

FRANCE AT WAR

I—FRENCH TROOPS ON THE NORTHEAST FRONT

French troops now fighting on the northeast front are occupying the sector from the Vosges to Belfort. These troops include French forces who had participated in the landings in the South of France, as part of General Alexander Patch's American Seventh Army, and General Jacques Leclerc's Armored Division which had landed in Normandy. They now form the French First Army under the command of General Delattre de Tassigny (See Free France, Vol. 6, No. 8, p. 263). Below are the communiqués and reports from Allied correspondents on the activities of French troops in the battle now engaged on the Franco-German frontier. We are also publishing several reports on the activities and the morale of the French troops.

New Gains Near Belfort

Supreme Headquarters, Allied Expeditionary Force, October 4 (By E. C. Daniel) — . . . Southeast of Nancy, General Patton's forces advanced a mile into the forest of Parroy, five miles northeast of Lunéville. Gains also were made on Lieutenant General Alexander N. Patch's Seventh Army front where the Germans reported that troops across the Mortagne River, on a broad front,

had driven twelve miles beyond Rambervillers to the upper Meurthe River on one of the main roads to Strasbourg through the Vosges.

Filtering through the forests farther south French troops of General Patch's command have captured Ronchamp, ten miles from Belfort, the nearest approach yet made to the anchor of the German's southern flank.

(New York TIMES, October 4, 1944)

London, October 9 (AP) — . . . General Patch's Seventh Army composed of American and French forces, on the southern end of the Allied front took two villages in the Vosges foothills but yielded ground northeast of Epinal to a tank-led enemy counter-blow. German counter-attacks in the Le Thillot area, eighteen miles above Belfort were beaten off.

(New York HERALD TRIBUNE, October 9, 1944)

Supreme Headquarters, Allied Expeditionary Force, October 10 (By Clifton Daniel) — . . . To the south on the American Seventh Army front, French troops were progressing through the steep wooded country around Le Thillot, north of Belfort, and to the west were just over a mile from the town. Remanvillers, near Ramonchamp, northwest of Le Thillot, was cleared of Germans. The Allies also repulsed a counter-attack at Vagney, east of Remiremont.

(New York TIMES, October 11, 1944)



Associated Press

Parachute landing in southern France

Supreme Headquarters, Allied Expeditionary Force, October 10 (By John O'Reilly) — . . . Troops of the French First Army passed the forests northwest of Le Thillot and have reached the Moselette River between Saulures and Vagney within nine miles of the Belfort Gap. . . .

(New York HERALD TRIBUNE, October 11, 1944)

Supreme Headquarters, Allied Expeditionary Force, October 12 — In unfavorable weather and over steep terrain rising sometimes one yard for every yard forward, French First Army Forces yesterday threw a strong bridgehead over the Moselette River in the Le Thillot area, driving to cut off the northern communications of Belfort. The Germans were reported from the front to be withdrawing under French pressure exerted strongly all around Le Thillot. . . .

(New York TIMES, October 12, 1944)

Supreme Headquarters, Allied Expeditionary Force, October 12 — . . . Perhaps the bitterest fighting along the whole Allied front yesterday was on the nearly forgotten front of the American Seventh Army and the French First Army. There an advance down a road means taking steep hills on each flank, and the ground over which the American and French infantry are scrambling rises sometimes one yard in every three. . . .

The French Forces have occupied the village of Sapois, two miles northeast of Vagney and due east of Remiremont. To the south they extended farther their bridgehead over the Moselette River north of Le Thillot and cleaned out the last strong points in the rear of their advance. In the Le Thillot-Ronchamp area the French have taken 7,000 prisoners recently, making a total of 60,000 taken since the landing in southern France. The American Seventh Army has taken more than 35,000 in the same period.

(New York TIMES, October 13, 1944)

Supreme Headquarters, Allied Expeditionary Force, October 14 — . . . Closing further around Le Thillot, north of Belfort, the French First Army has made notable progress through rugged terrain, reaching Cornimont, beyond the Moselette, five miles northeast of Le Thillot. This advance further outflanks Le Thillot, stubborn bastion of Belfort's northern defenses, and opens a way to the useful roads leading east to the upper Rhine Valley.

(New York TIMES, October 15, 1944)

First Infantry Battalion From Paris Near Metz — The First Battalion of Paris Infantry, which entered action in Paris on August 19, left the capital on September 11 and took up a position near Metz. These "Marie Louise 1944" received their baptism of fire immediately. Working in close contact with the Americans, the First Battalion of Paris, 550 men strong when they arrived near Metz, saw their numbers decrease little by little. The Battalion's missions were indeed glorious and dangerous. Patrol after patrol, day and night.

The Americans are full of admiration for the activities of these men and that activity is growing. They

attacked the Metz quarries which the Germans had carefully prepared. They were 450 when they set out; they took the position with small arms and returned with 150 men; their captain had been killed.

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

Reports on French Troops

With the FFI in Leclerc's Division (By war correspondent Pierre Maillaud) — This dispatch was begun in a wood in which the paths and even the roads have become enormous furrows of mud. I was surprised to see several passenger buses among the tanks, caterpillar trucks and jeeps. The men in the buses were not helmeted like the others and their arms as well as their equipment were modest. This was a squadron of FFI which was part of the battalion incorporated into Leclerc's Division. This forest is one of the three points of the Division's and even of the Allies' farthest advance in this sector. At a distance of one kilometer on the right flank, the enemy retained advance posts and though he dared not push his posts forward to regain what he had just lost, his artillery remained active, shelling the French positions at regular intervals but inaccurately enough to cause only occasional damage.

Everywhere, the FFI, despite the inferiority of the arms and equipment, which they expect will shortly be remedied, distinguished themselves by their dash and their feats in action, especially in this sector in which they did excellent service performing all patrol operations.

We have been at the bridgehead which the French and later the Americans have been extending for the last 48 hours, that is, since I saw infantry and the first tanks crossing the river the Germans had hoped to hold. To the west of the wood I mentioned, the commander of a tactical sub-group made a 20 kilometer advance in 24 hours by the thenceforth classic method of two thrusts across the enemy lines followed immediately by lateral clearing thrusts. Sunday these advance patrols operated with such swiftness that they took, among other prisoners, a dozen Germans who were still sleeping beside their guns. Despite its steady advance, the Division could not help noticing on the front as a whole a strengthening of the resistance of the enemy who is attempting to take advantage of the bad weather and mud which are paralyzing our movements to slow the awesome Allied advance and to gain some respite. To slow us up, perhaps, but to stop us, that is more doubtful.

(FRANCE, London, September 27, 1944)

Note — We have learned that the most fantastic rumors have been circulating on the supposed losses sustained by the Leclerc Division. We are in a position here to issue a categorical denial of these rumors. In fact, for the last fortnight this Division has participated in very few operations. The last action, which took place on the outskirts of a Lorraine town, cost the Germans more than a battalion while the French losses, sustained during an ambush attack, were about 20 killed or wounded. The heavy mud and the general slowness of the operations explains the relative immobility of the troops of the still intact



Signal Corps Photo

Argentan, Normandy, after the battle

Leclerc Division which has maintained its moral and material strength. Spectacular battles cannot be expected for the activity of the French is governed by orders received from a higher command. In addition, the use of an armored division in any specific sector is hardly the normal assignment of a unit designed for movement and attack.

(Ministry of Information, Paris, October 6, 1944)

Office of Military Information of the National Defense Committee — Communiqué — During four days of fighting, October 6 to 10, French troops operating on the first peaks of the Vosges overcame a strong nest of resistance and inflicted heavy losses on the enemy. Close to 1,000 bodies were picked up and more than 1,000 prisoners fell into the hands of General Delattre de Tassigny's Army. A regiment of French parachutists especially distinguished themselves.

(Ministry of Information, Paris, October 11, 1944)

In the Ardennes Sector (By war correspondent Pierre Gosset) — Germano-Luxembourg Frontier, September 25 — Yesterday it was autumn, today it is already winter. On the Ardennes front the roads within a few hours became covered over with a layer of frozen mud and we would guess that it will not disappear again for several months. There is a fog hanging on the tops of the pine trees which screens from sight yesterday's smiling landscape. Within 24 hours the appearance of men and things changed radically; the former began to realize that they are perhaps on the threshold of a hard and trying winter campaign.

These soldiers whom we saw yesterday in shirts and trousers, are still unfamiliar figures in their overcoats

and woolens. At the steering wheels of their trucks, all muffled and huddled up and shivering, they began today to suffer for the first time since the Normandy landings. At the advance posts in the forest of Eupen, Hertogenwald or in the great forests of Luxembourg, American shock troops, who alone at this moment are maintaining contact with the enemy in this section of the front thought today of protecting themselves against the cold, the rain and the mud.

Today also, for the first time perhaps since June 6, hundreds of thousands of men have anxiously asked themselves the question which each is unable to answer but which takes on a different aspect according to whether it is discussed in the atmosphere of London or New York offices or at the little frontier outposts of Luxembourg: "How long till the final offensive?"

(FRANCE, London, September 27, 1944)

Maquis from Alsace-Lorraine on Belfort Front — (AFI) Paris, September 26 — The Alsatians and Lorrainers who fled to the Maquis in Dordogne, Savoie, Corrèze, the Vercors and Gers have entered the FFI and formed a special brigade called "Alsace-Lorraine." This brigade, which is, naturally, eager to play as great a part as possible in the liberation of these two provinces, has already participated in the battles in which the armored Division "Das Reich" was destroyed. It reached the Belfort front under its own power, thanks to gasoline taken from the enemy. Its units operate in conjunction with the Sixth Army Group.

(FRANCE, London, September 27, 1944)

Gironde FFI — On October 12, the newspaper *Combat* published a report by Merry Bromberger describing in detail the dramatic and heroic activities of the FFI in Gironde. Several hundred young and poorly dressed volunteers, one out of three of whom had arms seized from the enemy, held out against 16,000 heavily armed and strongly entrenched German veterans who were supplied daily by planes from Germany.

Holding the Germans in check, these FFI have just been recognized by them as regular fighting troops. Through the efforts of Master Sergeant Francis they have acquired a plane for reconnaissance and liaison work while awaiting the assignment to them of a bomber squadron.

(*COMBAT*, Paris, October 12, 1944)

II—FRENCH ARMY AND NAVY IN SOUTHERN FRANCE LANDINGS

It is now possible to publish details on the operations of the French Navy in the Allied landings on the Mediterranean coast, as well as of General Delattre de Tassigny's Army in the advance leading to the fall of

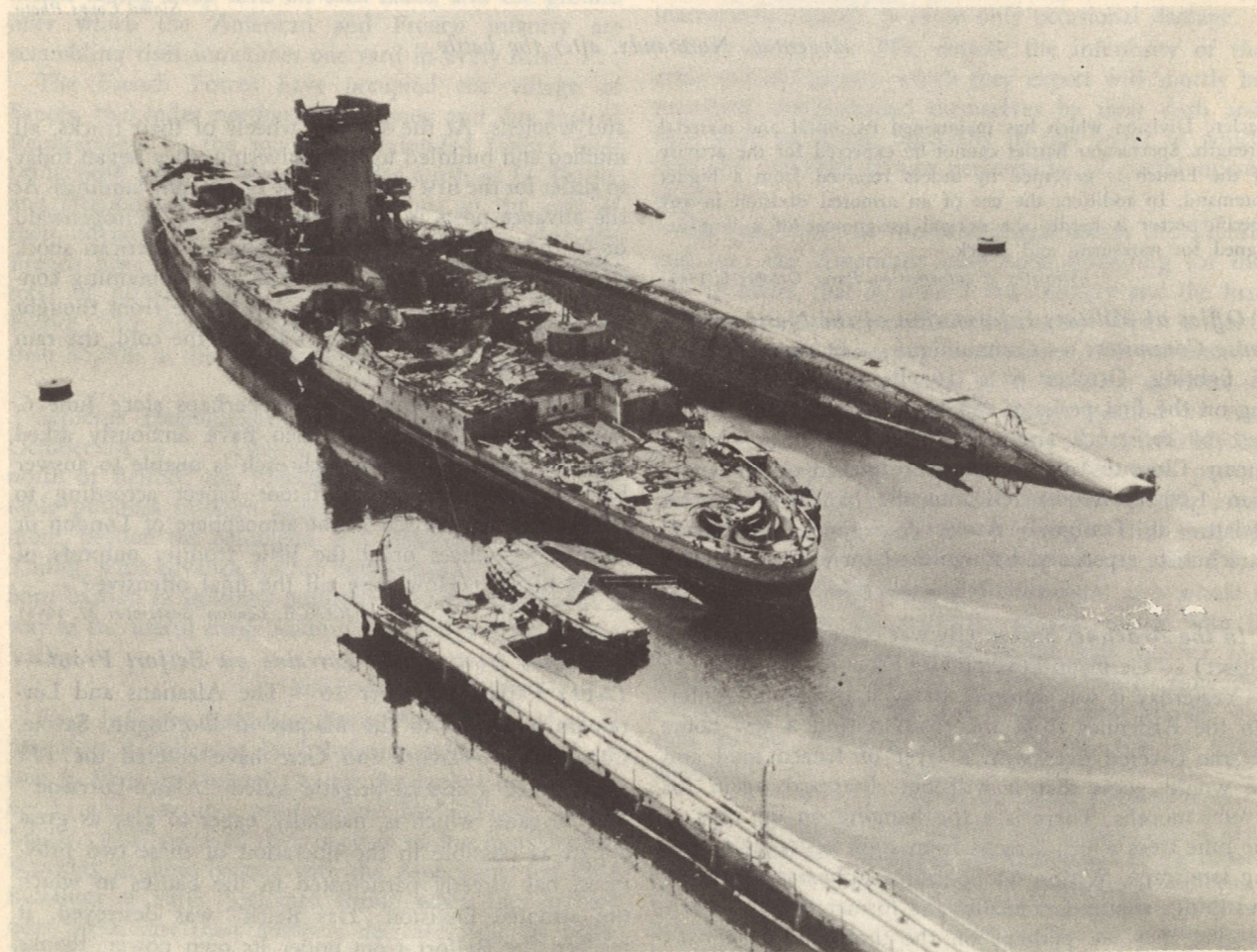
Toulon and Marseille and to the extraordinary advance through the Rhône Valley to the Belfort front. Below are several reports on French naval and military action:

Cruiser Emile Bertin in Action

The Emile Bertin, one of the most modern ships of the French Fleet,¹ was among the six French cruisers to participate in the southern landing operations. First assigned to cover the left wing of the invasion, the Saint Raphaël sector, she later was ordered to shift to the right wing, the Porquerolles-Hyères-Toulon sector. Below is a summary of these operations.

August 18, 1944 — In the morning, the *Emile Bertin*, recalled from the Cannes sector, took up a position south of the Ile de Port Cros which had already been occupied by the Allies, and beyond the Ile de Porquerolles which was still held by the enemy. She shelled artillery emplacements on the Giens Peninsula from a distance of 23,000 meters. Her fire was directed from planes and was extremely accurate. The objectives were hit and at least one battery was wiped out.

¹ The *Emile Bertin* remained at anchor at Martinique after the 1940 Armistice. She rejoined the French fleet when the island rallied to the French Committee of National Liberation in July 1943.



U. S. Air Forces Photo

Toulon — The battleship "Strasbourg" afloat on an even keel and a cruiser lying on its side

August 20 — While loading supplies at Propriano, on the west coast of Corsica, the *Emile Bertin* was alerted and by noon had rejoined the left wing of the fleet supporting the army in the investment of Toulon. She went into action in the afternoon beyond the Salins d'Hyères cape in a channel, six kilometers long and two kilometers wide, which had just been swept of mines. There she opened fire on a battery of three heavy guns; the attack was successful. While withdrawing from the firing zone that same evening, the *Emile Bertin* shelled an AA battery on the Mont des Oiseaux near Hyères causing a tremendous explosion.

August 21 — The *Emile Bertin* held station between two and three miles south of Porquerolles (still held by the enemy), in readiness to support the army. She was requested to shell enemy positions between Hyères and the airfield south of the town. Fire continued till 2:30 p.m., range being corrected by a shore observer, who congratulated the cruiser's gunners when the bombardment was over. It later developed that the observer was a former officer of the *Emile Bertin*.

During the day the *Emile Bertin* was fired upon by an enemy battery on Cape Cépet, and there were a number of near misses, but she continued action under cover of a smoke screen laid down by destroyers.

August 23 — Alerted at Propriano, the *Emile Bertin* arrived at noon in the Gulf of La Napoule, to support an advance on Cannes, which had not yet been liberated. The fact that French flags were flying in different parts of the town having led to the belief that the town had either been evacuated by the enemy or occupied by the FFI, there was no bombardment and, together with another cruiser, the *Emile Bertin* steamed to Saint Raphaël where the American and French Admirals visited American sector Headquarters. Since no Allied attack was planned for the rest of the day, the *Emile Bertin* returned to the night anchorage.

August 24 — In the morning the French cruiser was once more off Cannes, at the disposal of the land forces. Since the local situation was unchanged, the *Emile Bertin* was ordered to destroy a freighter tied at a quay at Nice, which the enemy might otherwise sink in such a way as to block the port. Although extremely accurate gunnery was necessary to avoid terrible losses and useless destruction, the operation was carried out brilliantly: of eighteen shells fired, at least six hit the freighter, the others falling close by. Only one salvo, fired while range was being adjusted, overshot the quay.

August 25 — The *Emile Bertin* was off Antibes. A small caliber enemy battery fired on her at 11 a.m. In the afternoon, the French Admiral was ordered to co-ordinate a bombardment by a squadron consisting of the *Emile Bertin*, the *Terrible* and three American destroyers. At 2:50 p.m. the *Emile Bertin* shelled Villeneuve-Loubet and, following information from shore observers, moved eastward toward Cagnes, adjusting her fire to the Allied advance toward the Var river. At

5 p.m. the *Emile Bertin* shelled a battery on the summit of Mount Vinaigrier, northeast of Nice.

August 26 — The *Emile Bertin* was before Nice. At 4:45 p.m. the land observer requested her to shell a deep ravine 2 kilometers northwest of Villeneuve-Loubet where enemy concentrations had been spotted. The bombardment was reported effective. At 5:35 p.m. another target between Villeneuve and Vence was pounded. At 9 p.m. the *Emile Bertin* left for Ajaccio to refuel and take on supplies.

August 27 — At 2 a.m. orders were received to change course to Toulon where the enemy was still holding strongly on the Saint-Mandrier peninsula.

Reporter's Note — Wonderful work was done by the wireless operators who serve, in a sense, as the ship's eyes and ears for the outside world. It was radio which enabled us to locate nests of resistance to be destroyed, to spot them accurately, to get their exact range. . . . Results such as those of August 26 are owing to both the skill of the gunners, the excellence of the matériel and the training of the entire crew which was a single entity working for a single aim.

The commander of the *Emile Bertin*, of the Free French Navy, had the undivided loyalty of his crew, and there was perfect teamwork between the 350 men who had been aboard for three years and the numerous men who had escaped from France and joined them in North Africa; their slogan is: "One France, one Navy!"

Toulon and Marseille Taken by French Troops

The French troops were assigned the sector along the Côte des Maures between Toulon and Cannes. There was only rather weak enemy opposition to the landing which went off completely according to plan, with very small losses, under the protection of Allied and French naval and air forces. Below is a summary of the operations of the French troops at Marseille and Toulon which they liberated.

August 17 — The bridgehead was solidly established, from the Hyères district to Saint Raphaël, along a line running through La Lande-des-Maures, Cuers, Pierrefeu, Carnoules, Le Luc-en-Provence, Draguignan and Puget-sur-Argens. General Delattre de Tassigny established his first Headquarters at Cogelin. A French Commando unit which had landed on Cape Nègre on August 15, took Lavandou and then Cape Benatles on August 16 and 17, taking 900 prisoners with a loss of only 20 killed. Beside this bridgehead, encompassing the entire Massif des Maures, General Delattre de Tassigny was developing a thrust toward Aix, in order to flank heavily fortified Toulon and invest Marseille. While he was regrouping the French forces for this maneuver, the Americans were advancing along the road followed by Napoleon [up the Rhône].

The Siege of Toulon, August 20 to 28 — On August 20, General de Larminat's troops began operations

against Toulon, which was defended by élite units of the German Navy, while armored elements protecting this action were developing an advance on Marseille by the occupation of Aubagne. On August 21, despite the enemy's bitter stand, our shock units attacked two steep mountains guarding Toulon from the North, Le Coudon and Le Faron. French Commando troops scaled the summit defenses of Le Coudon, using ropes, and overcame the garrison. A shock battalion took Le Faron, which was held by 200 German sailors. The town of Hyères was taken in hand to hand fighting after a bitter battle in which the enemy resisted street by street and house by house. French armored elements bypassing Toulon reached Beausset on the Toulon-Marseille road, and the sea at Bandol. Toulon was, therefore, completely surrounded by the evening of August 21. In the night of August 22-23, the French troops took the greater part of Toulon in hand to hand combat. Bitter fighting continued till August 28. The operation was a difficult one. The Naval Arsenal and Sainte Anne Hospital had been turned into fortresses. While the battle for Toulon was going on, armored reconnaissance units crossed the Durance river at a ford near Cavillon, and moved rapidly toward Avignon and the lower Rhône Valley.

The Siege of Marseille — The daring advance on Marseille, begun on August 21 with the capture of Beausset and Aubagne, continued to Allauch, 8 kilometers from Marseille. General de Larminat surprised the enemy by the speed of his advance and, with very effective aid from the FFI, by August 24 our troops had reached the Vieux Port and held the north quarter of the Cannebière. Part of the German garrison was cornered at La Joliette and another part in the Notre-Dame-de-la-Garde district. Our losses were light, and in the first two days 5,000 prisoners were taken in Marseille itself.

The Glorious 28th of August: 35,000 Prisoners Taken by the French — After five days of heavy action, the operations of the French troops at Toulon and Marseille ended in complete victory on August 28. At Toulon, on August 27, Cape Sicile, south of La Seyne, was completely cleared. The enemy retreated onto the peninsula of Saint-Mandrier, where, on August 28, the German Admiral commanding Toulon and the coastal sector surrendered to French General Pierre Magnan with his entire staff and 2,000 élite troops.

At Marseille, the southern quarters were completely cleared. The enemy was still holding the rear of the port from Fort St. Nicholas at L'Estaque. On August 28, the German General in command at Marseille surrendered to French General de Montsabert with all his troops, who numbered almost 10,000.

The surrender of Marseille and Saint-Mandrier marked the successful completion of the first assignment entrusted to the French Army. They took a total of over 35,000 prisoners, including 1,000 officers. On August

29, French troops and FFI paraded before their commanders in Marseille.

(BULLETIN DES ARMEES DE LA REPUBLIQUE, September 8, 1944)

Statement by General Delattre de Tassigny

Speaking over Radiodiffusion de la Nation Française, General Delattre de Tassigny described as follows the operations of French troops in the Rhône Valley up to the junction of his forces with those of General Leclerc on the Langres plateau, and the establishment of the Belfort front. The French troops commanded by General Delattre de Tassigny, now operating under the orders of American General Devers, form the French First Army:

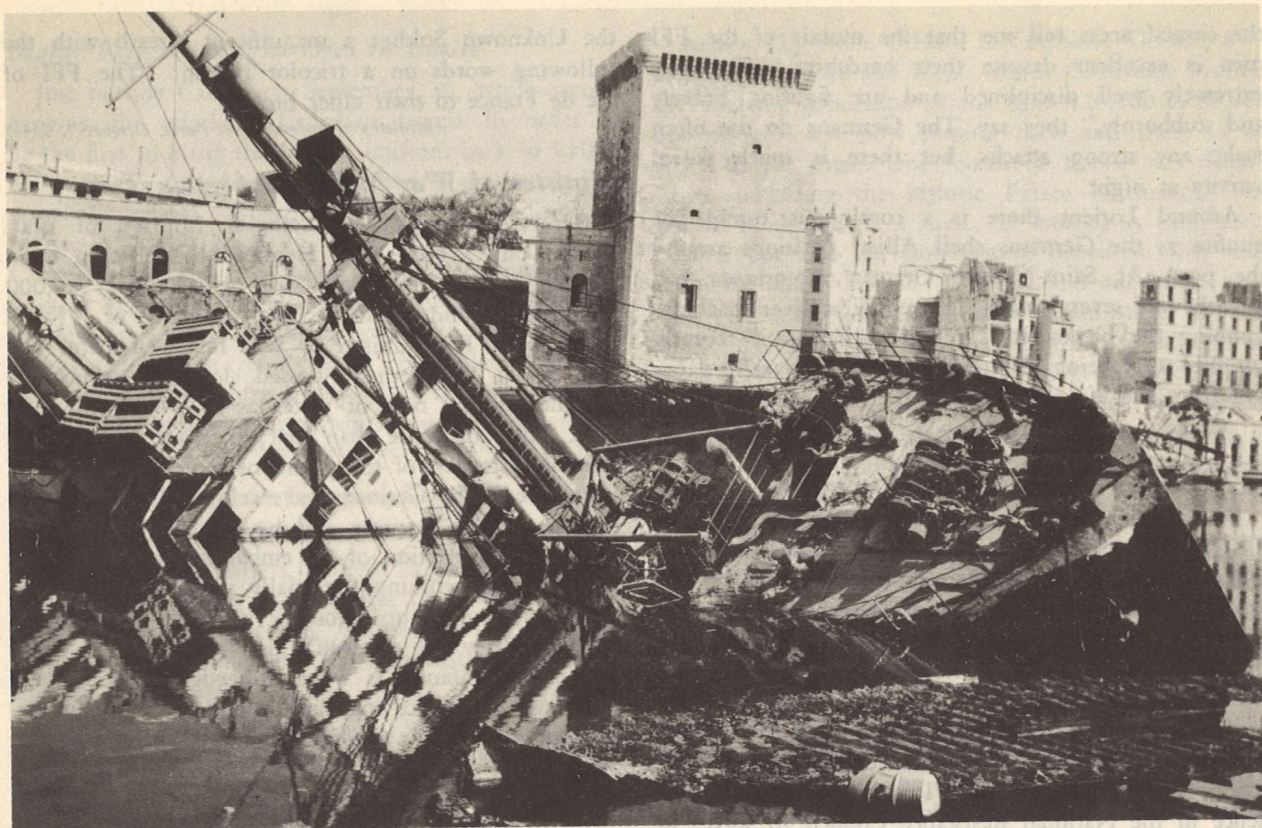
60,000 Prisoners Taken by the French — The operations of the French First Army are part of the campaign of France whose objective is the liberation of our nation's territory. The Anglo-American armies which landed in Normandy on June 6 were to conquer the Paris region. On the Mediterranean, the American assault corps of the Seventh Army had the assignment of taking, on August 15, a large bridgehead, encompassing the Massifs of L'Esterel and Maures. Covered by them, the French forces who landed in their turn took successively and methodically Toulon and Marseille and then swung northward to follow the Rhône Valley toward Lyon.

It was planned that these two groups would meet on the Langres plateau. By a daring and rapid advance the French Army achieved its aims in three weeks from the landing of its first group of tanks. This success is owing not only to the incomparable power of Allied equipment, but also to the fierce will for liberation which rules among the French people and to the matchless ardor of our Army, as well as to the close and sure cooperation which has existed among the American, British and French leaders.

On the appeal of the Supreme Commander, General de Gaulle, the entire French people rose against the invader. The zeal of our soldiers who were regaining France was equaled only by the magnificent heroism of the fighters of the interior who desired her to be free. The officers and men of the French Army always obeyed with the fullest confidence the orders of the Allied Supreme Command.

The mission entrusted them by General Patch, commanding the American Seventh Army, was completed: it comprised two essential objectives, the successive capture of Toulon and Marseille and the advance up the Valley of the Rhône. The speedy seizure of the two great ports was the decisive factor in the success of the operation . . .

The original timetable having been so happily outstripped, it remained to fulfill the second objective of the mission, strategic exploitation. While the American Seventh Corps moved boldly on Grenoble along the Napoleonic route, the French troops crossed the



Signal Corps Photo

Marseille — A ship scuttled by Germans blocks the entrance to the port.
In the background Fort St. Jean.

Rhône with improvised means and liberated Lyon and Dijon, everywhere helped by the FFI, those heroic groups of volunteers who often fought bare handed, and made up for their lack of arms with courage, élan, ardor and faith. In less than a month, the victorious march of our divisions, combined with the timely action of the FFI, freed our land, from the Mediterranean to the frontiers of the Alps and the Jura. Crossing Burgundy and Franche-Comté, on September 12 the French Army achieved the union of fronts in the western theater of the war in effecting a junction with Leclerc's Division and Patton's Army. These accomplishments were extremely profitable: the regions south of the Durance and west of the Rhône were liberated without suffering the devastation caused by modern armies. The Nazis left over 60,000 prisoners and considerable matériel in our hands.

A new phase of the battle is opening, the stake is the liberation of Alsace, French province dearest of all to us, whose sparkling landscape all Americans know. . . . This new phase necessitates the reorganization of the command.

General Devers, whose role in the preparation of the landings was so important, takes command of the Sixth Army Group, consisting of General Patch's Seventh Army and the French First Army which I have the honor to command. . . .

(French Information Services, London, October 5, 1944)

III—MILITARY NEWS

Battle of the Ports

The Germans still occupy Lorient, Saint-Nazaire, La Rochelle, Royan and the Pointe de Grave and the FFI are continuing their siege. Below is a report from London by Paul Bewsher, British war correspondent, describing their activities:

FFI Men Besiege Four Ports — The tide of the war has swept eastward so rapidly that some people fail to realize that the Germans still control these ports and strategic points and that they dominate the estuaries of the Loire and Gironde. Men of the FFI are helping to maintain garrisons in these areas. Some are clad almost in rags; others have only thin civilian clothing. However, they wear the Maquis armband as they man their posts to prevent Germans from ravaging the countryside in search of food or from escaping from their trapped garrisons. Men of the FFI have willingly undertaken this task. In some places they man block-houses and sleep in dugouts — on regular twenty-four hour a day "emergency duty."

Opposing them are big forces. At Lorient 50,000 Germans with 500 guns are said to be holding a 35 mile line around the post. The Saint-Nazaire garrison is said to be of equal strength. Men just back from