received over the BBC in London, and was re-broadcast by the French services several times on February 7:

"(1) To all armed members of the Resistance stationed in your own homes: Rejoin the Maquis in Haute-Savoie at once! All members of the Resistance who have not been called, rejoin the Maquis at once! (2) Workers in Haute-Savoie, each time that your activities can be helpful, either directly or indirectly, to the operations which are being carried out, or which will be carried out against the Maquis, stop working, declare a strike in sympathy with your brothers who are being attacked! (3) Patriots of Savoie, do not hesitate to take risks when such action can be useful, but do not run into danger unnecessarily, in order to sabotage railroads, highways and factories which work for the enemy. (4) Note the names and descriptions of the militiamen who are charged with the leadership of the police. Each of these wretches must know that he will be considered a hostage for France.

"These four orders come from responsible leaders of the Maquis in Haute-Savoie. We can add only this: All our hopes and prayers go out, and we are straining all our efforts to help the front in Haute-Savoie. Its soldiers, martyrs, and heroes, with the solidarity of the nation behind them, will drive back the aggressors."

*(FRANCE, London, February 8, 1944)*

## Supplies for French Underground Army

*A newspaper reports that members of the French Underground need arms, clothing, and shoes. They are obliged to get hold of these supplies as soon as they are sent to them, and this is one of their most difficult tasks. The following is the story of one of these perilous operations which enable the Resistance Army to continue its fight:*

This happened somewhere in France at one o'clock in the morning. The manager of the Chantiers de la Jeunesse was awakened by twelve masked patriots who forced him to hand over the keys of the storehouse. There were trucks parked in the courtyard, and 200 men to help carry supplies out of the warehouses. They took coats, sweaters, shoes, radio sets, and typewriters — in all, 38 tons of supplies. This raid had been very carefully prepared. All the police stations in the neighborhood had had their telephone wires cut. It was seven o'clock in the morning before the police learned what had happened and were able to join forces, but by then it was too late. The roads leading from the Chantiers de la Jeunesse warehouses to a secret underground storage place were guarded by members of the Resistance in case the trucks had to stop for any reason. Combat cars convoyed the trucks, and patrols, armed with machine guns, stood guard at every crossroad along the way. The four policemen who had been on duty at the warehouses had been overpowered and their guns taken away from them. There was only one hitch — one of the trucks broke down — but it was immediately repaired by a special crew of mechanics. Everything, down to the smallest detail, had been provided for, exactly as in the army. The world should be told that exploits such as this, needing perfect and secret organization, are taking place every day in France.

*(Commissioner of Information, Alger, February 13, 1944)*

## II - ON THE ITALIAN FRONT

### French Anti-Aircraft at the Front

I have been spending a day with the fellows belonging to an anti-aircraft battery in the region battered by enemy artillery... To a civilian like me an anti-aircraft battery is a symbol of watchfulness and of the French effort. Here I found men from Metropolitan France and the Empire, together in the same dugout, exposed to the same dangers, waiting for the common enemy with the same patience and the same determination... Did you know that the best look-outs are the Malgaches (natives of Madagascar) and the Indo-Chinese? They are very patient and can spot enemy planes unerringly. The ones on duty stand on the roof of a ruined hut which seems to be on the point of collapsing and constantly watch the sky through their powerful binoculars... They have 10 to 17 seconds in which to identify a plane and give the alarm, for it takes an enemy machine only that long to reach its objective. The gun crew then have to swing their gun into position, take aim, and fire effectively before the attacking plane can disappear. This calls for lightning speed in reflexes and action.

*(Robert Raymond, ECHO D'ALGER, February 4, 1944)*