

# FRANCE AT WAR

## I—FIGHTING ON FRENCH SOIL

*Owing to strong enemy resistance in all theatres where Germany is now fighting to defend her soil, present operations do not have the spectacular character of the battle for the liberation of France. Slowly but surely the Allied Armies are progressing toward the common objective—the destruction of the German Army. Allied strategy is being carried out under General Eisenhower's supreme command: the battle is in progress on all fronts. In France, General Jean Delattre de Tassigny's French First Army is holding the southern sector of the Vosges-Belfort front beside General Patch's American Seventh Army. In the Doubs and Savoie regions, where pockets of German resistance still remain, the FFI supported by French artillery are containing the enemy. Other enemy pockets still remain in the Center of France.*

*On the Atlantic front the battle of the ports has reached a stalemate. Lacking heavy equipment, the FFI are fighting an unequal battle against the Germans who continue to be supplied through Spain. (See General de Gaulle's Press Conference, October 3, 1944)*

### *The War From Day to Day*

*Below are the communiqués of the French First Army from November 1 to November 15.*

*November 1—In the Vosges sector our troops are keeping close contact with the enemy. In brisk local engagements they are driving several enemy advanced elements out of their positions, causing them heavy losses and taking prisoners.*

*Artillery is repeatedly hammering enemy lines of communication. On both sides of the Doubs our reconnaissance elements continue their active vigilance in the forefield of the whole sector.*

*In the Alps our artillery is harassing enemy organizations and installations.*

*(New York TIMES, November 2, 1944)*

*November 4—(From Brazzaville)—In the Vosges our troops attacked German positions in the Gérardmer area yesterday. Strongly supported by artillery fire, they progressed rapidly, reaching all their objectives in spite of strong enemy resistance and difficult terrain. All enemy counter-thrusts were broken and the Germans suffered heavy losses.*

*During clashes north of the Doubs our reconnaissance detachments inflicted losses on the enemy and took prisoners.*

*Sustained artillery fire is reported in the sector of the Alps.*

*(From the French Press Agency)—The French First Army passed over to the offensive on its left flank with a view to supporting American operations farther to the north in the direction of Saint Dié. The French attack,*

*launched on a front of eighteen kilometers, is progressing vigorously and has already reached a depth of six kilometers.*

*The enemy is putting up stiff resistance and, in addition to his local reserves, is using a major part of a fresh division which had recently arrived from Norway.*

*General Delattre de Tassigny's troops have taken la Forge, Bouvacote and la Tête de la Neuve Roche.*

*Enemy losses in killed have been very heavy and during the first two days of this offensive we have taken several hundred prisoners belonging to six different regiments.*

*The French air force, during operations undertaken by the First Army, has played a particularly active and useful part.*

*(New York TIMES, November 5, 1944)*

*November 5—The troops on the French First Army's left flank, attacking with fierce energy, have attained and even passed all objectives of the first phase of the offensive. The French air force continued its very effective support.*

*(Ministry of Information, Paris, November 7, 1944)*

*November 7—(From the French Press Agency)—Progress made since November 3 by units on the left flank of the First French Army have yielded all the results expected.*

*Disorganized by our air bombings and by the heavy fire of our artillery, the enemy has vainly endeavored to slow down our progress. He has been compelled hastily to bring up strong reserves so as to reestablish his line in front of Gérardmer and La Bresse. His positions are within range of our advanced elements and the latter can control his lines of communication.*

*(New York TIMES, November 8, 1944)*

*November 8—(From the French Press Agency)—In the Vosges the offensive launched on November 3 has achieved complete success. Despite stiff enemy resistance all objectives have been attained and at some points even passed. The enemy has suffered heavy losses and left several hundred prisoners in our hands.*

*The Germans reacted strongly in our sector of attack. For this purpose they used two battalions of fresh troops supported by violent artillery fire. After fierce fighting our positions were maintained.*

*Elsewhere one of our detachments, which had been lying in ambush, succeeded in taking several prisoners.*

*In the Doubs sector our patrols are maintaining close contact with the enemy. We have slightly improved our positions without the enemy attempting to react.*

*In the Alps our skiing detachments are keeping strict watch in front of our positions. During engagements with German patrols they have inflicted losses on the enemy.*

*It is reported that there has been exchange of artillery fire in Briançonnais.*

*(New York TIMES, November 9, 1944)*



November 10 — (From Brazzaville) — In the Vosges our troops continue to organize their positions. The enemy has reacted only weakly with artillery. On the other hand, we are maintaining close contact through our artillery reconnaissance which keeps up harassing fire on the enemy's communication lines.

In the Doubs sector inundations following heavy rains have reduced the activity of the infantry elements considerably.

In the Alps the weather is also bad, and only a little firing is reported from either side. The Germans have set fire to villages on the route from Ubaye to the Col-de-l'Arche.

(New York TIMES, November 11, 1944)

November 15 — With the Sixth Army group in France (AP) — The French First Army of General Jean Delattre de Tassigny launched an attack today on a twenty-five-mile front covering both banks of the Doubs River, on the approaches to the Belfort Gap, and scored advances of four to five miles.

Moroccan, Algerian and Senegalese troops, reinforced by the FFI, smashed forward through the snow and seized ten villages as well as taking several hundred prisoners. A heavy artillery barrage opened the assault, which reached all its local objectives, including the village of Arcey, eleven miles southwest of Belfort and five miles west of Montbéliard.

At places the infantry broke through the enemy's forward defenses for as much as five miles.

Villages were taken on both sides of the Doubs. Arcey, on the main highway from Besançon to Belfort, was the principal prize. But strung out in a southeasterly line behind it the troops took Gemonval, Marvelise, Onans, Bretigney, Montenois and Lougres, all north of the river, and Ecot, Vermondans and Ecurcey, all south of the river in the area of Pont-de-Roide.

(New York TIMES, November 16, 1944)

*The Alsace-Lorraine Brigade in the Vosges* — The writer, André Malraux, chief of the Maquis for three Departments, Lot, Corrèze and Dordogne, to which many Alsatians and Lorrainers had fled, is today a Colonel of the Alsace-Lorraine Brigade on the Vosges front. An Alsatian lieutenant described as follows the part played in the Resistance by Colonel Malraux and his associate Major André Chansom, who is also a writer:

Malraux and the writer Major André Chansom, organized the Maquis in Dordogne. The beginnings were difficult; they were without arms, poorly equipped and constantly hunted by the Germans. Gradually the Maquis got organized and carried out an increasing number of raids. Malraux was arrested but was saved by the Allied invasion. He returned to Dordogne to organize the Alsatians and Lorrainers into regular units. Chansom formed an Alsatian and Lorrainer Commando unit, met with Malraux and placed his men at his disposal. The Alsace-Lorraine Brigade was ready for battle. It arrived on the Vosges front at the end of Sep-

tember and took Bois-le-Prince. The men fought admirably to free their kinsmen, the last Frenchmen remaining to be liberated.

(Ministry of Information, Paris, October 31, 1944)

*Morale of French Troops* — After visiting the Vosges front René Payet, Swiss commentator, wrote that he was tremendously impressed by the morale of the French troops. One glance at them is enough to dispel the dreadful story that the French are a decadent race and that France's defeat four years ago was owing to this fact. They were beaten by a stronger and better equipped army that came from a country with twice as many inhabitants as France. However, the French spirit was not broken, merely oppressed by years of brutal occupation and the insinuations of an infamous kind of propaganda. And despite all of these difficulties France created these splendid warriors. One of the unusual characteristics of the French Army is that there is direct contact between the leaders and the men. Generals such as General Jean Delattre de Tassigny are hard on their men, but they are equally hard on themselves; they set an example and there is a feeling of mutual confidence and admiration in the Army. This is a long way from the rather stiff disciplinary armies of pre-war days but all of these men are motivated by the same instinct which was condemned to defeat by Vichy. Their hearts were with the soldiers who reached Africa as well as those who remained in France and worked for the Resistance. None of them refer to the past or to politics; there are no political parties in the Army and not a single person asked us about Laval. These men are doing their job in the Vosges; they are doing it simply and with the assurance that they are helping to rebuild their country. Their valor is complemented with a fine sense of proportion and a serenity of judgment which attest the vitality of the nation that produced such an élite.

(JOURNAL DE GENEVE, October 24, 1944)

### *Churchill and de Gaulle Visit the French Front*

Paris, November 14 — Prime Minister Churchill visited the French First Army in the Jura Mountains this week and in rapid succession a tire on his car blew out, the chains came off on a perilous, ice-caked road and the car was bogged down in a snowdrift for fifteen minutes.

"Thank heavens, the grand old man didn't get out in the bitter cold to push," one of the party said. "It's a wonder he didn't. There surely is a limit to what the Prime Minister should be asked to do in such weather."

In the party were General Charles de Gaulle, Field Marshall Sir Alan Brooke, Captain Mary Churchill and Major General Jean Delattre de Tassigny, who commands the First Army.

Driving to a near-by town from the French command post 3,000 feet in the mountains, Mr. Churchill stood without hat in a heavy snowstorm to receive the cheers of the French people.

(New York TIMES, November 15, 1944)





*French Armored Units continue their advance.*

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### ***Battle for the Ports***

**Statement by Lieutenant Colonel Chassin** — On October 28, Lieutenant Colonel Chassin, of the Military Information Bureau, gave a very interesting talk in which he analyzed the situation on the Atlantic front. French soil is still defiled by the presence of Germans at four points in the West. These four pockets are constructed on the same plan: a fortified zone with concrete casemates and heavy artillery, buried deeply in the earth; an occupied zone with a radius of about 20 kilometers enabling the enemy to be supplied; this zone is surrounded by a defense line composed of an anti-tank ditch and pillboxes containing heavy machine guns; about four kilometers beyond is a line of advance posts where artillery opens fire immediately on any movement of the attacking forces. Each garrison has about 20 to 25 thousand soldiers with five to ten thousand auxiliary troops. One third of each garrison consists of naval forces and a small proportion of foreigners: Russians, Poles and Italians. To maintain the morale of these troops who face annihilation and know it, a corps of SS men estimated at ten percent of total effectives, tolerates no weakening. The total number of combatants is estimated at about 70,000 and auxiliaries at 50,000. Their artillery is very powerful: two to five hundred guns, a large number of anti-aircraft batteries which can be fired from land or sea and abundant supplies of ammunition and food which enable them to

withstand a several months' siege. The soldiers, who are impatient to see the end of their suffering, are being compelled to continue fighting. The Hitlerites are pitiless and a prolonged resistance must be expected. The worst of the situation is that about 200,000 Frenchmen are subjected to a harsh and unbearable régime of German occupation.

(Ministry of Information, Paris, October 31, 1944)

**Enemy-held Ports Bar Aid to France** — A New York Times correspondent reported this situation on November 12 as follows: Supreme Headquarters, Allied Expeditionary Force, France, November 12 — German garrisons totaling between 110,000 and 130,000 troops are still holding Saint-Nazaire, Lorient, La Rochelle and the mouth of the Gironde, where they hinder the full development of the Allies' supply system, form a small but constant drain on men and equipment and constitute one of the many barriers to the economic recovery of France.

Two of the largest and best-organized of the German garrisons are at Saint-Nazaire and Lorient, both of which were famous U-boat ports before the invasion of the Continent. There are 30,000 Germans at Saint-Nazaire under the command of General Jung, a brave, experienced officer who formerly commanded the German Third Parachute Division. The Lorient garrison, also of about 30,000 men, is commanded by General Wilhelm Fahrmbacher, a Bavarian.



The garrisons of both ports include sailors and marines under naval commanders subordinate to Generals Jung and Fahrmbacher.

*Block Use of Bordeaux*—Colonel Kaeseberg commands the German troops south of the Loire River, the most important of which are those around the mouth of the Gironde, at Pointe de Grave on the tip of the Médoc District, west of the mouth of the river, and near Royan on the opposite or eastern bank of the river. These positions enable the Germans to keep Bordeaux, the largest port between Lorient and the Spanish coast, closed at a time when its use would facilitate the supplying of the Sixth Army Group on the south of the Allies' line on the western front.

Retention of these positions is a part of the general German plan to deny as many of the Atlantic ports as possible to the Allies, thus increasing General Dwight D. Eisenhower's supply problem and, they hope, slowing down the pace of the campaign on the western front.

The plan was also carried out in ports farther north and especially along the Channel, where Dunkerque still holds out. However, greater numbers of troops, or perhaps it would be more correct to say a greater necessity, ended the German sway in the northern ports.

But the troops, tanks, guns and planes employed against Le Havre and Brest undoubtedly detracted in some measure from the strength of the Allies' forces

fighting farther east. Undoubtedly the Germans hope the same will be true again.

The task of containing the Germans is largely in the hands of the French Forces of the Interior, and this means that the FFI must be kept in southwestern France and supplied with arms that otherwise might go to the French Army.

*Impedes French Supply*—The German hold on the mouth of the Gironde complicates the already difficult question of French coal supply. One of the major difficulties of French coal production is the lack of pit props for the mines. Normally, the Gironde area is an important source of supply for pit props. Now, however, the props cannot be brought from that area by sea because of the enemy's hold on the mouth of the river. Because of the lack of coal the alternative of transport by railroad is out of the question.

This situation is part of the vicious circle in which French production is caught. Pit props must be brought to the mines if coal is to be produced and coal must be produced if transport and industry are to function at anything like normal.

The greatest mystery surrounding these enemy garrisons, especially those at the mouth of the Gironde, is how the Germans have managed to eat during the past two months. Foraging parties have been able to gather some produce from the surrounding country in the case of Lorient, Saint-Nazaire and La Rochelle.

It has been reported from the Spanish frontier that



*French Second Armored Division passes through a French village.*

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the Spanish sent supplies to Germany until the second week in August and it may well be that the Germans diverted some of those to their fortified positions around the mouth of the Gironde. Nor is it impossible that Germans in Spain are running supplies by sea along the coast to these positions, with or without the knowledge of the Spanish Government.

Some support has been sent by air but the increasingly bad weather and the growing Allied fighter strength of the Continent makes this means of supply no longer feasible.

At present there seems to be little prospect that the Germans will be starved out. The Germans in Brest, Le Havre, Calais, Boulogne and Saint-Malo capitulated only after very heavy attacks and it is probable that those in Saint-Nazaire, Lorient and La Rochelle will not give up without a fight. So long as these German strongholds remain, the curtain of war has not yet fallen on the Atlantic coast.

(New York TIMES, November 13, 1944)

## II—MILITARY NEWS

### *French Naval Operations*

Communiqué from Headquarters, Allied Mediterranean Forces: "On October 30, 1944, the cruiser Emile Bertin shelled the beaches and troop movements near the Franco-Italian frontier. On October 31, the French destroyer Forbin shelled objectives in the same sector and scored direct hits on several small forts."

(Ministry of Information, Paris, November 1, 1944)

### *French Air Force Victories*

The Military Office of the Ministry of Information issued the following report on French Air Force operations: "The total score for French fighter groups is as follows: Champagne group, 120 victories; Normandy group, 102 victories; Corse group, 99 victories; Lafayette group, 92 victories. Lastly, we can state that from the beginning of the war to the present French fighter groups have shot down more than 1,500 enemy planes."

(Ministry of Information, Paris, November 4, 1944)

### *French Aviators Training in United States*

Thousands of young French aviators are now being trained in the United States and Canada.

On November 8, General Piollet, head of the Military Cabinet of the Ministry for Air, commented on the cooperation of the French and American Air Forces and on the training of French aviators in America. The pilots of one glorious squadron participated in numerous operations in Italy. Thousands of French youths are now being trained in schools in the United States and Canada. Some schools have already been established in Morocco and later on others will be established in the South of France.

Furthermore, owing to the fact that the productive capacity of French industry is relatively limited, we shall adopt a policy of quality with respect to personnel as well as materiel.

(Ministry of Information, Paris, November 9, 1944)

### *The Resistance Effort to Arm the FFI*

Combat has published a report on the resumption of production of arms and equipment in French factories to outfit the FFI. Below are excerpts from this report:

One manufacturing town in central France was liberated on August 18; the next day an appeal for armament workers was issued and they immediately presented themselves in haste and with some surprise, still carrying their guns. Young FFI staff officers are busy everywhere speeding production of arms for the young Army of Maquis soldiers and volunteers.

Columns of trucks are out collecting all available steel and copper. The workers have offered to put in a 60 hour week. Already several thousand automatics are being turned out to arm the men with the FFI armband who are fighting under the command of General Delattre de Tassigny.

Similar activity reigns in a neighboring town where 36 caliber rifles and trench mortars are being manufactured. A number of 81-mm. mortars is on the way. The FFI were without weapons; now they are receiving arms of French make.

A cartridge factory has also been started, the powder needed being brought from Toulouse. In Loire when there were no castings for making trench mortars, the FFI notified Châtellerault. It was a revolution in bureaucracy. "Have you the Minister's authorization?" They replied "What Minister?" The young officers took the initiative and that was all there was to it.

Thanks to the initial efforts of the FFI some factories are now producing automatic rifles which by all rights shouldn't be manufactured but which are excellent weapons, light and accurate.

Remans is making shoes for the FFI, a Lyon textile plant is busy on suits and blankets, and 10,000 pairs of trousers have been sent from Lyon stocks for the FFI in Brittany who are fighting against nests of German resistance.

(COMBAT, Paris, November 9, 1944)

### *All FFI Groups Under Jurisdiction of War Ministry*

Following the decision of the Minister of War to establish an FFI Department within the Ministry of War,<sup>1</sup> the Committee for Military Action of the National Resistance Council issued the following proclamation:

Paris, October 18—All FFI groups derive their authority solely from the Ministry of War, operating through the FFI Department of the Ministry of War.

The Committee for Military Action will function henceforth as an Army Committee. The Committee for Military Action will cooperate with and assist the Minister of War who will consider its opinions and suggestions on all important questions, especially those relating to the FFI. The central administration of the Ministry of War is organized as follows:

- 1) FFI Department whose functions and organization

<sup>1</sup>See *Free France*, Vol. 6, No. 10, p. 360.