FRANCE AT WAR

I—THE BATTLE OF THE RHINE

Alsace and Lorraine are in great part liberated except for large pockets south of the Vosges and in the sector beyond Haguenau. Units of the American Third and Seventh Armies and of the French First Army are driving toward the Rhine where the next Allied offensive on Germany from the east and southeast will launch before the great natural frontier and the Siegfried line.

Operations in Alsace have met stanch German resistance which, in addition to bad weather during the last fortnight, has made the Allied advance particularly difficult. Below is a resumé of American Seventh Army and French First Army operations from December 1 *to December* 12, *from the New York* Times *correspondent's reports from Supreme Headquarters, Allied Expeditionary Force, in France*:

Haguenau Fight Goes On — December 2 — The American Seventh Army was registering important gains both north and south of Strasbourg, as Lieutenant General Alexander Patch exploited his advantageous positions on the Rhine plain. While some of his troops fought into Haguenau, 16 miles north of Strasbourg, other forces swept ten miles to the northwest across the hills to within ten miles of the Palatinate. Armored units, spearing southward down the Rhine Valley in gains of up to four miles, reached Booftzheim and Kogenheim, 16 and 19 miles south of Strasbourg.

The Seventh's tanks there were no more than 30 miles from the French First Army moving up from the south around Colmar. American troops fought their way into Sélestat, an important communications town in the Alsace Plain, 12 miles north of Colmar. House-to-house fighting was in progress on the western edges of Sélestat. Tank-supported German counter-attacks were repulsed.

French First Army troops, moving up from the south, established a bridgehead on the northern bank of the Doller River at Mulhouse and held it against strong enemy counter-attacks.

(*New York TIMES, December* 3, 1944)

Rhine Bridges in River — December 3 — There was still some sniping going on around Strasbourg today where the Germans have destroyed three bridges over the Rhine. A steel railroad bridge, 750 feet long, to the north has fallen into the Rhine and only one span of a road bridge next to it is still standing up. A 760-foot concrete road bridge farther south is the least damaged of the three and only the western span is in the Rhine.

The armored push south of Strasbourg was making slow, steady progress today, with mines and blown-up bridges delaying the advance. By nightfall tanks had pushed into Friesenheim on the east side of a canal eighteen miles south of Strasbourg and Herbsheim, seventeen miles south of the city to the west of the canal. The Germans and Americans battled all day through the streets of Sélestat, an important communications center on the western edge of the Alsace plain. German artillery also pounded Ebersheim, two and a half miles northeast of Sélestat, which was captured. The enemy counter-attacked today to the southwest at Saint-Hippolyte and Aubure.

These persistent German efforts to hold the American advance around Sélestat are having some effect, for although the counter-attacks have been beaten off consistently, they are slowing down our progress. Today Orschwiller, three miles southwest of Sélestat, and Thannenkirch, four miles farther southwest, were cleared of the enemy.

German mortar and artillery fire is pounding the troops advancing through the Bonhomme and Schlucht passes and the thrust toward Colmar is making only limited progress.

French troops of Major General Jean Delattre de Tassigny's army are moving a little faster in the Bussang Pass. The battle in Cornimont reached its third day with Algerian and Moroccan infantry spilling out from the pass into the Thur River valley, where they have occupied Wildenstein, Kruth, Oderen and Ranspach. The later is just northwest of Saint-Amarin, which is sixteen miles northwest of Mulhouse.

Other troops advanced to the west of Thann, on the edge of the plain ten miles northwest of Mulhouse.

Mopping up of the enemy in the area south of Mulhouse continued and the number of Germans in the area has been sharply reduced in the past four days of fighting.

(*New York TIMES, December* 4, 1944)

Haguenau Battle Continues — December 4 — An indecisive battle is still raging around Haguenau. The enemy is trying to hold the town as long as possible to cover the removal of supplies from the forest to the north, but today the village of Walk Château, two and a half miles south of Haguenau, was captured, and although heavy enemy artillery fire continued the Americans slowly fought their way toward the town.

This is an important area, closely connected with General Patton's operations farther west. Should General Patch clean up Haguenau and shove around the Haguenau forest to the German frontier to the north, then the German forces defending the Saar Basin would have to be thinned out to meet the new push materializing west of Karlsruhe, Rhineland industrial center.

All resistance from snipers now has ceased around Strasbourg. South of Strasbourg, however, there was still fierce fighting today, with the Americans gaining ground slowly.

Hard fighting continued in the area of Sélestat on the western edge of the Alsace plain southwest of Strasbourg, but Saint-Hippolyte, four miles southwest of this

key communications center, has been captured. The enemy is counter-attacking repeatedly, usually in company strength, supported by few tanks.

Opposition in the Sainte-Marie Pass appears to be disintegrating, however. Infantry spilled out from the pass to capture Ribeauville, only eight miles northwest of Colmar, today. Those troops who have been impeded in the Vosges mountains by forests and snowfalls for at least a month, now are being held up on the plain by the marshes around Sélestat. The Germans, as usual, are taking advantage of these natural obstacles and directing their artillery fire down the roads.

The French also are making better progress in the passes. Moroccans of the French First Army have pushed east of Gerardmer into the northern end of the Schlucht Pass, while farther south they have seized a crest overlooking part of the Bussang Pass in the vicinity of Thann and Willer-sur-Thur on the main road northwest of Mulhouse. This road has been cut farther north at Saint-Amarin.

Other French troops encountered heavy German pressure in the Harth Forest northeast of Mulhouse. The French, who have been trying to clear the forest, which lies on the west bank of the Rhine, were forced to give ground today. Their artillery, however, knocked out an armored train that had been shelling the French from the other side of the Rhine.

French Squadrons of the United States First Tactical Air Force flew fighter sweeps east of the Vosges in the Mulhouse-Strasbourg area, but met no German opposition. They also attacked communications in the Reich, destroying or damaging four locomotives, three barges and fifty-five railroad cars. One rail line was cut.

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

Poilus Scale Peak — December 5 — The pace of the operations in the Americans' sector in the eastern Vosges should be speeded by the clearing of Sélestat. The Thirty-sixth Infantry Division, fighting in this area, entered Roderen southwest of Sélestat, yesterday after having taken Saint-Hippolyte.

Farther west doughboys were attacking the German fort at Mutzig, at the eastern exit of the Saales Pass, twelve miles west of Strasbourg. Mutzig was by-passed in the initial advance onto the Alsace plain.

Despite a desperate attack, which breached the walls of the fortress, several score Germans were still holding out within it tonight.

(Press services said the fort fell Tuesday night with the last ten survivors surrendering.)

The French First Army continued to gain in the area east and southeast of Gerardmer, where the poilus occupied Mount Hohneck, 4,461 feet high and second highest peak in the Vosges, situated east of Lake Blanchemer. According to French reports, its occupation creates a pocket of fifteen to twenty square miles enclosing several hundred German troops.

The Third Algerian Infantry Division has been operating in the area of Le Valtin, seven miles east of Gerardmer, and probably its troops took the Hohneck peak.

Farther south gains were made east of the Thur River into the Münster Forest between the Schlucht and Bussang Passes. These advances followed the valley of the Thur in the area of Saint-Amarin. The French have regained some of the ground lost in the Thann area, where the Germans attacked Sunday.

General Delattre de Tassigny, in his press conference today, named the present French First Army objectives as a complete clearance of the Alsace plain, the freeing of Colmar and establishment of a wide front on the Rhine. A start, at least, has been made toward all three.

The First Tactical Air Force flew more than 350 fighter-bomber and fighter sorties today, attacking railroad lines in Germany in the Mannheim-Darmstadt area. French planes bombed a German ammunition dump near Mulhouse at Sennheim and saw it blow up as they flew home.

(*New York TIMES, December* 6, 1944)

Another Metz Fort Falls — December 6 — Far to the west of the fighting front, Fort Saint-Quentin, one of three remaining forts around Metz, fell at 10:30 a.m. today after a combined assault by air and ground forces. Twenty-two officers and 571 men surrendered. There are now only two forts, the Jeanne d'Arc and Driant, still holding out at Metz.

Progress on the Seventh Army's northern front continues, albeit at a slower pace than heretofore. The most significant success in the last twenty-four hours has been the taking of Wimmenau, two miles east of Wingen, in a pass that connects the two battlefields, one west, the other east, of the Vosges. Wingen has also been cleared, and the Seventh Army is now assured control of the pass.

(*New York TIMES, December* 7, 1944)

Five Miles West of Münster — December 6 — The French First Army was continuing its pressure in the eastern Vosges after gaining four miles in the Schluct Pass up to this morning. At last reports infantry of the Third Algerian Division was five miles west of Münster, on the main road east of Gerardmer. Another peak, this one 3,736 feet high, has been taken in this area.

(*New York TIMES, December* 7, 1944)

The Battle in Thann — December 7 — The last bits of Alsace appeared to be slipping from Germany's grasp as the Seventh Army drove to within four miles north of Colmar, last Alsatian city in enemy hands, after overrunning four towns and villages, including Ostheim. The Germans threw in a series of counter-attacks against this push in an apparent effort to protect their withdrawals across the Rhine.

The French Army reached Thann, ten miles northwest of Mulhouse, and began street fighting there. Eight miles east of Mulhouse the enemy was strongly resisting French attempts to advance beyond newly captured Nif-

fer, on the west bank of the Rhine. The gap on the Rhine plain between the United States Seventh Army and the French First Army was narrowed to 23 miles, and enemy trucks and men jammed the temporary Rhine bridge at Neufbrisach to the east, pulling back into Germany and the Siegfried Line.

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

Drive Toward Colmar — December 8 — Seventh Army forces fighting their way southward have pushed within five miles of Colmar from the northwest in the area of Kaysersberg, while other troops moving out of the Vosges. have captured Guémar and Ostheim to the northwest.

On the flank of these forces infantry of the French forces have captured Hegenheim, Mittelwihr, Zellenberg and Riquewihr and have pushed within four miles of Colmar from the west. Other French troops have entered Oderen on the west bank of the Rhine due east of Mulhouse, meeting strong German forces near Niffer. Some small villages in an area seven miles east, southeast of Mulhouse between the Rhine and the Harth Forest, were cleared in this fighting, but most of the German positions in the Harth Forest still are intact.

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

Thann Battle Continues — December 9 — On the Seventh Army front American troops dug deeper into the heavily wooded Eifel Pass, just south of the French fortress town of Bitche, seven miles south of the Saar border.

The French First Army fighting out of Bonhomme Pass, were closing on the Alsatian city of Colmar, no more than four miles ahead of them. Their progress was slowed by desperate German rearguards protecting the German withdrawal across the Rhine east of Colmar, where a temporary bridge at Neufbrisach was attacked by Allied warplanes.

The French cleared most of Thann, ten miles northwest of Mulhouse, but fighting continued in the southwestern part of the town. Other French troops clung to the Lutterbach bridgehead, across the Doller River just west of Mulhouse, but lost the railroad station there in the face of fierce resistance.

(*New York TIMES, December* 10, 1944)

Heavy Resistance North and West of Colmar — December 10 — German resistance north and west of Colmar is stiffening. The American advance from the north, impeded by flooding rivers, is held about four miles from the city. French First Army troops have pushed five miles north of Münster onto the high ground between the Bonhomme and Schlucht Passes, about four miles west of Colmar.

Farther south the French drove the Germans from Thann and pushed across the Thur River. Here, too, the advance has been slowed down by a river that also is at flood stage.

(*New York TIMES, December* 11, 1944)

Ministry of Information

Armored cars belonging to the Leclerc Division at Strasbourg.

Ministry of Information

Armored cars belonging to the Leclerc Division at Strasbourg.

Haguenau Mopped Up — December 11 — The Seventh Army's most significant advances were made in Haguenau and to the northwest of this important road center. Doughboys of the Seventy-ninth Infantry Division entered Haguenau's southern and southwestern outskirts this morning, and by nightfall most of the town had been cleared of the enemy, save for snipers and a few machine-gunners.

There was still heavy fighting outside the town, in Griesbach and Mertzwiller to the northwest, where the German lines supported by dug-in tanks and self-propelled guns are yielding slowly to the American assaults. East of Haguenau the enemy line along the railroad is as yet unbroken while the Germans' strong fortified position at Kaltenhouse, between Haguenau and Bischwiller has withstood all assaults.

Advancing east of Niederbronn other Seventh Army troops entered Reichshoffen, a key position on the plain west of Karlsruhe that commands the routes eastward. By noon two-thirds of the town was held by General Patch's troops.

West of the Vosges the advance beyond Lemberg continued in the face of strong opposition from heavy machine-gun positions.

Troops of the French First Army have cleared the Germans from Kembs south to the Swiss frontier, thus reducing a pocket along the west bank of the Rhine that the enemy had held for three weeks.

(*New York TIMES, December* 12, 1944)

Mopping-up Operations — December 12 — French and American troops of the French First Army cleared Germans from Schweighause, Aspach-le-Bas, Michelbach and Vieux Thann. The four towns lie south of Thann in the eastern foothills of the Vosges. Floods are as great a hindrance as German resistance in this area.

Other advances were made south of Lapoutroye, and Tête des Faux, high point south of Bonhomme Pass, has been occupied.

The French captured 250 Germans when they eliminated an enemy bridgehead over the Rhine at Kembs.

(*New York TIMES, December* 13, 1944)

II—REPORTS FROM THE BATTLE FRONTS

On the Vosges Front

Our Most Glorious Maquis Holds Vosges Ridge — (By Roger Vailland, special correspondent of *Action,* weekly of the Committee for Military Action of the National Resistance Council) — "Careful," said "Quinze Grammes." "Bend down, don't run, we can be seen."

Here we are now, protected by a grassy ridge. "Quinze Grammes" stops, lights a cigarette, smiles at me. He has rosy cheeks, curly blond hair and a childish expression. He weighs very little, only fifteen grams his comrades decided. A non-com at seventeen, he is now eighteen.

On all fours "La Pipe," "Trente Six" and "Calva' emerge from a foxhole dug in the slope and covered with pine branches. The oldest can't be more than twenty. "La Pipe" must be a mountaineer, you guess that right away when you see him climbing the slope with the vigorous and casual gait of a mountaineer.

"Half an hour ago we got hell," he said.

The field is torn by four new craters which frame the shelter.

"It's 'Cupidon's' fault, that idiot," explained "Calva." "He lit a fire ten meters from the ridge."

"Cupidon" loves comfort. Even in the front lines he must have warm food. That is apparently why his friends nicknamed him "Cupidon"; today young men have a strange opinion of the God of Love. The trouble is that, 200 meters on the other side of the ridge, the Germans are occupying a chalet, white and pink like a toy, and whenever they see the smoke of "Cupidon's" fire they phone their battery hidden in the pine woods covering the opposite hillock. Then the shells fly.

" 'Frédé' was mad," said "Trente Six," "He gave 'Cupidon' hell . . . "

" 'Frédé' is right," answered "Quinze Grammes." "It's because of fellows like 'Cupidon' that people say the FFI can't fight a war."

"Frédé" is the captain. He is old; he is twenty-four. He has a red beard. Before joining the Maquis he worked with his father, a Lyon broker. For we are somewhere in the Vosges with one of the most famous French Maquis, probably the most famous French Maquis, but censorship keeps me from giving its name. . . . Here is "Frédé's" story.

On November 11, 1942, shortly before the Germans arrived at his garrison town in the supposed free zone, Lieutenant G. left his barracks and took to the highest plateau, overlooking the city, with his platoon, arms, munitions and horses. Almost at once he was joined by some students and, in February 1943, followed by workers whose labor draft number had come up. Then, in March, young peasants of the class of 1942; in May and June, workers and students from the neighboring city.

Their exploits are already famous: two winters in the mountains, sabotage, forays; and in June 1942, open combat, desperate resistance against important German units which encircled the region. Retreat after astounding battles, concealment in woods and caves, the horrible campaign of the Militiamen.

In August, the survivors took a city defended by a garrison of 2,000 Germans. Hooray! the depot was overflowing with arms and ammunition. At last our Maquis had the equipment long dreamed of. It could even arm new recruits flocking in from everywhere. An attack in force into a large valley of great strategic importance; violent action; the Germans recovered, launched an attack with 200 tanks. Once again the battle seemed to take a turn for the worse but then the Allies arrived.

Our Maquis soldiers are now fighting in the Vosges. They are in the front lines in the arduous mountain battle. They hope to be the first to enter Alsace, over there, not so very far on the other side of the high, haze-covered ridges. They know that all the Army's eyes are upon them, so much has been said about the Maquis. They are bent on proving themselves worthy of their comrades of Tchad, Bir-Hakeim and Tunisia, not only through their courage in battle — the liberation was not needed for that — but also through discipline and military skill.

"Cupidon" won't light any more fires 200 meters from the Germans, "Frédé" won't tolerate it. All agree. This is war, real war.

This is a tough spot.

The "Chleus" (Germans)[1] have not given up. During the day they remain entrenched but at night they send patrols that courageously slip into our lines. First we posted sentinels in the pine woods through which they came. But German snipers silently climbed into trees, tied themselves to the trunks with their belts, and awaited dawn: then, before being spotted, they could shoot some of our men.

[1]The Germans are named after a famous Moroccan tribe, known for its courage and trickery in battle.

Then "Quinze Grammes" had the idea of strewing cans and empty shells on the outskirts of the forest. Enemy patrols stumbled over the metal scraps, the sentinels were alerted.

"The rotten part of it," said "La Pipe," "is that at night dogs from the chalets chase rabbits. They upset our cans. Alert! Alert! we can't sleep."

Sleep where? In foxholes? As yet they have no tent cloth to cover them, no rum to warm them, no cigarettes to help pass the time during long watches. It is raining. Water oozes down the walls. The boys don't have any change of uniform. Before the last relief there were some who remained in their holes for eight days without removing their wet clothing.

They smile anyway. They smile a lot. They are very young. Their cheeks are marvelously pink.

When Captain "Frédé" visits the post, they greet him with a lot of bustle, each one gives his suggestions and they all discuss things together; this is an army of stanch comrades.

But at his arrival they remain at attention and salute three feet away. At first, they thought it funny. But it is necessary. Nobody must say that the FFI aren't real soldiers. This is the new French Army.

(ACTION, Paris, October 27, 1944)

Frenchmen Fighting in Lorraine (By French war correspondent André Camp) — We are in a little town with a charming name, the headquarters of the Army Corps to which the French Division we are going to visit belongs. We are the guests of an American officers' mess. They ask us at once for news of Paris and we inquire about our boys who are fighting beside them. "They are amazing," the Americans say, "really the best division in the Army. The American General commanding here wears only one emblem on his blouse, that of the French Division, because it is the one he thinks the most of. He is very proud of his Frenchmen and wouldn't lose them for anything in the world." Hearing such a tribute we too cannot but be proud. And that is how we learn that our compatriots who hold the sector around Baccarat are "in action"; a splendid opportunity to go and see what is happening.

We are truly in an army zone. There are military police at the crossroads, at the entrance to villages and at the town limits. To our surprise these MP's speak perfect French. But there is nothing astonishing in that, they are our own men.

"The front? Why yes, this way. You pass three MP's, then you turn left, then right and then ask again. It's pretty lively up there."

"O.K. Thanks."

And so, from one rut to another, past MP after MP, through a village completely in ruins and another which still has a few houses standing, amid an endless convoy of vehicles of every kind, rumbling along with much noise of backfiring, we reach Baccarat which our first

units entered only a few hours ago. Baccarat is celebrating. The people are getting over their first stupefaction. Flags are appearing in windows.

"French, they're French! You've come in time. If you knew how we've waited for you." We inquire around: "Where can we get some lunch?" "All the restaurants are closed but everyone will want to invite you. Come along," — and a man still young, his face drawn with fatigue after the recent battle, takes us off to his home. We have to congratulate his mother, embrace his sister. Imagine what a day! And we must share a liberation dinner with the family.

Yesterday these people were still under the German heel. They describe their last days of waiting and hope: "We knew you would be coming and it was certainly time. Half the town had been evacuated a month ago. We all have some relatives behind the German lines. Yesterday evening a total evacuation was ordered. To go where? Fortunately, this morning you had arrived. And you know no one here liked the Boches and no one helped them. No one. And they knew it. The Gestapo was terrible. Only three days ago they shot nine of our people down there, in that clump of trees, and every day for months they have been threatening us."

"And the FFI?"

"There were some of them hiding in the woods near here last summer. We got supplies to them as best we could. Unfortunately, they were not well enough armed. They attempted a few raids but suffered severe losses. Since then no one has seen anything of them. Who knows where the rest have gone. The Boches were very strong around here."

"Has the town been badly damaged?" "Not too badly. Some sections suffered a lot in the last air raids, in fact the whole quarter around the church and the town hall is in ruins. People are going about their business in the midst of the wreckage." "And the glass works?"

"That is intact, thank God! Workmen are already bringing out works of art and treasures they had hidden during the occupation. All the finest pieces had been put in a safe place. Now you will be able to see them."

We left Baccarat rejoicing. But one last fear remained: "If only they don't come back!"

"They will not come back. You can be sure of that."

(Ministry of Information, Paris, November 30, 1944)

In the Advance Posts (By French war correspondent André Camp) — This is the last advance post — a little town that has been completely ransacked. In what was once a village full of life like the others, there remains not one inhabitant, only a few chickens wandering around.

In a house, amid debris of all kinds, we come upon a sergeant and his squad, eating. "You've come at the right moment," he said. "We've been hard at it all night." He pointed to his men: "Meet my 'gorillas.'" The "gorillas" are sitting there, dirty and unshaven, their eyes still shining with the excitement of battle.

French Press and Information Service

The Savoie Maquis. Men from Vercors.

"They're good men and they know what they're doing. This is Julot who used to be a mechanic, Charles, a law student, Josué, a Breton and Vladimir, a Russian who was in the Foreign Legion. We've been together since Normandy. We've never left each other but many have left us." Their faces grew sad.

"But let's not talk about that," the sergeant went on, "tell us quickly, what's the news from Paris?" "Here are some newspapers, but they are already three days old." "Do you hear that, men? They are only three days old! Why we haven't seen any newspapers for months." To think that these men who are French and who are fighting in France itself get no news from home. They are completely cut off, whereas their American comrades who fight beside them have special papers which tell them everything that is going on in America. At the front it's easier to get news about Kansas City than about Paris. Can't something be done for them? What do you think? Newspapers are not so difficult to send, they don't weigh so much and it would give the men so much pleasure.

Sergeant H.B. forgot all about himself in talking about his men. Fortunately his "gorillas" are there to tell us his story: A sergeant in 1939-40, he gave up everything, went through prison in France and a concentration camp in Spain to get to England. He volunteered for all Commando raids. After North Africa he landed in Normandy, still doing all the dirty jobs, still where the fighting is thickest and still a sergeant. "Since 1940 the only ones who haven't been promoted are de Gaulle and I," he says quite simply.

Some prisoners captured in a poplar grove a few yards away were led off. One was a beardless youth less than 15 years old. They fight without hope but like madmen. Hand to hand fighting is frequent. They are determined to leave nothing behind them; they set fire to houses already battered by artillery and deface and smash everything of any value that they cannot carry off. We were shown clocks, vacuum cleaners, stoves and sewing machines all broken so they could not be used again. "Real savages! When will we be done with them?" "Soon, if everyone does his duty like you."

We questioned another soldier:

"I haven't been with this outfit long; I enlisted in the division when Paris was liberated. Until then I had been in the Resistance — even after the liberation we had to shoot it out with snipers who were firing from the roof tops; those men who were not Germans . . . ." He is at a loss for the word. Since he has been in the firing line he has forgotten the very word Militia. Fire purifies all things.

(*Ministry of Information, Paris, November* 30, 1944)

On the Atlantic Front

With the Lorient FFI — (By Yves Huggonet, special correspondent for the Resistance newspaper *Libération*) — Vannes, November 3 — Major Monceau, commanding on the Lorient front, stopped his finger at the blue spot representing the sea. He had just described the arc encircling the port. Ile de Groix, Belle-Ile, Quiberon peninsula, all are occupied by the Germans. Then the Major turned to us. He is a white-haired giant. He has experienced the worst possible tortures. Sentenced to be shot on August 5, he was saved by the liberation of Auray on August 3. His speech is concise and abrupt, but when he becomes animated, his voice is deep and vibrant.

"Here are the positions on the map. Do you want to see them closely? To see our boys, see how they live, under what conditions they are fighting? Very well. But first know whom they are fighting, for otherwise you would ill know their heroism.

"In the pocket and on the islands there are nearly 25,000 Germans. Their backs are to the wall. True. But to the wall of the Atlantic. Some say that they are prisoners. Perhaps. But prisoners with guns, mortars, tanks and cannon, 77's, many 88's — very dangerous weapons. Here they have 340's, on the other side more than 100 AA guns. (His finger stopped at the neck of the peninsula and on the Ile de Groix). In the pocket, crammed with automatic weapons, mobile railway artillery is continuously transferred from one sector to the other without the least disturbance.

"The Germans are fighting modern warfare. We fight guerilla warfare . . . Nevertheless," Major Monceau pierced us with his clear eyes, and offered his hand, "Go see my boys."

The First Cigarette — Rain poured down as we walked. Preceded by the young lieutenant who was to guide us, we left the path of ruts and mud and cut across the fields.

The horizon is limited. Everywhere stony moors, hedges of furze, gorse, heather, clumps of pines and oaks, encircle apple orchards. Near the trunks rotting apples slush underfoot. Another hedge, another field, a slight rise.

"Bend down, hug the hedge, we can be seen." There we were. Today, war is silent. The only sound is the rain and the wind through the autumn leaves. It is our eyes that find the war. This water hole is a crater. "A 105," our guide explains. These irrigation ditches were made for men: trenches. No one uses these streams of mud, however. These mounds of earth, resembling anthills are shelters: masses of clay on iron sheets bent over propped boards, all covered with branches. They are a good protection against enemy fire, but not against the cold and damp which had already begun to penetrate us.

Then we reached the men. At the muffled sound of our voices they appeared one by one, uniformly bearded under their caps or berets — no helmets to protect them from enemy fire. A spark of joy flickered in their eyes at the sight of the first cigarette. The first in four days. This is not a complaint; these men never complain.

The Feldwebel's Round-trip — When these men arrived at the front a week ago it was raining just as today. They walked five kilometers through heavy mud, three-fourths of them without hats or raincoats. Then in their wet clothing, they stood watch in this wet protecting earth. They speak very little. Following the confidences of headquarters there was the silence of the fighting men. They don't even speak of the battles.

Their young lieutenant told us that a week ago they had undergone the heaviest attack of the Lorient front. It was on a Friday. The evening before the enemy began shelling with artillery and mortar fire. The men held throughout the night without counter-attacking. Nearly 2,000 shells landed in a sector two kilometers long and a few hundred meters wide (the Americans, a few kilometers away, were about to count them). Then, at dawn, the Germans attacked with about four battalions. At 11 a.m. they retreated having suffered heavy losses, and left many prisoners. Our own losses were miraculously slight.

"Do you often take prisoners?" A young blond sergeant answered: "From time to time some Germans come to surrender. But now we turn them away unless they bring their arms and packs. We want to get some return. The other day an Austrian feldwebel appeared empty-handed. We sent him back. The next day he returned with his gun and ammunition.

The Goal — Victory — It was nearly night when we left the sector to return to Auray, a small Breton vil-

lage, which is twenty kilometers from the lines, which might well be a hundred leagues from the war were it not for the relief convoys moving toward the front.

"Well, you have seen them?" Bundled in his leather jacket, Major Monceau stopped us on the way. "For more than two months they have been entrenched like that, putting up with those terrible fighting conditions. But determination and hope must have a goal. Their goal? Victory."

For weeks they have undertaken to hold in this manner, believing a period of improvisation was inevitable, that an attack was being prepared and that they must hold at any cost. They have held. They are still holding. But supplies have not been forthcoming. A few arms, some equipment with which it is better to remain entrenched and on the defensive. But nothing for a decisive battle, nothing with which to pierce the abscess that every Breton feels on the side of his country.

Now winter is coming; prospects are darkening. The time has come not to deceive these men who have voluntarily and spontaneously undertaken a task which demands at least support if not relief. For they well know that men are not sufficient to take Lorient. Tanks, cannon, airplanes are also needed.

The appointment of General de Larminat brought new hope. It must not be let down.

(*LIBERATION, Paris, November* 3, 1944)

On the Lorient Front — (By Jacques Dapilly, *France Libre* special correspondent) — There are still 25 to 30 thousand Boches clinging like leeches to this end of Morbihan which they have already devastated. Lorient is the pivot of this last retreat. Every day it becomes increasingly difficult for the Germans to procure supplies; they are not suffering from any lack of canned goods and ammunition but they have no fresh foods whatsoever. They make sudden raids, sending out a patrol or attempting a sortie with but one objective: pillage. For the Germans are caught in a trap and can no longer carry out a large scale attack. Today, owing to the tenacity of our FFI in Brittany, the danger of the Germans effecting a junction with the enemy forces on the Roche-Bernard front has almost disappeared.

Since the beginning of August, small FFI detachments have been closing in on the remnants of the Wehrmacht who had been forced back from Auray and Vannes toward Lorient. There, in fertile, rainsoaked fields separated by hedgerows and deep narrow footpaths, a crafty battle is being waged. These FFI cannot be described as wearing a uniform for their clothing consists of whatever heterogeneous collection of garments the Maquis have been able to pick up in the village stores: pea jackets, business suits, black, khaki or blue trousers, any color tie, overseas caps, berets, képis, or no hat at all, and armbands that are so different, except for the Cross of Lorraine, that one wonders whether any two of the men have the same. But recently they have been given a few overcoats, shirts and pairs of shoes. Soon they will all be fitted out exactly like the Americans, their brothers in arms.

The front runs approximately from southwest of Auray to Pouldu on the Finistère border, following the Vannes-Quimperlé road, at a distance varying from a few kilometers to some hundred yards, to the south of Landévant, Brandérion, Hennebont and Pont-Scorff; south of Quimperlé it extends along the Laita river to the sea.

There is no severe fighting, only exchanges of artillery fire and skirmishes. The villages of Nostang, Kervignac, Merlevenez and Sainte-Hélène have borne the brunt of the most violent engagements. Men are still being killed . . .

Immediately behind the Allied lines, life goes on as actively as ever, cattle browse in the meadows and the peasants are pressing cider. Meat and butter are served in the restaurants ration free. There are so many apples, and nobody to pick them, that they fall and cover the roads where the jeeps crush them till juice runs into the ditches. The price of a liter of fresh cider fell to 5 francs, 4 francs 50 and then 4 francs, whereas before it cost as much as 25 francs.

Not much damage had been done back here but we know that Lorient on the German side has been practically wiped out. In the liberated sector, Pont-Scorff which was partially evacuated has suffered serious damage. At Brandérion there are shell holes in the clock tower, but at Auray, Quimperlé and Vannes (although this last was in the line of crossfire) hits were rare and we could imagine ourselves far from the war except for the terrible reminder at Hennebont. There the Germans in a fury wreaked destruction on the little town which the Patriots had captured from them. Nothing remains of the upper section and the Rue Nationale but a few houses and the church; the lower part of the town and the four bridges across the Blayet are a mass of rubble over which a score of bearded FFI stand guard.

Opposite us, less than 9 kilometers away is Lorient, the center of German resistance, and their forward line is nearer still.

(*FRANCE LIBRE, Paris, November* 4, 1944)

Nantes Still Within Range of German Guns — (By François Caradec, special correspondent of *Front National,* organ of the Resistance movement of the same name) — Nantes, November — I arrived at Nantes on a damp, dark, ominous night. At 9 p.m. everything was already closed. The black-out was complete. I wandered through interminable, deserted streets guided now and then only by a thin ray of light filtering through a crack in a window or a door. I bumped into barricades, knocked against piles of stones, the remnants of destroyed houses, and got entangled in debris. Suddenly the pavement gave way under my feet and I slid into some kind of sunken no man's land into which large stones had rolled.

British Official Photo

A camp in France. Men of the FFI and the French Army resting.

I tried five hotels before finding a room. And what a room! The walls were cracked and in many places the red brick showed through under the torn wallpaper; lath torn away by the explosions was hanging down from the ceiling. There were no window panes and a nasty wind blew in through the interior shutters.

There was a knock at the door. The chambermaid walked in carrying two champagne bottles in her hands. "I never ordered anything of the sort," I said. "But this isn't champagne, Sir, it is water for you to wash with; there is no running water." There was obviously no gas either, for it was impossible even to get a cup of tea. The gas works are carefully trying to make their dwindling coal supply last by mixing it with peat, and there is no pressure. Artificial pressure is unknown here.

Walking Through the Ruins — Almost everything is lacking to repair what can be repaired: plaster, slate, window glass, cement, etc. The old Nantes gentleman who accompanied me through streets lined with gaping houses and piles of rubble could find nothing in all this debris with which to seal the holes in his own house. He complained about and deplored many fruitless efforts in so many offices, and quoted me some figures. I recall one: about fifty percent of the population is more or less homeless.

Nantes has contributed heavily toward the war. She certainly deserves the Croix de la Libération awarded her by General de Gaulle after the massacre of her hostages in 1941. Nantes alone, along with Grenoble, can boast of this award.

They Are Very Near — "We were liberated. But who would have thought that two months later they would still be 25 kilometers from here?" Annoyance flashed across my guide's face. "Yes, they are at Cordemais, at Vue, at Frossais, at Temple-de-Bretagne. And they are using heavy railway artillery concealed in the Pont-Château tunnel. They could fire on us. You don't doubt it, do you? Yes, Nantes is still within range of German guns."

It seems that people in this street do not give this danger much thought; were it not for the housewives standing on their door steps, receptacle in hand, waiting for the trucks which bring them drinking water, the life in this street would recall that of pre-war days.

The summer drought, lack of forage, no deliveries from the nine dairies in the zone held by the Germans — these are the main causes of hardship. And there are others.

The small Place du Change where there is still a medieval house with a half burnt roof, is very lively.

But all these people do not live in the city. Many come in for the day, and leave again in the evening for the small surrounding villages where they went after the bombardments of September, 1943. They are not afraid of the German guns but they would like to return; they are tired of country life. But, granting that they are able to return, they do not have the right, officially.

For various reasons of security, supply, hygiene, the Prefecture is opposed to their return. Nevertheless, official eyes are closed if they ignore the rules, for the city itself feels that they should be allowed to return.

The population of Nantes, which fell to about 50,000 before the liberation, is now estimated at about 125,000, whereas the pre-war population was 212,000.

These figures give eloquent proof of the desire of thousands of workers to return to their jobs. To get back to work and to return to Nantes her old rank and position, these are the urgent desires of the people of the old corsair city.

(*FRONT NATIONAL, November* 10, 1944)