

Free France

VOL. 5 No. 9

MAY 1, 1944

PUBLISHED BY THE FRENCH PRESS AND
INFORMATION SERVICE

An Agency of the French Committee of National Liberation

501 Madison Avenue, New York 22, N. Y.

Phone PLaza 3-4361



FRANCE AT WAR

I — FIGHTING FRONT IN FRANCE

The Siege of the Glières Plateau, Haute-Savoie

After the failure of the militia operations in the Savoie region, the Germans launched in the second half of March an offensive against the Glières Plateau ("Free France," Vol. 5, No. 8, page 272). According to the latest news received in London the fighters of the Maquis surrounded on the Plateau, had to withdraw after two weeks of resistance during which they suffered and inflicted considerable losses. The militiamen did not participate in the actual fighting. They were used by the Germans simply as informers. Below are the details, received from London, describing this heroic siege, and excerpts from the neutral press commenting on the patriots and the militiamen.

12,000 Germans Against 500 Patriots

In the course of the second half of March the patriots, entrenched on the Glières Plateau, were attacked by German troops in considerable strength. The men of the Maquis were finally overwhelmed by the attacking force after inflicting upon the Germans considerable losses. The fighting started early in February when the militia was ordered to clean up the region of the Plateau. These operations carried out on orders from Darnand were a total failure, and the numerous counter-attacks and skirmishes in which the patriots took the initiative resulted in serious losses to the enemy. During one of the first engagements, on February 12, near Petit Bornand, a group of about 50 Gardes Mobiles from Chateauroux and the Cévennes region had to fall back, losing 11 men including their commanding officer. This setback suffered by Colonel Lelong's troops was made complete in the engagement of March 13, when 200 soldiers of the Maquis came down from the Glières Plateau — under the command of a former instructor in the Military School of St. Cyr, Lieutenant Morel — and attacked the post of the Gardes Mobiles at Entremonts taking 60 prisoners including two officers.

Thereupon the German troops, which had surrounded the Glières Plateau several days before, were ordered to attack. The troops of the Maquis, numbering 500 men, were commanded by officers and non-commissioned officers, most of whom had belonged to the 27th battalion of the Chasseurs Alpins. The German troops engaged in these operations consisted of five battalions of Alpine infantry, two battalions of SS, two groups of heavy artillery, one group of mountain artillery, 10 light tanks, as well as anti-tank and anti-aircraft equipment. The German aviation took an active part in the operations.

In spite of the enormous difference in numbers and equipment, the resistance of the Patriots lasted two weeks. For ten days the Plateau was subjected to an intense bombardment by enemy aviation and artillery. On the eleventh day the defenders of the stronghold of Glières, who had fallen back to new positions upon orders from their officers, tried to break through the enemy lines. Simultaneously a detachment commanded by Lieutenant Jérôme attempted to join forces with the surrounded patriots by piercing the enemy lines from the outside. In the course of this bold diversion maneuver Lieutenant Jérôme and all his men were killed.

The cost of this victory to the Germans was 400 killed and 300 injured. The defenders of the Glières Plateau shot down two enemy planes. As late as April 4 the fighting continued in the prohibited zone.

This feat of arms worthy of the glorious French military tradition ought to be known by the free peoples of the world. A second Bir Hakeim, the Glières Plateau, bears witness of the will of France to maintain the tradition of French military grandeur. The enemy himself had to pay homage to the epic fighting spirit of these badly armed heroes.

(French Information Services, London, April 8, 1944)

Additional information has come through from France with regard to the battle of the Glières Plateau. The number of the German troops engaged in this action was approximately 12,000. The losses of the Maquis are estimated for the time being at 100 killed and 150 prisoners. The officers inspired their men by their gal-

lant fight at the head of their troops. The proportion of losses among the officers is very great. The retreat was accomplished in perfect order and discipline. One of the German officers who participated in this action is quoted as having said: "These men are full of fighting spirit; as to the militia, they are no damn good!"

(*French Information Services, London, April 9, 1944*)

(A.F.I.) With artillery and air support, the German troops finally succeeded in occupying the Maquis camp on the Glières Plateau. All the chalets were destroyed by shells, bombs and incendiaries. From a count of the skirmishes that have been going on in the Croisy region, where partisan groups are seeking to escape encirclement, it can be estimated that the Germans have engaged 10,000 men in this operation. The "Journal de Genève" says: "We are informed by reliable sources that almost all the partisans managed to escape." The militia, which has suffered constant reverses, did not take part in the operations, but Joseph Darnand and Philippe Henriot, took possession of the captured terrain, in a ceremony that was organized under the auspices of the officer commanding the German troops. In a communiqué issued by the D.N.B. (German News Agency), Henriot stated that the camp contained enough arms and equipment for 4,000 men. No mention of prisoners was made; he admitted that the mass encirclement of the Maquis forces had failed, "since the foreign terrorists, and groups of sharpshooters, who had been abandoned by their officers, did not offer any resistance." Henriot thus confirmed a statement issued from the Maquis to the effect that the order to save men by avoiding a pitched battle had been carried out.

(*France, London, April 3, 1944*)

They Call Them "Terrorists"

Information has reached London from France that on March 13 Lieutenant Tom was treacherously killed at Entremonts in the Glières region, in the course of an interview with a captured Gardes Mobiles officer. Regular Army officer, born leader of men, Lieutenant Tom had been decorated on the field of battle with the Cross of the Légion d'Honneur, during the campaign of France. Enemy propaganda had called him a Communist and terrorist.

In line with those other officers of the French regular Army who died gloriously leading the fighters of the Maquis, such as Lieutenants Brun and Uborre, or the heroic partisan leader Simon, Tom will remain a legendary figure of French Resistance.

(*French Information Services, London, March 31, 1944*)

According to news from France, Lieutenant Jérôme, killed at the head of his troops while attempting to rescue the defenders of Glières, was a Warrant Officer at the 27th Battalion of Chasseurs Alpins. Among other heroes fallen at Glières was Second Lieutenant Barillet of the 6th Battalion of Chasseurs Alpins, killed together with the 30 men of his section.

(*French Information Services, London, April 14, 1944*)

Colonel Lelong on the Maquis Army

Colonel Lelong, who is leading operations against the partisans, stated to the press that the campaign will be very hard and long. Regarding the enemy's organization, the Colonel declared that the partisans operate in six-man groups, on the Communist model. Moreover, the "nomad groups," living in isolated Alpine huts, dominate the whole valley. Partisan sympathisers live even in villages and cities. They pay at least 20 francs per month membership fee, co-operating only in certain actions near their domiciles. In unpopulated areas, a section of the legendary "secret army" operates, which consists of several hundred officers and soldiers of the 27th Chasseurs Alpins Battalion of Nancy, dissolved in November, 1942. According to Lelong, the secret army, formed by Savoie patriots, is enjoying the population's sympathy.

(*Aftonbladet, March 30, 1944*)

The following story, showing how the so-called "terrorists" work, was reported by passengers recently returned from France on the diplomatic exchange ship "Gripsholm":

French patriots, who had learned that a German troop train was scheduled to pass a certain place near Bordeaux on the way to Paris, sabotaged the tracks in order to derail the train. A short time before the German troop train was due the patriots were informed that the schedule had deliberately been changed by the Germans, as a matter of routine protection, and that the regular passenger Bordeaux-Paris train was to take the place of the troop train. In spite of the tremendous danger involved, the patriots immediately returned to repair the sabotaged tracks in order to prevent the otherwise inevitable accident which would have killed many innocent Frenchmen.

Methods of the Militia

Numerous arrests of patriots have been caused by German agents and militiamen who are using false identity papers and have thus succeeded, in certain cases, in obtaining membership in the Francs Tireurs. The gravity of Darnand's repression measures cannot be overlooked. The French Himmler knows that he has no friends among the population except his own henchmen. In Savoie, the Resistance suffered heavy losses and expect further assaults. It is indispensable to provide immediately the necessary means to face the situation.

(*Le Démocrate, March 14, 1944*)

Neutral Opinion on the Militia

The following is from a letter — written by a French citizen living in France near the Swiss frontier — which has reached Lausanne through secret channels: "Life has become intolerable . . . Everywhere people of all ages are denounced by informers and the worst part is that these informers are not Germans but Frenchmen. The most dangerous elements have found their

way into the militia, among them eighteen-year-old youths. This gang, which allegedly works for the maintenance of order, spreads disorder, burns farms, terrorizes inhabitants during the night, and searches and arrests "suspected" people. Questionings, beatings, and all sorts of other means are used to obtain denunciations. The recent news broadcasts regarding the explosion in the militia center near Thonon, which has allegedly caused many victims, is untrue. According to my opinion, this false report has been broadcast in France in order to justify in Swiss eyes the acts of robbery committed by militiamen against so-called terrorists."

(*Gazette de Lausanne, March 20, 1944*)

II — UNDERGROUND FIGHTS GERMAN WAR MACHINE

Sabotage

The following balance sheet — published in London — of sabotage activities in the Massif Central from November 6 to November 11, 1943, gives an idea of the large-scale activities of the French underground:

The Clermont-Ferrand station, and the Langeac depot were blown up.

Fire was set to a stock of Michelin tires that were going to Germany.

The rotary printing press of Pierre Laval's paper "Le Moniteur du Puy de Dôme" was blown up.

A tank in St. Hilaire containing 260,000 liters of gasoline was destroyed.

A store belonging to a notorious collaborationist in Clermont-Ferrand was destroyed.

In the station of Pont-Mort 10 patriots, who had been sentenced to hard labor, escaped.

In Tallende 13 motorcycles and side cars, and two small cars were taken by the patriots.

In Massiac a new tank-truck belonging to the Todt organization and containing 5,000 liters of gasoline was taken.

Gasoline was taken from the gasoline dumps of Pontgibaud, St. Babel, and Romagnat.

Many cars and trucks were taken in Pont-du-Château, Billom, and Volvic.

A great many weapons were carried off.

Towers conveying electric power to the central part of France were blown up.

The Turbot factory was blown up, as well as the Ollier iron works that were turning out a vast amount of material for the Germans.

A store belonging to a militiaman, which served as a meeting place for the Militia, was blown up.

A five-ton truck belonging to the Germans was blown up.

Towers conveying electric power to steel works were blown up, just as the St. Etienne factories ordered a speed-up of the casting.

Various reprisals were made against collaborationists and informers — 20 men disappeared.

Canadian aviators who were forced down near Montluçon were rescued under the very noses of the Germans.

In Royat the home of G. Sardier, departmental head of the Service d'Ordre Légionnaire (collaborationist organization) was blown up.

From a Chantier de Jeunes in Châtel-Guyon the Underground seized gasoline, oil, tires, two motorcycles, one truck, and General Delaporte Dutheil's private car.

The Underground took all the clothes and shoes from store-houses in Laroche-Faugère and Vertaizon.

Three patriots who had been interned for seventeen days in Issoire were enabled to escape.

In Lezoux there were continual free-for-all fights with the Germans, one of our men was killed. German losses: two killed and two wounded.

In Clermont-Ferrand, an armored car was taken from the police garage in broad daylight.

In Montluçon the Underground took all the gasoline from two gasoline dumps.

A troop train was derailed in Ménétrol.

In Royat the German Paradis Broadcasting Station was blown up.

The steel works of Ancizes, that had a monthly output of 3,000 tons of soft steel, used in manufacturing planes, was blown up, stopping work for three months.

There was an engagement with a feld gendarmerie patrol: three Germans were killed.

Reprisals for the murder of a patriot (10 executions in 15 days).

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

Various Activities

The Co-ordinating Committee for the Struggle against Deportation, created by the National Resistance Council, has entered, under the pressure of events, a new phase of activity, that of the offensive. It puts on record that in the industrial centers the fight against deportation is an important reinforcement of the action aimed against the occupation forces, and in particular of the sabotage of enemy works and of industries supporting his war effort. The Committee states furthermore that its activity is indispensable to increase and replace the troops of the Maquis. It takes cognizance of the double failure of both Vichy and the Germans with regard to the deportation of the '44 class and the departure of the new contingent of labor draftees for Germany. By the end of February, 1944, only 1,500 of the 200,000 men demanded by Sauckel had been sent to Germany.

In the five days from January 2 to 6, 1944, 143 acts of sabotage were committed in France:

38 actions against railroads

49 various ambushes

14 cases of sabotage

42 actions against collaborationist organizations.



A VICTORY FOR THE FRENCH UNDERGROUND

Taken at the greatest risk, the photographs on this and the next page, have just been received from the Underground. They show the destruction in November, 1943 — by the French Underground Army — of the German munitions works and artillery park at Grenoble. Explosions, continuing for more than six hours, destroyed ten anti-tank guns, 60 mortars, 400 tons of provisions, 50 tons of powder, and 150 tons of other explosives. The Germans seized 300 hostages in the city and refused to release them when threatened with reprisals. Thereupon, the patriots blew up the Bonne barracks, killing 220 and wounding 550 of the invaders.





Statistical data covering January 13 to 20, 1944 indicate 128 actions as follows:

- 78 actions against railroads
- 21 various ambushes
- 15 cases of sabotage
- 14 actions against collaborationist organizations

The information received is incomplete, except for the railroads. Besides, during the five days January 17 to 22, twelve locomotives have been damaged by explosions in their sheds, and 41 actions have taken place resulting in derailments or in interruption of communications. On several occasions strikes have been organized in the Graissessac region, resulting in the loss of 1200 tons of coal. On January 15, two acts of sabotage were responsible for the destruction of electric cables in Peirruis and Lepoet, in the region of Marseille. These electric cables carry electric energy to Saint Auban where the current was interrupted for more than six hours. The magnesium plant in Saint Auban has been forced to interrupt its work for a period of two months due to the indirect effects of this act of sabotage.

(*French Information Services, London, April 1, 1944*)

Punitive Executions by Resistance

Under the command of a Captain, a "Corps Franc" has been organized with the aim of avenging captured fellow patriots who are tortured and murdered by the Gestapo instead of being treated as prisoners of war. In the course of the month of January, the Corps Franc attacked a convoy of four German cars on the road of Castelnaudry and executed all the occupants of the cars. Among those executed were Colonel Ardelo — a leading official of the Gestapo services in Spain — as well as a lieutenant and three agents of the Gestapo in Toulouse who had been guilty of denunciations.

(*French Information Services, London, March 27, 1944*)

ON THE ITALIAN FRONT

Communiqués from General Headquarters

The activity of French troops in the second half of March is summed up in the following communiqués from Allied General Headquarters in Italy:

(March 13) French troops of the 3rd Army repelled two powerful attacks against their positions, inflicting casualties on the enemy. Heavy fighting continues in Cassino. A counter-attack launched against one of our positions dominating the town was repulsed by our troops, which made prisoners. Allied patrols were very active in the 8th Army sector and on the Allied bridgehead held by the 5th Army.

(*La Dépêche Algérienne, March 24, 1944*)

Americans Awarded Croix de Guerre

Some fifteen American officers and soldiers, belonging to a battalion of chemical warfare mortars, who had performed outstanding deeds of valor in the two heroic battles of Pentano and Mt. San Croce won by the French troops, were awarded the Croix de Guerre by General

Juin, commanding the French expeditionary corps in Italy, accompanied by Colonel Kammerer, chief of the French-American liaison mission.

(*La Dépêche Algérienne, March 24, 1944*)

(March 29) Three small-scale attacks against the positions held by the 5th Army on the bridgehead were repulsed. On the main front, French troops also repulsed a German attack. Allied patrols were active on the whole front.

(*Alger Républicain, March 29, 1944*)

With the French Troops

THE SAN CROCE FIGHT. The fight at San Croce is one of the most glorious episodes of the Italian campaign. An officer who does not, as a rule, approve of high-sounding words, described it to me as an "extraordinary display of heroism." It is from the stories of the participants themselves that I have been able to reconstitute a more or less accurate picture of the difficulties overcome by our tirailleurs and to understand the reasons for this victory of the French arms.

Our tirailleurs had to face an enemy clinging to shelters dug two or three meters deep, in the mass of the rocks. These shelters gave access to trenches, provided with shooting niches, which the defenders of the position could reach within a few seconds after the fire protecting the attack had subsided. How did our infantry succeed in overcoming such formidable obstacles? Undoubtedly because of the support of very powerful artillery barrages. In one half hour one battery of mortars fired 1500 volleys. On the other hand, our tirailleurs displayed exceptional maneuvering qualities, and stuck as closely as possible to the rolling artillery barrages. And, most important of all, they fought with superhuman fury and self-sacrifice — with hand-grenades, with bayonets — a handful of men, advancing ahead of the bulk of our forces, they repelled the most furious counter-attacks. Sergeants took over the command of decimated companies. Men made prisoners by the enemy escaped to resume fighting.

(*Rafales, Alger, March 30, 1944*)

WITH THE TRUCK DRIVERS. (From Elisabeth de Miribel, French war correspondent.) The nights are so dark that it takes the truck convoys 14 hours to cover 14 kilometers in the mountains. The Germans make use of this slowness to block the roads! Each truck is preceded by a guide on foot who indicates the bends of the road and warns of the danger of precipices. One evening, a truck — summoned to rescue the remainder of a convoy, part of which had rolled over a precipice — tumbled down itself, crushing under its weight the victims of the first incident, who were being rescued. The infantrymen prefer to climb on foot up to their lines, whatever the risk, rather than use these extremely slow trucks.

During the day, the risks are different. The only serious incidents are due to enemy planes which machine-gun the trucks loaded with munitions. The fires illuminating the road make good targets of the rest of the convoy, which can then be bombed copiously. "On the road to Acqua-