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FRANCE AT WAR

I—THE BATTLE OF FRANCE

The taking of Caen was the beginning of a tremendous struggle which should lead up to the battle of Paris. That is why the Germans are concentrating their efforts on this sector of the front. To the east of Caen the British have broken through along National Highway No. 13, from Caen to Paris, and it is in this area that the enemy has been making strong counter-attacks which have been extremely difficult to repulse because of bad weather and the nature of the terrain.

During this second month of the battle of Normandy, the French Forces of the Interior have continued their sabotaging and harassing actions against German troops in accordance with the Allied plan and under the direction of General Koenig. Their method of action varies in accordance with the assigned objective. Whether it be sabotaging actions, destruction of communications, slowing down of German production and enemy attacks against the Allies, intelligence operations, or even punitive action designed to discourage treason, the FFI conduct their actions in an orderly manner and in accordance with the plans laid down by their responsible leaders.

Coordination of Allied and FFI actions¹ was one of the factors in the success of landings in Normandy. The official spokesman of the Provisional Government of the French Republic wrote on July 22: Look at the map of Normandy, note the lines of the Allied advance on the right bank of the Orne, note the points on the left bank from which the Allies have since yesterday crossed the river to Caen, despite the destruction of the bridges, and captured the city where a junction with tank forces coming in from the north was effected. Then remember this: At the time this junction was effected, a Canadian officer said to me on the battle-field recalling the combined French operations whose secret must still be kept, "Without these men," he pointed to a soldier wearing

civilian clothes and the Cross of Lorraine armband, "it would have taken us eight days to accomplish what has taken us eight hours."

It is difficult to describe in terms of daily communiqués the action of the FFI whose success depends on discretion.¹ However the Allied High Command, like the French General Staff of the National Defense periodically publishes a resumé of their actions. (See Free France, Vol. 6, No. 1, 2, 3.) In addition the underground General Headquarters of the FFI sends to the French Services in London whenever possible, a report of important actions carried out all over France by the Patriot Army. In this chapter we are publishing the official communiqués and a few of the most outstanding incidents of the FFI battle during the month of July.

(French Press and Information Service, New York, July 31, 1944)

Communiqué of the French General Staff — Owing to the military successes of one month of action by the FFI, the enemy was forced to regroup his forces.

In the Alps destruction and surprise raids have been increased. The rail line between Dijon and Modane has been cut. In the Massif Savoyard the FFI have successfully resisted violent German attacks conducted by several thousand men since July 4. In the Massif du Vercors the same defense continually and victoriously resists repeated infantry, tank and air assaults. The enemy losses were 40 killed during a single engagement.

In the Rhône Valley a number of rail lines have been cut. Patriots still hold an important region on the right bank of the river. In another Rhône Valley Department enemy losses during a single battle were 50 killed as against 27 Patriot losses.

In the Southwest the enemy is conducting suppressive actions with mercenaries, an army of whom was recruited in

¹In order to reduce fifth column action against the FFI to a minimum, an official communiqué, "Against the Fifth Column," of the Provisional Government of the French Republic issued on June 14 its orders to the French Forces of the Interior over Radio-Alger:

"Since the dispositions of the French Forces of the Interior, and the methods used by them cannot be revealed for reasons of security, we wish to emphasize:

(1) That reports released from neutral sources may have been launched by the Germans with the intention of inciting Patriots to action.

(2) Reports from official French or Allied sources only can be regarded as trustworthy.

(3) We shall keep secret certain military actions regardless of their importance, or of false information released from non-official sources concerning them.

¹The dates given in the text are those of release by the French Information Service. The actual events occurred several days before the release date.

central Europe. As a result of an attack on a train at the Lozère station, the German losses were 21 killed, 12 wounded and 24 taken prisoner. Tele-communications at Bordeaux are cut every three days. They have been permanently cut in Lozère, Hérault, Aube and the Pyrénées Orientales.

On a plateau in the Hautes-Pyrénées, Patriots who were attacked in force, were able, because of their tactics, to tear down all communications and inflict losses on the enemy. As a result of another operation the Germans lost 50 killed, and 30 wounded; the Patriots also seized 2 cannons. Losses of our troops were 3 killed.

Rail communications between Dordogne and Puy-de-Dôme have been systematically and frequently interrupted.

Because of rail line cuts in the north of Loire and particularly in the east, marshalling yards are crowded with troops and materiel which cannot be moved at the necessary intervals. The Sambre canal has been cut at Landrecies.

The Wehrmacht, unable to use coordinated military action, is taking its revenge in many regions by murder, pillage and burning. Each of these atrocities further cements the unity of the French Resistance.

(Commissioner of Information, Alger, July 14, 1944)

Periodical Allied Communiqué No. 1. (From Supreme Headquarters, Allied Expeditionary Force) — During the period July 4-15 French Resistance forces continued their operations in the face of violent German attacks, which were frequently supported by tanks, artillery and aircraft. In the majority of the attacks either the enemy was repelled with serious losses or the French Forces of the Interior were able to retire successfully. As a result of these activities the movement of enemy troops and supplies to Normandy has been effectively delayed.

In the Ain Department important zones remain liberated, though Resistance forces have been forced temporarily to abandon three towns. In two Departments of central France, where repeated assaults of the enemy have been repelled, the Germans have suffered many casualties. Enemy losses are also considerable in the Southeast, Saône-et-Loire, Brittany and in the region of Paris. A panzer division moving toward Normandy was detained for thirty hours, and lost eighty killed and 300 wounded.

On the whole railway system, but particularly on the more important lines, traffic has been considerably slowed down and often completely suspended by the cutting of tracks. Many derailments have completely resulted and at several points immobilized trains have been attacked. The number of locomotives, coaches, troops and material destroyed is considerable. A train carrying flying-bombs in eastern France has been reported completely destroyed. Twenty-six bridges, most of which were on strategic routes, were destroyed or seriously damaged between June 24 and July 6.

The canals through which the Germans attempt to move part of their traffic have also been dealt with efficiently. Traffic has been interrupted by destroying locks of numerous canals including the Marne and Rhine Canals.

Electric power grids have been frequently attacked. High-tension lines supplying railroad systems in the South have been cut. Transformers and converters supplying important war factories have been destroyed.

The enemy system of telecommunications has also suffered serious disturbance. The Paris-Berlin cable and many underground long-distance lines in the Departments of the East, Center and North have been cut periodically.

The activity of the French Forces of the Interior is also employed against the German war industry in France. In the Mediterranean region railroad machine shops had to abandon work for at least a month. An engine depot has been set on fire in the Jura area. Leather warehouses have been destroyed in the Alps.

A surprise attack by the French Forces of the Interior liberated interned Patriots at the camp of Evaux-les-Bains.
(The New York TIMES, July 21, 1944)

Periodical Allied Communiqué No. 2. (From Supreme Headquarters, Allied Expeditionary Force) — Since July 15 French Forces of the Interior have repelled further attempts by the Germans to liquidate the Maquis areas. German attacks now have taken the form of raids carried out by armored columns. In many instances these new tactics have been frustrated by ambushes.

In the Saône-et-Loire Department Resistance forces have succeeded in annihilating an enemy convoy of 116 trucks.

In the Pyrénées Resistance forces attacked a column of armored cars and artillery with such success that the enemy was forced to bring up reinforcements in order to avoid complete defeat.

Engagements also have taken place in the Morvan area and in Brittany.

In the Rhône Valley Resistance forces which had withdrawn from towns captured by the enemy have now regrouped in the woods.

In Normandy and elsewhere attacks against the railway system continue to disorganize the enemy's line of communications. In Loiret thirty trucks of war material have been destroyed. In Hérault attacks on railway lines have caused several derailments, including wreckage of an ammunition train. Interruptions of traffic in this area lasted from eighteen to thirty-six hours.

Destruction of locks on important canals has continued, particularly in the North and in the East, thereby interfering with transport of fuel. Barges carrying 100,000 gallons of oil and fuel have been blown up, and petrol depots and convoys have been destroyed in the Nièvre.

(The New York TIMES, July 28, 1944)

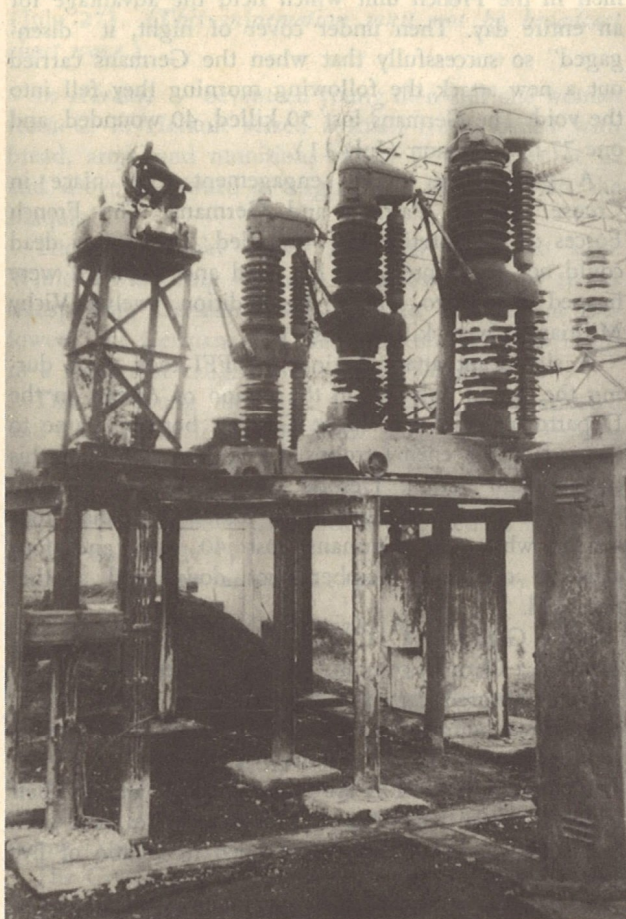
Action Against German Supplies — An attack on a German barge train traveling along the St. Quentin Canal achieved the following results: five barges, each containing 28,000 liters of gasoline blew up starting a fire which spread to coal barges. Four of the latter were completely destroyed (July 11).

In the Besançon region a 77 car train of military supplies was derailed (July 15).

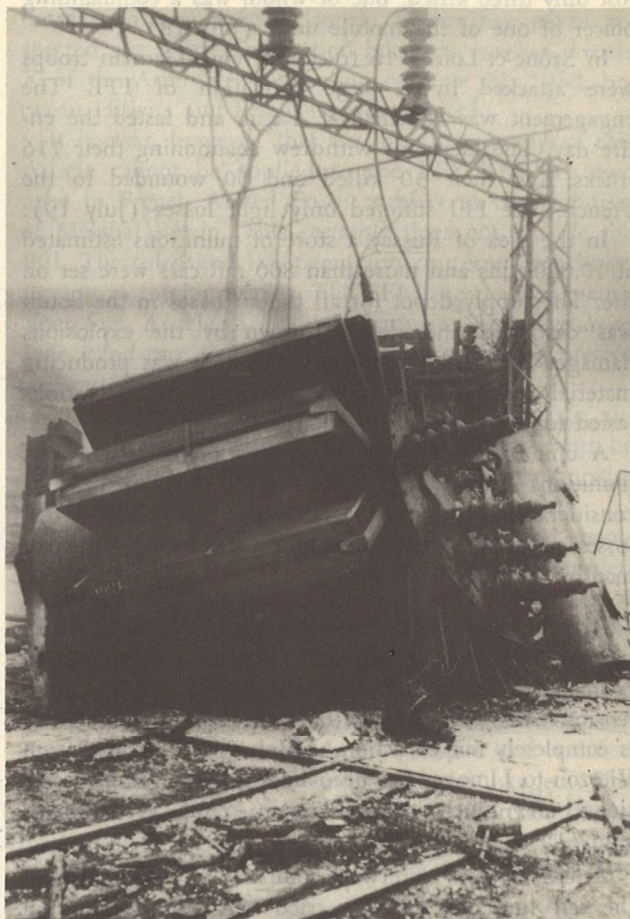
At Boussens an important and heavily guarded chlorine factory was attacked with excellent results: one series of electric transformers, and one electrolysis cell were destroyed. It is estimated that there will be a stoppage of about two months at the factory, which will mean stoppage for 14 power-houses in the region (July 17).

The FFI operating in the Southwest have added another important success to their credit by attacking and almost completely destroying a Germany convoy traveling toward the North. The convoy included two tank trucks, six troop trucks, and one combat car. The first unit of the French Forces of the Interior forced the convoy to a stop on the Grasse-Digne road. It had barely got under way again the next morning when it was attacked by another unit of the French Forces of the Interior who inflicted heavy losses. A short distance further on a third unit of Patriots put the combat car out of action. While this last unit was engaging the enemy one of the first units to attack him came up

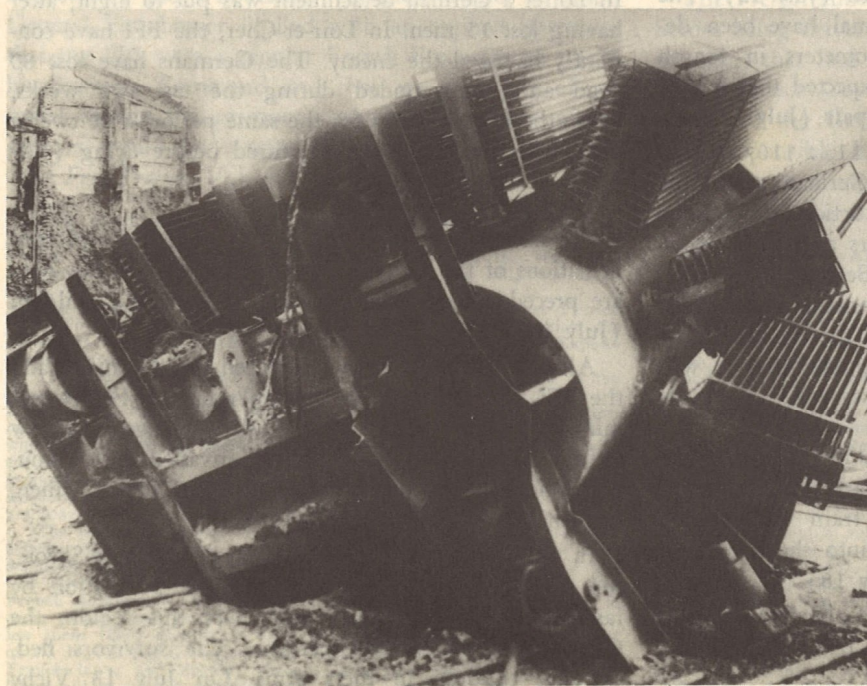
SABOTAGE BY THE FFI



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Transformers at Virevialle in the Corrèze. Repairs took two weeks.

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in his rear and joined in the engagement. The outcome of these combined and excellently organized actions was that only 45 Germans escaped, while the French lost only three killed, one of whom was a commanding officer of one of the mobile units (July 18).

In Saône-et-Loire 116 trucks carrying German troops were attacked by a large formation of FFI. The engagement was launched at 4 a.m. and lasted the entire day. The Germans withdrew abandoning their 116 trucks, and their 30 killed and 50 wounded to the French. The FFI suffered only light losses (July 19).

In the area of Russey a store of munitions estimated at 10,000 tons and more than 800 rail cars were set on fire. The supply depot for all the air bases in the South was destroyed and debris thrown by the explosions damaged a nearby cement factory which was producing material for the German fortifications. The operations lasted for three days (July 20).

A unit of the FFI staged a point blank attack on a munitions train at 30 meters from the rail line. A considerable section of the train blew up. The German losses were 80 killed as against the loss of only one man by the French (July 26).

Action Against German Communications — The subterranean cables from Albi to Toulouse and from Carmaux to Rodez have been cut. The network of high tension wires which feeds the rail network of the Midi is completely out of action. All electric rail traffic from Vierzon to Limoges has been interrupted and only occasional and much delayed steam trains get through (July 12).

Attacks against waterways comparable to those against the rail lines are being carried out. The East Canal could not be used for two weeks, and the canal from the Marne to the Rhine for a month (July 12). The locks at Girancourt on the East Canal have been destroyed. A canal reach twelve kilometers in length has been put out of use and it is expected that it will require two and a half months to repair (July 17).

At Vienne during the day of July 11, a 110,000 volt cable transmitter which feeds the German submarine base at Rochefort was put out of action. At Pessac, near Blaye, three high tension towers and three transformers were destroyed. The Paris-Berlin subterranean cable was cut at several points. German work gangs had not yet discovered these points at the time the news was sent to London. Specialists estimate that it will require 15 days to make the necessary repairs (July 14).

Interruption of rail lines is steadily maintained in the entire region of Languedoc, particularly on the Montpellier-Castres-Toulouse line, and a train was derailed in a tunnel. A flaming train sped into the station of Bédarieux, set fire to the depot (July 18).

In the vicinity of Rodez a unit of the FFI attacked a German radio station, which they destroyed without suffering a single loss (July 19).

FFI Engagements With German Troops — An FFI unit was attacked by enemy forces made up of 59 truckloads of troops and two 77-mm. cannons. There were 120 men in the French unit which held the advantage for an entire day. Then under cover of night, it "disengaged" so successfully that when the Germans carried out a new attack the following morning they fell into the void. The Germans lost 50 killed, 40 wounded, and one 77-mm. cannon (July 11).

A particularly bloody engagement took place in Creuse between Patriots and Germans. The French Forces of the Interior lost 40 killed. The enemy dead could not be counted, but his dead and wounded were heaped onto two trucks. In addition twelve Vichy Militiamen were killed (July 18).

A significant attack against the FFI took place during the day of July 20, in the region of Atiège, in the Department of Aude. Eight German bombers came to the aid of the enemy troops during the course of this twelve hour action. Despite this display of German force, the French suffered light losses. They had four killed, while the Germans lost 40 men and four armored cars, one bomber shot down and another damaged.

Near Gigouzac a 70 man mobile unit of the FFI attacked a German column, killing 29 men and destroying 26 armored cars and two 108-mm. guns. When, after three hours of action the Germans were heavily reinforced, the French withdrew (July 26).

In Dordogne the FFI are under constant attack. Their losses are often heavy, but the German losses have been tremendous, greater than the French in a ratio of five to one (July 26).

In Loire, a mobile unit of the FFI attacked a German column, 250 strong. Enemy losses were 30 dead. In Loiret a German detachment was put to flight, after having lost 15 men. In Loir-et-Cher, the FFI have constantly harassed the enemy. The Germans have lost 80 dead and 50 wounded during the last two weeks, while the French losses for the same period were twelve men. Three of them were tortured before dying (July 27).

German Reprisals — There have been several confirmations of the fact that German convoys in the Alps are preceded by buses filled with women and children (July 20).

After a battle in Savoie between the Germans and the FFI, the Germans decided on reprisals. For twenty minutes planes bombarded a "guilty" village from low altitude. Then a thousand soldiers invaded the community and set it on fire after stealing radios, linen, furnishings and bicycles (July 26).

In order to overcome the Resistance in Haute-Savoie, the Germans are trying to reduce the population by famine. And in one little hamlet of this region, the Germans murdered 250 persons. The survivors fled, carrying children in their arms. On July 13 Vichy

Militiamen shot civilians at Nantua, and then carried off a number of the inhabitants, who have not been seen since. At Cerdon 47 houses were burned. Only three houses remain standing in the village of Villedoux (July 27). (*This information must not be broadcast short wave.*)

In Hérault — Seventeen young men and one woman from C. in Hérault seized a small truck loaded with bread, arms, and munitions at the Gendarmerie at C. and drove it toward a neighboring town to join the Maquis.

The truck broke down and was forced to stop. While it was being repaired it was overtaken by trucks transporting German troops and an engagement followed. The Germans lost one dead, one burnt to death in a truck that caught fire, and 21 wounded.

The 17 young men and the woman were arrested and taken to Béziers to be tried. They were condemned to death during the morning by the German Army Council. They were shot on Wednesday; their hands were stretched above their heads and tied to a railing on the wall (July 29).

(*French Information Services, London, July 28, 1944*)

Berlin Does Not Recognize the Military Status of the FFI

The French Forces of the Interior who are fighting the Germans have a clearly defined legal status: they are regular units of the French Army, under command of General Koenig and are thereby an integral part of the Allied Forces fighting on our soil under the Supreme Command of General Eisenhower.

The Germans refuse to recognize the FFI as a regular Army. The Commander in Chief of the German Armies in the West declared on June 7 last, that soldiers of the FFI taken prisoner would be shot. General Eisenhower replied with an explicit statement that the FFI were a regular French Force placed under his Supreme Command and that any measures of reprisal against the prisoners constituted a crime whose authors would be sought out and delivered to trial. (See *Free France*, Vol. 6, No. 3, page 85.)

¹DNB, German news agency, July 17. "The Headquarters of the Allied Expeditionary Forces in France dealt with the problem of the French Maquis in a four point statement. Regarding this statement, the German Foreign Information Service issues the following statement:

"The purpose of this announcement is to make out that French Franc-Tireurs, saboteurs, bandits and other elements of which the Maquis is composed, are to be regarded as part of the Allied Expeditionary Force in France.

"The instructions issued by the German Supreme Command in the West for the treatment of these elements are not affected by the Allied announcement. The measures taken and to be taken by the German Supreme Command against civilians in the rear of German lines who wish to continue their criminal life, are in full agreement with the Hague Convention. The enemy cannot put these out of force by appointing a French General by the name of Koenig, who lives in London, as the Supreme Commander of all civilians in France who are bearing arms against Germans.

"The role to be played by France and French civilians in the fight between German troops and the Anglo-American invaders has been definitely fixed. The French government and the French people are tied down by the terms of the Franco-German Armistice Treaty. The French government, moreover, has issued a great many decrees in order to put these terms into effect. Those Frenchmen who do not follow them (their number is very small) are putting themselves, first of all, beyond the German-French Armistice Treaty; secondly, beyond French laws; and thirdly, beyond the Hague land-war Convention. They will be treated accordingly."

The Germans nevertheless, persist in their attitude. (An official German communiqué of July 17¹ reiterates that the German Military Command will continue to treat FFI soldiers as irregulars, in a word, to shoot those who are taken prisoner. Berlin has never respected any written obligation but now invokes Article X of the Armistice Convention of June 22, 1940, between Hitler's and Pétain's governments.²)

It is clear, however, that the three paragraphs of this Article cannot be applied to the FFI. The first two refer to French Armed Forces subject to the authority of Marshal Pétain. This certainly does not include the FFI. The third and last paragraph concerns Frenchmen serving in foreign armies. The FFI have no such status. Therefore Article X of the Armistice Convention of June 22nd can certainly not be invoked in the present circumstances.

The FFI belong to the French Army, under the authority of the Provisional Government. They must be considered as regular soldiers. To treat them otherwise is to violate the laws of war.

In carrying out their threats of execution and shooting our soldiers, the Germans have committed murder. These crimes are added to the rest of the atrocities of which they are guilty in all the occupied countries. As proclaimed by General Eisenhower, they shall be punished. And this is not a vain threat. The Russians have already begun trials in the regions they have freed, and a number of German butchers — officers and enlisted men — have been tried, sentenced and hanged. The same fate — with the single possible difference of the method of execution — awaits all German war criminals.

(*FRANCE, July 19, 1944*)

Statement from the GPRF³

The French authorities have noted that the Germans, before being driven out of Caen, killed all the political prisoners they had arrested.

The French Government warns the German Government and the German military command that it will hold responsible for all executions of French citizens in France or Germany, not only the authors of these crimes, but also the civil or military authorities who

²The article of the Armistice Convention of June 22, 1940 relative to the prohibition against bearing arms against Germany is worded as follows:

"The French government pledges not to undertake in the future any actions hostile to Germany, in any way, or with any part of the Armed Forces remaining to it.

The French government will also prevent members of the French Armed Forces from leaving the territory of France, and will see to it that no arms or equipment of any kind, no ships or planes, etc., shall be removed to England or any other foreign country.

The French government shall forbid French inhabitants to fight against the German Reich in the service of states with which the German Reich is still at war. French inhabitants who violate this provision shall be treated as irregulars by the German troops."

Moreover, the foreign affairs editor of the *Times* of London, referring to the Geneva Conventions of 1929, wrote on July 19 that soldiers of an army, a volunteer corps or a militia are entitled to the rights of prisoners of war if: a) they are under the command of a person responsible for his subordinates, b) they wear a distinctive mark of identification, c) they bear arms openly, d) they conduct their operations according to the laws of war. He added that the Hague Conventions of 1907 even more clearly guaranteed the rights of the FFI by providing: "In a country where a militia or volunteer corps constitutes an army, or forms part of such army, they shall be included within the term army."

³Provisional government of the French Republic.

had ordered, authorized or tolerated them. All such persons shall be personally responsible.

(Commissioner of Information, Alger, July 28, 1944)

Official Statement by the Commissioner of Justice —
The German Armies, driven in retreat on every battle front, are continuing their extermination of civilian populations. Everywhere, enemy soldiers and police are indulging in indiscriminate murder, torture and pillage. After the massacres at Ascq, Oradour, and Saint Gingoiph, comes the news of the execution of political prisoners held at Caen. These crimes shall not go unpunished. The Provisional Government of the French Republic has given the German Government and civil and military officials a solemn warning that war criminals will be brought before regular courts and punished with all the rigor of the law. According to French penal law the atrocities committed within or outside France by enemy agents constitute common law crimes. They cannot be justified either by war conditions or, as asserted, by the necessities of military occupation. The officer who has hostages or prisoners shot, commits murder; the man who sets fire to buildings or any inhabited premises, commits arson; any individual who interns or deports civilians is guilty of unlawful arrest; any individual who organizes the sacking of a town or a property is guilty of looting. War crimes are always crimes against common law, and French law will so consider them.

Moreover, these crimes are part of a systematic plan. Two distinct responsibilities are involved: that of the person to whom the physical act can be ascribed, and that of the administrative or military authorities who ordered, organized or permitted the crime. The responsibility of the person who personally commits the crime is not lessened: his direct part in carrying it out proves his guilt which is increased, rather than excused, by the manifest illegality of the orders he has obeyed.

But the responsibility of the instigators of these crimes, and of all the individuals holding higher rank, who have encouraged the criminals or allowed such acts to be committed, is still more overwhelming. The office of military or civil chief renders the person holding it responsible for all crimes committed under his command or his administrative jurisdiction. For instance, the director of a prison or internment camp is responsible for torture and murder at his prison or camp, and every officer is responsible for crimes committed in the districts over which he exercises territorial command.

The leaders shall not escape the punishment which shall weigh heavily upon their subordinates. As liberation progresses, the courts will impose upon war criminals the punishment their heinous crimes deserve. French justice shall be done.

(Commissioner of Information, Alger, July 30, 1944)



Victorious French troops parade in front of the house where the Franco-Italian Armistice was signed on June 24, 1940.

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