

## FRANCE AT WAR

### FRANCE DOES NOT FORGET THE WAR

*France has been at war since September 3, 1939. She has never been out of the war, despite the Armistice of 1940, despite the German occupation. On battlefields abroad, as well as in the Resistance at home, France has contributed to the cause of liberty the weight of her troops and her FFI, her bases in the Pacific, the prestige of her loyalty to the Allies and above all her inspiration in her voluntarily accepted martyrdom. As M. Guignebert, Director of Radiodiffusion de la Nation Française, said in a radio address on October 13 last, in reply to certain Allied correspondents who had somewhat lightly reproached France with forgetting the war:*

*"We have not forgotten that the battle was fought and is still being fought on our soil, and that when France has been completely liberated we shall still have to fight on enemy soil. . . . We ask that no hasty conclusions be drawn from the healthy look we feel politeness requires of us and we would like above all that it be not forgotten that the French people are emerging from a régime of terror which has oppressed them for four years and which has directly or indirectly struck them all."*

### I—VOSGES—BELFORT FRONT

The Germans have regrouped part of their forces all along their west frontier from the Ardennes to the Belfort Gap behind Alsace-Lorraine, and are stiffly resisting the Allies. The American Seventh Army commanded by General Alexander Patch and the French First Army commanded by General Delattre de Tassigny are fighting on the Alsace-Lorraine front, with the French holding the southern sector. The triangle formed by the line from Lunéville, in Meurthe-et-Moselle, to Le Thillot, in Vosges, and east to Colmar, on the edge of the Rhine plain, is the area in which the present operations are concentrated.

The FFI are still active in this region, despite the fact that the Resistance in Alsace-Lorraine was reduced to a minimum by the German military police and the Gestapo, who both know today the cost to them of FFI action within their lines. There still are isolated groups of Patriots in the two provinces; and the AFP announced on September 20, that "the FFI of the Ballon d'Alsace have successfully hampered the disposition of troops in the German rear near Giromagny." Moreover, a great many Patriots have crossed over into neighboring Departments and lent valuable aid to French and Allied troops with their thorough knowledge of the terrain. Lastly, the Brigade Alsace-Lorraine made up of Alsatian and Lorraine Patriots who came from the Dordogne, Gers, Corrèze and Savoie Maquis, arrived in the Belfort region to join the French Army after a period of training.

*(French Press and Information Service, New York, October 30, 1944)*

### *The War From Day to Day*

*Below is an account of the operations in the American Seventh and French First Army sector from reports by Clifton Daniel, New York Times war correspondent at Supreme Headquarters, Allied Expeditionary Force:*

October 16 . . . With the gain in momentum that swept them through several towns, the French First Army forces on the extreme southern end of the Allies' battleline began to pose a positive threat to the defenders of at least one of the six major passes leading through the Vosges Mountains to the Upper Rhine and outflanking the German bolt position of Belfort. . . . South of Cornimont, the French pushed forward to Travexin. Eleven miles northeast of Le Thillot, the western slope of the useful Hill du Tot has been overrun and Rochesson, four miles northwest of Cornimont, has been outflanked. With these advances the French troops are now approaching the road through the Schlucht Pass of La Bresse . . .

October 17 . . . Slight gains continued to be made in the difficult country of the Vosges foothills, on the American Seventh and French First Army front. Advances were made around Rochesson, seven miles east of Remiremont, and Cornimont, eleven miles east of Remiremont. French troops progressed east of the Moselette River, sometimes after exceptionally heavy local fighting . . .

October 18 . . . Farther south the American Seventh Army repulsed two counter-attacks around the forest of Parroy, northeast of Lunéville, without loss of ground. The French First Army mopped up Haut-des-Tombeaux in the forest northeast of Cornimont, after beating back three attacks in the hills around Haut-du-Faing and occupying Lamalcourt, southeast of Cornimont. . . . Tedious fighting for the approaches to the Vosges passes continued on the American Seventh and French First Army front at the southern end of the line. Supported by tanks and heavy artillery the Germans counter-attacked yesterday southwest of the forest of Parroy, north of Bruyères and in the Rochesson area, northwest of Le Thillot. The attacks were continued. . . . Limited Allied advances were made around Cornimont, which the French troops now outflank by two and a half miles to the northeast and southeast; and northwest of Baccarat, where stiff encounters occurred at Menil-Flin and Glonville. . . .

October 19 . . . Fighting against the French First Army penetrations into the Vosges north of Belfort the Germans made six counter-attacks yesterday in an effort to regain ground west of the Moselette River near Cornimont. The French retained their positions, and southeast of Cornimont they sent armor out in several local actions, captured 200 men and a German battalion commander. . . .

October 21 . . . Far to the south, Lieutenant General



Alexander Patch's American Seventh Army forces made gains east and north of Bruyères after having captured the stubbornly held strong point east of Epinal. The road from Bruyères leads east into two passes running directly through to Colmar on the edge of the Rhine plain. French forces in the Vosges foothills to the south were clearing strong enemy units from the forests in an advance east of the Moselette bend around Cornimont. . . .

October 22 . . . Lulls were indicated on the French First Army front and also on the eastern end of the British salient into the Netherlands.

October 24 . . . Beating all counter-attacks east and northeast of Emberménil, beyond the forest of Parroy, American Seventh Army men knocked out a minimum of five tanks yesterday. Other units of the Seventh also made several crossings of the Mortagne River around Frémfontaine after encountering stiff German opposition on the west bank.

French First Army forces made slight gains northeast of Cornimont. Somewhere in the area of these two armies elements of a Volks Grenadier regiment have been encountered. With good equipment and experienced officers and noncommissioned officers the German unit apparently was formed under Hitler. . . .

London (AP) . . . The first snows of winter added to the weather difficulties of American and French troops in Northeastern France. . . .

October 25 . . . First Army communiqué transmitted by the French Press Agency (AFP):

In spite of persisting bad weather, our troops remain very active in the Vosges and improve their positions, especially in the wooded areas. They are consolidating the ground won and reestablishing communications. The enemy continues to resist despite severe losses inflicted by our artillery and mortars.

On both sides of the Doubs our infantry units, in close liaison with FFI elements, maintain great activity day and night. Our troops show much aggressiveness in their maneuvers, in their patrol activity and in raids.

In the Alps the enemy launched an attack during the night against one of our advanced detachments in Haute Maurienne, but was repelled with heavy losses.

In the Briançonnet and the Ubaye area artillery is active on both sides.

October 30 . . . Supreme Headquarters, Allied Expeditionary Force (By Drew Middleton) — ". . . On the American Seventh Army front doughboys pushed into Fraipertuis and Bru, east of Rambervillers and held them against strong counter attacks. Slight gains also were reported in the Lunéville sector. The French have repulsed new enemy counterattacks in the Vosges sector and are patrolling south of Montbéliard. . . ."

### **Reports From the Front**

*Below are two reports by a French war correspondent on the French front. Though these dispatches are already outdated owing to the recent advances, they hold for us a psychological and sentimental meaning*

*owing to the fact that the author is French, working in the atmosphere of France and in the company of French troops.*

**Brief Episode in the War of Movement** — Nothing can give a clearer idea of the atmosphere of the war of movement in France, now drawing to a close, than the experience we had, a few days before the capture of Langres and Chaumont and the junction of the American Armies of the North and South<sup>1</sup>. We had just looked over the outposts of the column attacking Langres. We had to return to Besançon that we might come back and enter Langres as "liberators." The shortest way seemed to be through Grey on the Saône River. But hardly had we crossed a badly battered bridge, barely passable for us, than we noticed that we were not meeting any more French or American soldiers. The road was beautiful and too tempting. One village decked with flags, then another. But the peasants did not appear too ready to cheer the liberators, and we had been accustomed to heartier receptions. We could not even see a face. As we approached Chassigny we slowed down; the village was magnificently decorated, but there was not a soul in the main street.

The road takes a sharp turn in this village and the public square is about a hundred meters beyond. At last we saw a crowd that would at least interrupt the bareness of our trip. Somebody in the crowd pointed us out to the others, and to our complete amazement we saw the whole group fade away in no time at all. The peasants scattered like sparrows. No one remained to welcome us.

When we had reached the square we stopped our car hoping to solve the mystery. Then the people of Chassigny were able to see the insignia on our car.

"Ah, you are French! We thought you were Boches. Your car is the same color as those the Wehrmacht requisitioned. We heard that they had taken Champlitte again."

"That is a false rumor. We passed through there this morning."

"We were scared just the same. You see, we put our flags up as soon as they left. But we had not yet seen any French soldiers. You are the first. May we kiss you?" And then we found ourselves smothered in flowers!

The most humorous aspect of this insignificant story, which shows how much more interested our command is in driving out the enemy more rapidly than in effecting a symbolic occupation, the most humorous aspect is that these gallant souls had taken a German prisoner! And they wanted to give him to us, as if thus to make amends for their excusable mistake. As he would have been cumbersome and we did not especially care for a doubtful companionship, we refused him.

(ALGER REPUBLICAIN, September 29, 1944)

**Nearing Alsace** — I was not wrong in my prediction that the Boches would fiercely defend Belfort, Alsace

<sup>1</sup>The junction of Leclerc's division and Delattre de Tassigny's Army occurred at the same point.





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*General Jacques Leclerc, Commander of the French Second Armored Division, now on the Vosges Front*

and Lorraine, advanced strongholds of our reversed Maginot Line, the Rhine and their Siegfried Line. However, there will be a quick finish if the Northern Army is able to swing around the Siegfried Line.

In the meantime, nothing wrung my heart more than the sight of that small village of Geney a few kilometers north of Isle-sur-le-Doubs. Of course, I have seen Italy, Cassino, Cisterna, Poggibonsi . . . But this is France.

We had just crossed fields perfumed by the coming fall. Our eyes had seen all the greens of the world, the gilding of the coming season . . . Our eyes still held the sight of the fir trees, the elms, the birches, the ash, and they were still softened by the calm stare of the "belled" cows. But here, a fine milk cow, its stiffened legs pointing toward the road, its udder about to burst, more dead than a man could be, seemed to bear the message: "Beware, here we have war."

The road, cribbled by 28 mm. shells and mortars, crossed a plateau; all the surrounding fields were strewn with cattle struck by death only a few hours ago. The other animals, the live ones, were grazing. No one bothered to bury the dead cows and horses, killed by shells that were not aimed at them. And here is the village, black, burnt to a cinder. Not a soldier in sight, an old woman crying on her doorstep. A group watches us go by. Their eyes are so red from crying that we hesitate to ask them the way. The ruins are still smoking. The Germans are only 2 kilometers away . . .

And here is the command post of the North African soldiers whom we have come to visit. What a contrast! Officers and men are gay. A section leader arrives, he is nervously gay. The next section has been sighted, the "Boches" 500 meters away, 800 meters from us, are firing. Foxholes must be dug, we have to hide. "Pinelli has had a stroke of luck, Captain. A mortar shell landed only 50 centimeters away from him. He is all right only a little shaken."

Pinelli arrives. A boy of 25, with a Corsican accent. He is wearing a funny British helmet. A shell landed only a meter away from him while he was lying in the grass, behind his pack. A fragment, which must have been fairly large, judging from the size of the hole in his helmet, pierced the steel headgear. The exit hole was four centimeters in diameter. The cribbled metal sheet flared out like the corolla of a lovely lily. His blouse was so tattered that he had the appearance of a beggar. His rifle strap held only by a few shreds. As for Pinelli, he came through with only a haircut at the top of his head, and without losing a drop of blood. He would like a cigaret. But I have smoked the last one of the small allotment our supply service sparingly distributes among us. It is useless to speak again about the tobacco problem. I decided to buy a few packs on the black market behind the lines and bring them back. Because I will return, as the Company has invited me for a longer stay at the front.

For, even when one is in the infantry, one knows the laws of hospitality.

(ALGER REPUBLICAIN, October 6, 1944)

## II—THE FFI IN BATTLE

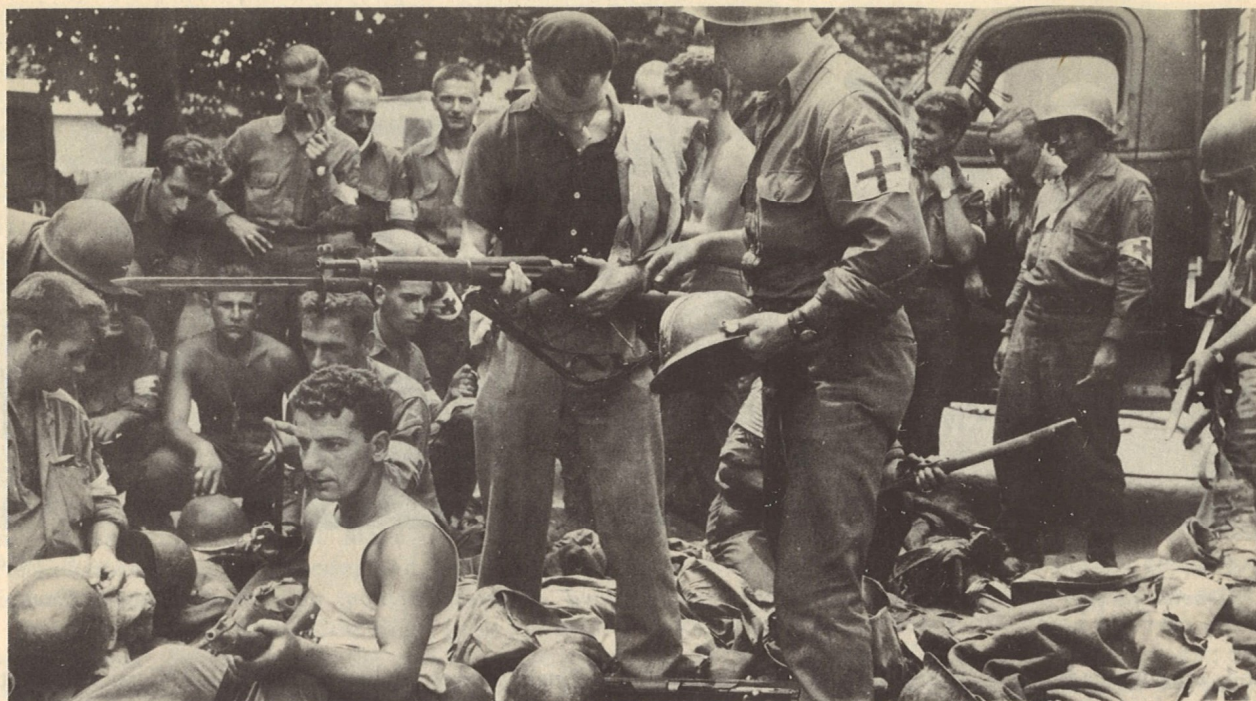
### *FFI in the Battle for Alsace-Lorraine*

René Payot, the editor of the *Journal de Genève*, visited the Headquarters of the French First Army and wrote the following report on what he had seen:

"To the south and west of the city of Belfort, in the deep forests and along the rivers where it is easy for the enemy to resist, there is a daily battle. The infantryman advances foot by foot, wresting the soil from the Germans, who stubbornly defend every inch of it.

"These troops are barely mentioned in the official communiqués of General Eisenhower, which cover such a long front that it is impossible to go into detail about





*A member of the FFI chooses a rifle from a salvage pile of equipment*

*Signal Corps Photo*

the activity in any one sector. However, from the psychological point of view it is unfortunate that the contribution of the French Army should not receive more notice. Of course it is small in comparison to the forces of the other Allies but it is very brave. Most of the soldiers come from the colonies and are as well trained as the men from Metropolitan France.

"The Government has had to solve the problem of what to do with the FFI. They played an important role in the liberation of the country and it would have been most regrettable if these enthusiastic soldiers had been sent home and told that they could not continue to fight the enemy. More than 50,000 of them have joined the Army, and over 10,000 are now in the line of battle. Their units are called Morvan, Provence, Savoie, Berry, etc. The Franche-Comté Regiment has 4,000 men, while the Brigade Alsace-Lorraine, which is under the command of André Malraux, is a remarkable force with a large number of FTP. The names of these units recall the regiments of old France.

"The FFI are lending great assistance to the African Division and to the Americans. These men who were trained for guerrilla warfare are useful in the wooded regions of the Vosges where light weapons are used and where the individual has an opportunity to put his skill and bravery to the test. The trained soldier from the colonies is coming in contact with these young warriors and there will be a gradual synthesis of the elements which will compose the French Army of tomorrow. This is important not only from the military point of view, but from the psychological as well, for the various forces are being fused together into one great whole."

*(JOURNAL DE GENEVE, October 16, 1944)*

**FFI and Gestapo on Swiss Border** — FFI scouts have passed through the German lines from Belfort and report that intensive preparations are being made for the defense of this key strongpoint. Today in a little village not far from the German lines, reports from Maquis scouts are being posted on a large map while partisan leaders, seated at children's desks in the local schoolhouse, hold council on plans for continuing their harassing attacks on the enemy.

According to latest FFI information the Germans have massed thousands of crack troops around Belfort; some of them are panzer division troops. The nucleus of the Eleventh Panzer Division, brought from Russia and badly mauled by the Seventh Army is here and, in addition, the enemy has brought in SS panzer units fresh from Germany — the élite armored troops of Nazi Gestapo Chief Himmler.

Engineers are feverishly building fortifications and digging entrenchments in an arc around Belfort extending from Hericourt, ten kilometers west of the city to Delle, 17 kilometers east of Belfort.

Further south in a wider arc the armored strength of the panzers is spread out from Fort de Grange, 22 kilometers west, to Porrentruy, 31 kilometers east, just off the Swiss border. From this anchor on the Swiss frontier the Germans have posted Gestapo guards all along the border north up to Germany itself. The purpose of these guards according to German prisoners taken by the Maquis, is to prevent the escape of any German soldiers who might be tempted to seek internment in Switzerland as an easy way out of a lost war. All the Gestapo left in France have been assembled here



and the FFI believe that not only are they blocking the soldiers' escape but that they are themselves preparing to jump across the Swiss border at the last moment.

It is not known what the Swiss attitude will be but the frontier villagers say that the Swiss are patrolling their border vigilantly. The FFI here are well organized and well armed. Their patrols go in and out of the German lines constantly, cutting communications, taking prisoners, never letting the enemy get set, harassing him, sniping, constantly keeping him off balance and on edge. The battle of France has been won, but these Allied Patriots will never halt their attacks until the day that the last German soldier puts down the last weapon.

(Recorded by OWI, September, 1944)

**Battle of the Ports** — At a Cabinet meeting on October 21, 1944 M. André Diethelm, Minister of War, made the following statement on nests of German resistance still holding out on the French Atlantic coast:

**Saint-Nazaire** — In the region of Saint-Nazaire, in the two zones north and south of the Loire; the front runs through Billiers, Mayon, Béganne, Rieux, Blain Fay, Le Temple, Saint-Etienne de Montluc, Arthon en Retz. There are 20,000 German troops in the north zone and about 10,000 in the south zone. At the present moment the enemy is transferring troops from the north zone to the south. Enemy resistance is organized in strong points of 20 men armed with machine guns and light weapons or 20 men armed with heavy and light machine guns, mortars, heavy and medium artillery with high concentration of fire power.

**La Rochelle-la-Pallice** — In the region of La Rochelle-la-Pallice, the positions under the command of a vice-admiral include the fortifications of the city of La Rochelle and the outer port of La Pallice whose submarine base can shelter a garrison. Eleven submarines are still in service. The line of forward posts runs through Bourgneuf, Dompierre, Saint-Xandre, Nieul-sur-Mer, Marsilly with advance posts at Saint-Jean-des-Sables and Châtelailon.

**Iles de Ré** — There are 1,000 German and 600 Italian troops here. At Oleron, 1,200 troops. The fortified positions are garrisoned by 18,000 men.

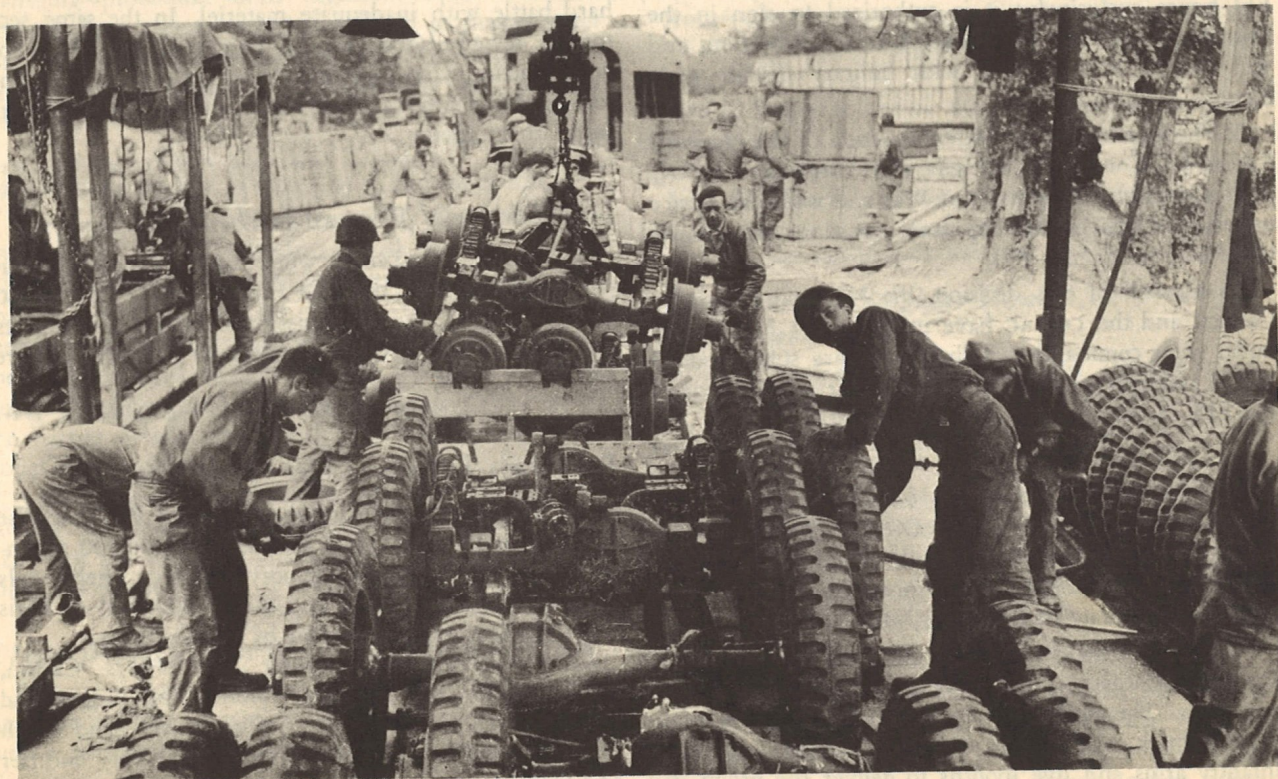
**Royan** — The fortifications include the forest of Coubre and the coastal fortifications, Vaux, Pontailac, Royan, Saint-Georges de Didonne, the advance works are at Etaules, and Saint-Sulpice; the garrison has about 12,000 men. Planes provide liaison between these garrisons and Germany several times a week; complete staffs have arrived and are preparing new operations.

(Ministry of Information, Paris, October 21, 1944)

**General de Larminat to Command Atlantic Front** — On the recommendation of André Diethelm, the Cabinet, meeting on October 21, approved the appointment of Army Corps Commander Edouard R. de Larminat<sup>1</sup> as commanding officer of French forces operating on the Atlantic front.

(Ministry of Information, Paris, October 22, 1944)

<sup>1</sup>General de Larminat who joined General de Gaulle in French Equatorial Africa in 1940, commanded the Free French forces of the Middle East which participated in the Libya campaigns. He held a command in General Alphonse Juin's French Expeditionary Force which fought victoriously in Italy, and participated in the southern France landings under General Delattre de Tassigny.



Signal Corps Photo

In France — G.I.s and French civilians work side by side, assembling a 2½ ton vehicle