

# FRANCE AT WAR

## I—FRENCH FORCES TAKE PART IN THE INVASION OF FRANCE

### *The Part of French Parachutists*

**French parachutists in Cherbourg Peninsula** — Supreme Headquarters, Allied Expeditionary Force, June 9 — It was revealed today that French parachute troops are participating in the invasion of the Cherbourg Peninsula, and proving especially effective as guides, through their knowledge of the terrain.

(NEW YORK TIMES, June 10, 1944)

**General Koenig's final appeal to French 'Chutists** — A few days before the invasion, General Koenig, commanding the French Forces stationed in Great Britain, visited the French troops which had been taking part in preliminary invasion operations, and the parachutists who were to participate in the battle. Each of them had been given a special mission, a specific objective to be reached.

In a brief speech, General Koenig said that the myth of German invincibility is now at an end, and that total victory in the near future is certain. During this inspection, aviators and parachutists showed magnificent fighting spirit and resolution.

(French Information Services, London, June 9, 1944)

### *The part played by the French Air Force in invasion operations*

Among the invasion troops who are fighting for the liberation of the European continent, the French air squadrons deserve honorable mention.

The pursuit groups "Alsace," "Ile de France," "Berry," "Les Cigognes" are flying over the Normandy beaches, effectively contributing to the protection of trains of Glider planes which transport reinforcements directly to the battlefields.

The "Lorraine" group of Boston light bombers were busily engaged from daybreak on June 6, spreading a protective smoke screen. There are several veterans of the Libyan campaign among the pilots, and "Bleus," who have just finished their training in Canada. They outdo each other in skill and courage, hedge-hopping, and attacking columns of enemy tanks and the Wehrmacht's communication lines.

The necessary secrecy which must still be observed concerning military operations makes it impossible to relate the individual exploits and the prowess of all these groups of French flyers who are scattered through the Royal Air Force squadrons. Nor is it possible to disclose what splendid service our parachutists have rendered; the joy and pride they experienced when setting foot on their native soil has carried them through the most difficult moment, and given them strength to conquer every obstacle.

And so the Cross of Lorraine is flying over battlefields in Normandy, where it has been for four years of suffering and continued resistance, the symbol of the survival of France, of liberation, and of faith in the future grandeur of the Nation.

(French Information Services, London, June 13, 1944)

### *The part played by the Merchant Marine in the Invasion*

*The following is an article by Robert Nivelles, A.F.I. war correspondent, who was with the Allied Merchant Marine on Invasion Day, June 6, 1944.*

"We furnished the tools, now the Navy and the Army are going to do the job." A few minutes after H-Hour, a merchant marine captain repeated Prime Minister Churchill's words. "These tools were perfected during many long months and now they are splendid precision instruments which made possible and will make possible this uninterrupted invasion." But the word "invasion" is no longer used. The Allies have set forth to liberate Europe, and first of all to liberate France.

We were heading for the French coast when the captain declared, "Gentlemen, this is a new day and there lies France." Suddenly, the men began singing the "Marseillaise" as if it had been their own national anthem. I was a Frenchman, and I was a hero to these men who were going to liberate us. Whenever I went up a companionway or opened a door, I could still hear the "Marseillaise," because a boy from England, Scotland, Wales, or Ireland would be singing somewhere near. All the men had been given booklets about France, which they read avidly at breakfast or tea-time. These time-honored meals, and their reading, kept them busy until H-Hour. I do not mean to say that the men were unaware of the danger they were about to face — most of them had lived through the tragic hours of Dunkirk; some soldiers had been through the Battle of France, and had been driven back to the sea on that famous beach. Merchant seamen of this troop transport had volunteered to evacuate the army in Dunkirk, in 1940.

Today, these men are again volunteering, not to rescue the army, but to support it, not to re-embark it for England, but to land it in France. This landing was minutely prepared by the Merchant Marine staff, and the operation resembled the working of a precision machine. All winches and cranes used for loading and unloading the ship were on board. If the crew needed help, the soldiers aboard lent a hand, the crew telling them what to do. During attacks by Junker 88s, which the Allied fighter planes would immediately shoot down or scatter, during the incessant roaring of the big guns on the Nelson, the Rodney, the Arkansas, the Montcalm

and Georges Leyges, the captain and the second engineer quietly went on with their work. Everyone behaved as though he were still unloading coal in some British seaside resort, and if the captain and engineer were on deck during the crossing, it was just in case something happened.

Yes, something is happening: these men who are volunteers in the British Merchant Marine, the sailors of the Allied fleets, and the French merchant seamen who are sailing with them, are linking Great Britain with our soil to liberate the Continent.

(French Information Services, London, June 12, 1944)

### ***Part played by the French Forces of the Interior in the Invasion***

The French Forces of the Interior,<sup>1</sup> have greatly contributed to the success of Allied operations in Normandy. The weeks preceding the invasion were marked by a renewal of acts of sabotage against communications connecting the Parisian region with the North of France, Normandy and Brittany. The railroad lines and highways connecting Paris and Le Tréport, Cherbourg, Lamballe, Granville, Quimper, Brest, and the Mezidon, Argentan, Lison and Lamballe lines were cut in many places. Transport of materiel and troops was interrupted. The Norman patriots also attacked electric installations which supply the German defensive system along the Channel coast. As one instance, many high voltage pylons in the Orne have been blown up. It will be remembered that the Allied High Command revealed that radio location posts had been destroyed. The French Forces of the Interior everywhere are on a war footing, ready to take action at the first signal from the Supreme Allied Command.

(French Information Services, London, June 9, 1944)

According to information from dependable sources, the plans designed to facilitate the Allied landing were executed throughout French territory with complete success, especially those for hindering German strategic movements along railroads and highways.

It is reported that French Forces of the Interior and German forces of more than 2,000 men have clashed in the *Vosges*. The French took 300 prisoners. In the *Nord*, the St. Quentin, Merville and Bac St. Maur canals were cut. In the *Ain*, 50 engines, two turntables and the machine shop at Amberieu were destroyed. In this region, as well as in Saône-et-Loire, the population is organized in support of the French Forces of the Interior, and is revolting against the German army. Fighting is proceeding at Bourg and Mâcon. In the *East*, following an attack on transformers in the region of Lunéville, factories will be deprived of two-thirds of the electrical current they need for at least two months. In *Brittany*, guerrilla bands have attacked the Germans, killing 20 of the enemy and seizing a great deal of equipment.

<sup>1</sup>The French Forces of the Interior include the Secret Army and the Guerrillas and Partisans. See page 23.

In view of the success achieved by the Allied army in Normandy, the Vichy Government, and the occupation authorities have adopted certain safety precautions. The first we heard were those broadcast over the radio. Radio-Vichy, in a program at 12:30, on June 10, announced: "Franc-gardes and militia, by order of your chief, Joseph Darnand: You are to go to the assembly points which have been indicated. You must not allow yourself to be prevented by any consideration whatsoever. The fulfilment of this duty is more important than anything else<sup>2</sup>."

And from Paris, at one o'clock, the following communiqué was issued: "From now on, until further orders, telegraphic communications will be suspended in the occupied zone to the north of the following lines; the demarcation line running from the Swiss frontier to Nevers, and from there following the course of the Loire to its mouth. Regional telephone connections and trunk calls will also be immediately cut off in the same territory unless the subscriber has received a special written authorization. Applications for such permits must be addressed to the Kommandantur, and for the Paris region to the Commanding Officer for Greater Paris. Any violation of this order will lead to prosecution for conniving with the enemy, and will be punished according to the laws at present in force."

(French Information Services, London, June 10, 1944)

### ***In Bayeux, the first French town to be liberated***

The account published below comes from the spokesman of the Provisional Government of the French Republic, who has broadcast from London for the past four years. He landed in Normandy with the storm troops. His first cable was sent from Bayeux.

**Visit to the leader of local Resistance** — I certainly did not expect this triumphal march. I thought we would have to pay a higher price for liberation . . . There is a sea of flags in Bayeux and crosses of Lorraine are everywhere. Only a few miles behind the lines, a fiery enthusiasm has consumed even the memory of the four years of martyrdom endured by the French, and all this is no dream, it is true. I had been told that I would set foot on a battlefield where there would be no inhabitants: "The people who have not been evacuated or deported will have fled because of the ravages of war." And yet, it was right in the middle of a battlefield, on D-Day, that I met my first Frenchman, who had spotted my helmet from a distance. Later, when the last German had been routed, this man led me to his village. From then on I was carried, borne aloft, snatched into people's arms and submerged by the crowd. Normans are supposed to be a phlegmatic people; Lord knows what would have happened if they were excitable.

<sup>2</sup>See page 27. Joseph Darnand's broadcast to the Militia.

I am writing from near the Bayeux cathedral. I am in the back room of a small shop, where for three years the organizer of the local Resistance movement has commanded his sector of the French front. Seated around me are his fifteen principal aides, who did not know each other until a few hours ago. It was quite a sight to see the old canon of the cathedral, and the old "anticlerical," who had fought each other for 30 years, falling into each other's arms, when they learned that they were both members of the underground. The two school teachers, who had hidden tricolor armbands, made two years ago, have brought them out, and sewed them to the sleeves of their comrades-in-arms.

Outside there is a huge crowd. The whole town is out to greet the liberators, and there are flags at every window.

The shop door opens, and a girl whose husband is a hostage, comes in carrying her baby. Behind her are two girls who have just been released from prison, then two boys who coolly ask me when de Gaulle will get here to give them their uniforms, and how long it will take them to learn how to handle new weapons.

This is Bayeux today, and tomorrow we shall live this day over again, and re-savor our happiness.

*(French Information Services, London, June 10, 1944)*

**Germany increases number of defense centers in order to scatter Allied offensives** — In a forward sector of the front, I met an Allied officer who had been taken prisoner near Tobruk, in 1942. He told me he had made his escape through France. "For 14 days," he said, "I witnessed the magnificent solidarity of the French fighting members of the Resistance. These men and women did not hesitate to risk their lives in order to save me. Now I have an opportunity of showing my gratitude by hastening their liberation. When the populations of liberated villages throw flowers on my jeep and thank me, I thank them, too."

On the battlefield before Bayeux, one gathers the general impression that the Germans were confused by the break in their "impregnable" western wall. Except for one or two points, the enemy did not hold it for more than a few hours, and none of their positions held against the Allied attack longer than two days. However, the enemy's confusion did not turn into panic. Rommel, who inspected this region only a few weeks ago, obviously expected an Allied attack. From then on, the purely defensive strategic plan which he carried out, was to increase the number of local defensive points, so as to slow down the establishment of an Allied defense line, and also to give the Germans time to prepare a counterattack, supported by the armored forces they are re-assembling. Until now there are only precursory signs of this move. Armored units attempted a local counterattack on the Caen-Bayeux railway line, which was a complete failure.

I must say the prisoners captured today give me a very different impression from the ones captured dur-

ing the first two days of the invasion. The hundreds of prisoners we captured on June 6 and 7 apparently belonged to dissimilar troops or to foreign units. They represented the majority. I saw a British officer questioning a Russian prisoner who spoke hardly any German. Tonight, on the contrary, the German prisoners have a military bearing. All this tends to prove that the enemy is gathering his forces together and recovering. However, though a counterattack could have been dangerous on the first day, when the invading army had only been able to get its first units into position, today it would not be as serious.

Yesterday, hundreds of vehicles were brought over and landed. The Luftwaffe, which since yesterday had an easy target within reach, made only feeble bombing attempts. I saw the powerful anti-aircraft guns on the Allied warships shoot down several enemy planes, but I did not see a single hit scored on any of the battle-ships.

I can only repeat what was told to me by an Allied staff officer who was better placed than anyone for getting an impression of the whole operation. "Two things astonished me: the first was the comparative weakness of the German coastal defenses; the second was the extraordinary strength and amazing unity of the French Resistance." I answered that I did not share his surprise, and he added: "It remains to be seen if the remaining enemy tank forces also have the same sort of agreeable surprise in store for us." We still have to find that out. In the meantime, for at present the battle has hardly begun, I am going to sleep in a bed where Rommel is said to have slept a fortnight ago, when he was inspecting the western wall.

*(French Information Services, London, June 11, 1944)*

**Liberated Frenchmen demand to be mobilized** — While the cannon roars not far away, Bayeux has continued to celebrate its liberation, prolonging its first rejoicings into a huge and spontaneous demonstration. The number of people participating is greater than the entire population of the town. An immense crowd has gathered from liberated villages in the surrounding regions, some even coming from certain places which are still occupied by the enemy.

Yesterday, at the end of the afternoon, a drummer had gone through the town announcing that the spokesman of the Provisional Government of the French Republic would address the people at three o'clock in the main square. I had taken care, when returning to Bayeux, to bring back with me from the front lines three Allied officers and a soldier, who received a tremendous ovation when they each in turn expressed their gratitude and their admiration for their brothers in arms. The demonstration was presided over by a woman, mother of a family, who was the second in command of a section of the French Forces of the Interior from this region, now liberated. Shouts of enthusiasm re-echoed through the town all afternoon. I will only mention one cry "Mobilisez-nous" (take

us into the army!), raised first of all by the young men, then by veterans, and even by women, who seem to have played an important, in fact a predominant part in Resistance, both by their own exertions, and by the clever use they have made of their children.

It is impossible to take a step without being besieged with questions like: "When will General de Gaulle order mobilization? When are we going to fight under General Koenig?" The first French town set free the day after the invasion without having suffered in the battle, is fired not with any ordinary enthusiasm, but with a tremendous eagerness to fight. That is the chief point which I cannot emphasize too strongly. When we left Bayeux to go back to the various theatres of operations which are quite close to the town, we had the greatest difficulty in preventing the young men of Bayeux from following us. Many of them have undertaken the most dangerous missions to further the operations. Several of them are very indignant because it seems to them that the B.B.C. did not describe the town's enthusiasm about the first signs of liberation in sufficiently lyrical terms. I can bear witness that the last German had hardly left the town before the first flags with the Lorraine Cross were hoisted on several buildings, noticeably, on the highest one, where two schoolteachers live, and on one of the lowest, where an old abbé — the Cathedral organist, lives.

Bayeux — liberated, and yet in the front line, is completely mobilized, and is waiting for the French Government to confirm this mobilization.

(French Information Services, London, June 12, 1944)

### *General de Gaulle in Normandy*

On his arrival in France on board the destroyer "La Combattante," General de Gaulle, who was accompanied by several of his staff officers, was met by British officers, belonging to General Montgomery's staff. The few hours which the Head of the Provisional Government of France spent on French soil, were mainly devoted to visiting Bayeux, where General de Gaulle spoke with leaders of the Resistance movement. On his way to the small Norman city, General de Gaulle rode in a jeep, driven by a British liaison officer. The general passed through several villages, some of which were in ruins. The people recognized him immediately and he was enthusiastically acclaimed. Bayeux had been informed of his arrival one hour before; all the shops were immediately closed, and tricolor flags were hung on every window. When General de Gaulle's jeep arrived in the main street, crowds vibrant with enthusiasm were massed along the sidewalks. The Head of the French Government climbed out of the jeep and walked to the "Sous Préfecture", surrounded on all sides by wildly cheering crowds, who shouted "Vive de Gaulle! Vive la France!"

At the Sous Préfecture, General de Gaulle was met by General Koenig, the hero of Bir-Hacheim, Admiral

Thierry d'Argenlieu, Commander-in-Chief of the French Naval Forces, as well as the leaders of Resistance movements and city officials, with whom he had long conversations.

General de Gaulle was enthusiastically acclaimed as he went to the main square, where the population of Bayeux had gathered. He spoke first to young Frenchmen who had been wounded a few days before, while crossing through the German lines to bring valuable information to the Allied troops. Then, as "Tipperary" was broadcast over loudspeakers, General de Gaulle walked over to the speakers' stand. He was presented to the crowd by Captain Schumann, who was the Fighting France spokesman over the B.B.C. for four years. General de Gaulle stood erect, and bareheaded, and speaking for the Provisional Government of the Republic, he hailed with deep emotion the town of Bayeux, "the first French town to be liberated."

*The people of Normandy, said the General, have never wavered in their patriotism. But what the French behind the German lines want to hear, is the battle cry, a cry which has continually been raised. The voice of France is, at the same time, the voice of struggle and of liberty.*

*What history has called the "Battle of France," has never ceased. France still lives through all her suffering and through all her efforts — the efforts of her armies on land, on sea and in the air. Today, these forces are valiantly fighting in Italy, and soon they will fight in Metropolitan France.*

*Behind the German lines, our people are engaged in the terrible battle against the hated oppressor, and now watch the flight of the enemy. The French people are waging this battle almost without arms. They will continue it, however, until the sovereignty of France is entirely restored. We shall gain the victory, side-by-side with our Allies, and the victory of the free world, will be the victory of France.*

At the close of his speech, General de Gaulle asked the population to sing la Marseillaise, which he started himself. Then, surrounded by the enthusiastic crowd, he returned to a jeep in which he was to drive back to the beach, where "La Combattante" was waiting to take him back to England.

(Commissioner of Information, Alger, June 15, 1944)

## II—ITALIAN FRONT

### *With Rome liberated, Allied and French troops continue their advance*

**Gustav Line broken through** — From May 12, 1944, when the offensive for Rome was launched by General Alexander, the French Expeditionary Corps never ceased to play a major part within the Fifth Army's general plan of operations. The French Expeditionary Corps ensured the break-through in the Gustav line. Lashing out between Minturno and the Liri River, on a 12