

FRANCE AT WAR

I—THE BATTLE OF ALSACE

Von Rundstedt's offensive launched against the American First Army on December 16 broke through on the central sector of the Allied line and carried the enemy toward Liège in the north and Sedan in the south. The Allied counteroffensive opened December 21, and supported by heavy air attacks during the days following narrowed the German bulge, freeing Malmédy in the North, Rochefort and La Roche in the center and Bastogne in the South. Von Rundstedt, whose original plan was blocked, launched a series of general attacks against Allied positions at the beginning of January with the intention of freeing all German territory occupied by the Allies and carrying the war far beyond the German frontier. Enemy troops attacked simultaneously in Holland and Alsace in the Bitche sector.

A series of massive Allied counterattacks again halted the Germans on the Meuse and the Northern frontier of Alsace, while the enemy intensified his offensive in the direction of Strasbourg. This city has been held by General Delattre de Tassigny's troops since January 6, under orders of General de Gaulle, in agreement with Supreme Headquarters of the Allied Expeditionary Forces, making the French First Army responsible for the defense of Strasbourg. On January 15 there was steady enemy patrol activity in the Vosges east of Colmar, and German advance units which attempted to penetrate to the suburbs of Strasbourg were driven back.

The War From Day To Day

Sixth Army Group Front Quiet—December 31— A German attack that infiltrated American positions around Bitche was repulsed with heavy German losses and another attack near Nieder-Schlettenbach north of Wissembourg was broken up by artillery fire. French troops to the south halted two enemy attacks, one at Ammerschwihr and the other at Le Gras, taking 294 prisoners including ten officers.

(New York TIMES, January 1, 1945)

Enemy Attack On Bitche — January 2 — Everywhere along this front the enemy is pursuing aggressive tactics. Halted at one point, he tries to infiltrate to either side and the advance is covered by heavy artillery fire. Few German tanks have been sighted in this wooded area, but today fliers reported seeing German armor in a sector north of Bitche. Active patrolling by both sides continues on the French First Army's front in the Alsace Plain and Vosges.

(New York TIMES, January 3, 1945)

German Infantry Captures Maginot Line Forts — January 4 — Meisenthal, south of Bitche, is again held by American troops after having changed hands several times in the last twenty-four hours.

German infantry captured Maginot Line forts to the west and northwest of Bitche, although the Americans

are clinging to Fort Simmserhoff, west of the town. The enemy now holds Fort Scheisseck, which has been partly destroyed, and Fort Freudenberg, both within two miles of Bitche to the west and northwest.

The withdrawal on the Seventh Army front was from the area to the northeast of the fighting. Lieutenant General Alexander M. Patch's troops have fallen back from positions on the frontier or over it in Germany east and west of the Wissembourg Gap to a new line farther south, north and northeast of the Hagenau Forest. Lauterbourg also has been given up. The new line has taken advantage of some of the Maginot Line fortifications and in some places is ten miles south of positions held by Americans at the start of the German attack.

French forces farther south are probing the German lines in the area of Orbey, west of Colmar and Sigolsheim, four miles to the northwest. Farther south a German raiding party that crossed the Rhine and attacked Kembs was driven off with heavy casualties. In this sector both French and German patrols are crossing the river to harry positions. (New York TIMES, January 5, 1945)

German Maneuver To Cut Off French Army — January 5 — The Germans appeared to have switched the main weight of their southern offensive. The enemy column that is now fighting in the area of Wingen is only eleven and a half miles north of the great communications center of Saverne, on the eastern exit of the Saverne Pass through the Vosges. In this area troops of the German First Army have covered twelve miles since they opened their attack just before midnight New Year's Eve, pushing in a southwesterly direction through the wooded hills. While the enemy advance from the north was slowed down today by the Seventh Army forces, a German battalion crossed the Rhine in barges eleven miles north of Strasbourg and after landing near Gamsheim advanced north and entered the village of Offendorf, two miles north of Gamsheim and only nine miles southeast of Hagenau. There they were struck by an American counterattack and at last reports received here fierce fighting was continuing.

This may be either a feint or the start of another German thrust designed to strike to the rear of the American positions in the northern Alsace Plain and if possible push across to the eastern slopes of the Vosges and divide the American Seventh and French First Armies.

It is now reported that the German force that raided Kembs Thursday night also attacked French positions around Rosenau and Loechle, south of Kembs.

(New York TIMES, January 6, 1945)

Situation Between Strasbourg And Hagenau Confused — January 6 — There was no change in the area from Bitche to the Rhine where, south of Wissembourg and north of the Hagenau Forest, German and American troops are skirmishing in the area between the Siegfried and Maginot Lines.

The situation along the Rhine between Strasbourg and Haguenau is extremely fluid. It is possible that the German penetration in this sector is in greater strength than the battalion that was at first announced.

The force that crossed the river was a battalion of infantry, according to this headquarters. The Germans took the town of Stattmatten, nine miles north of the point where they crossed the river yesterday and were driven out of that town today by American troops who came in from the west and surrounded the town. The doughboys took fifty prisoners.

By late today the enemy had also been cleared from the towns of Rothwiller, Herrlisheim and Offendorf, the latter just north of Gambsheim where the original crossing was made.

The German forces at Neunkirch, northeast of Sélestat, have been counterattacked by the French and the town has now been cleared of the enemy.

The Germans continue to raid positions of the French First Army northwest of Mulhouse. They probed around Ile Napoléon last night and are maintaining heavy artillery fire on a number of villages in the lower Alsace Plain. The outskirts of Strasbourg also are being heavily shelled by the foe.

(New York TIMES, January 7, 1945)

General de Gaulle at Inter-Allied Military Parley — January 6 — A military parley relative to current military operations on the Western front took place at Allied Headquarters on January 6. It was attended by General de Gaulle, President of the Provisional Government of the French Republic, Mr. Winston Churchill, British Prime Minister and General Eisenhower, Commander in Chief of the Allied Armies. Field Marshal Sir Allen Brooke, chief of the British Imperial General Staff, General Alphonse Juin, Chief of Staff for French National Defense and several members of General Eisenhower's staff were present at the conference. At its close the President of the French Government and the British Prime Minister conferred privately.

(Ministry of Information, Paris, January 7, 1945)

German Offensive In Alsace — January 7 — Striking across the Rhine north and south of Strasbourg, the Germans have opened a new and potentially dangerous offensive aimed at driving the American Seventh and French First Armies out of the Alsace Plain.

(New York TIMES, January 8, 1945)

General Alphonse Juin Optimistic — January 8 — General Alphonse Juin, Chief of the General Staff of the French Army, has made optimistic statements about the situation in Lorraine and Alsace after a trip to that area. Generally, the situation in Alsace and Lorraine is easier and, according to this headquarters, there is no truth to a German report that American positions south of Wissembourg have been breached.

Substantial gains are being made in the eastern Saar Basin, where American troops have driven back the Germans who had penetrated their positions and have improved their line around Aachen and Gros-Rederching.

By late today, the Americans held most of Rimling, first captured by them in late November, after they repulsed the German attacks. The Germans still clung to a section on the western edge of the town, however.

Around Bitche the Americans gained about half a mile, one mile and one-quarter east of the town at the base of the bulge.

Two weak enemy attacks were repulsed around Reipertswiller this morning. There was sharp enemy artillery fire today on Wingen, Wimmenau, Ingwiller, Muhlenhausen and Offwiller, south of the German salient.

Fliers of the First Tactical Air Force's French component attacked railroads east of the Rhine, cutting the line at Gengenbach and bombing a bridge at Zell, southeast of Strasbourg.

(New York TIMES, January 9, 1945)

The German Drive Toward Strasbourg — January 9 — While the long grim battle to drive the Germans out of Belgium continues in the north, the situation in Alsace has improved north of Strasbourg but has deteriorated to the south. German attacks from the western flank of the German salient in the Northern Vosges and on American positions north of the Haguenau Forest have been halted by the Seventh Army, but south of Strasbourg German armored forces are cutting through the French First Army troops toward the city.

This advance, which began Saturday, has now covered six miles to Sand, west of the Rhine-Rhône Canal, and eight miles to Gerstheim, east of that waterway. Despite stubborn resistance by the French, German armor and four battalions of infantry pushed to within fourteen miles of Strasbourg at Gerstheim. Unless all signs are wrong, the enemy intends to develop a strong offensive on Strasbourg from the south.

On the French First Army's front the Germans continued their attempts to exploit the salient with an attack on Rossfeld. Other attacks were reported to have been made against Herbsheim, Sand, Obenheim and Gertsheim. The Allies withdrew from Bootzheim. It was estimated that the enemy forces numbered four battalions of infantry with at least four tanks.

(New York TIMES, January 10, 1945)

Obenheim Cut Off — January 11 — In the Alsace Plain French forces took fifty prisoners at Rossfeld, and heavy fighting was in progress in the area of Herbsheim. About four miles northeast of that point on the east side of the Rhône-Rhine Canal the town of Obenheim was overrun by strong enemy forces of tanks and infantry. The town was isolated early in the enemy advance in this area.

(New York TIMES, January 12, 1945)

French Troops Defend Strasbourg — January 11 — In accordance with the desire of General Charles de Gaulle, this city, the capital of Alsace, is now being defended by troops of the French First Army.

Major General Delattre de Tassigny announced today in a front page declaration printed in the *Echo de l'Est*, former underground publication, the mission of the French First Army. In part, the proclamation reads:



French Press and Information Service

French First Army gun crew

"The French First Army has, henceforth, the mission of defending your city, dear in the hearts of all our soldiers.

"General de Gaulle, President of the Provisional Government of the French Republic and Chief of the French Armies, wished that it be our Army that protected Strasbourg.

"General du Vigier has been named military governor and commander of the Tenth Military Region replacing General Schwartz who was so well liked by the whole population and who will continue as commander of the sub-division of Bas-Rhin. General du Vigier is one of our bravest officers and was the first to reach the Rhine with the First Armored Division.

"I give the solemn promise that the Army will show itself worthy of its task. It will watch over you faithfully and with pride."

(Ministry of Information, Paris, January 14, 1945)

Repeated German Attacks Around Strasbourg — January 13 — A hostile combat patrol tried to move out of the west Rhine bank pocket northwest of Herr-

lisheim, twelve miles northeast of Strasbourg, at the center of the pocket, but was thrown back.

French First Army forces in the Alsace Plain south of Strasbourg knocked out two Panther tanks, a self-propelled gun and other vehicles in the area of Rossfeld and Herbsheim, a mile and a half southeast of Benfeld. In counterattacks on the enemy salient 100 prisoners were taken.

The Germans attempted a raid on a bridge south of Erstein and southeast of Osthause, south of Strasbourg, last night but it was repulsed.

(New York TIMES, January 14, 1945)

French Hold Strasbourg — January 14 — In other sectors of the Seventh Army front we made small gains against fanatical German resistance. Its forces made a small advance along the south side of the Bitche salient over the extremely difficult mountainous, wooded terrain. Along a sector of the line facing the Rhine a patrol of twenty-five to thirty Germans attempted to strengthen their bridgehead southwest of Herrlisheim last night but ran into withering mortar and artillery fire that drove the Germans back.

In the French First Army sector a patrol that crossed the Rhine in the vicinity of Strasbourg likewise was shoved back with losses, and another patrol was repulsed by the French at Ebermünster, northeast of Sélestat. Patrols were active in the Vosges west of Colmar.

(*New York TIMES*, January 15, 1945)

Reports From The Front

One Village Among Many — This is a Vosges village, just like many another, a village which will not even be honored by having its name mentioned in tomorrow's communiqué. This is where the attack took place this morning and up there, on that ridge a few hundred meters away, the Germans are fighting desperately as they retreat.

It is the end of the day. The sunset has tinted the surrounding hills with gold and purple and the air is filled with the angry roar of 155's pounding the enemy rear, shattering the winter peace.

The roads leading to the various sectors from which the attack was launched are lined with endless columns of trucks: gasoline, munitions — essential war matériel.

Tanks camouflaged with foliage and ready for action are lined up against the wall of a factory in ruins. A score of ambulances are awaiting orders to pick up their pitiful human loads.

From here on the road climbs steadily; our jeep drives on cautiously. On our right a long white tape stretched on pegs indicates that the fields we are skirting hide death under their green surface. The whole area is mined.

"Where is the battalion leader's Command Post?" the Headquarters Commander asked a Tirailleur. He wanted to find out how the attack was progressing. The soldier looked around, then pointed to the C.P. We entered. Two officers leaning over a map lighted by an oil lamp, looked up as we came in. The commanding officer gave a clear, brief description of the operation: "It was tough. My men who are more accustomed to fighting in open country than in woods ran into small individual casemates from which the enemy could fire at us point blank. There were traps everywhere. The ground was like a swamp and full of mines. This forest fighting is difficult; we never know who is the surrounded and who the surrounder. But we managed to drive out the Germans by this morning losing as few men as possible. Our advance is continuing. A battle is now raging less than a mile away."

The battalion leader left his aide in charge and went with us into the flooded village where there had been hand to hand fighting only a few hours before. By this time it was twilight. Suddenly a few people who had stayed on emerged from the ruined houses. They



French Press and Information Service

French troops on the Vosges front



French Press and Information Service

France sends Christmas parcels to her soldiers in the front line

were covered with dust and looked dazed. They were speechless, unaccustomed to speaking freely, for it is so many years since they have been allowed to speak French and they answered our questions awkwardly in broken sentences. Their houses had suffered, their fields were laid waste. But they were not discouraged. "We'll rebuild them," said the old Mayor, a true French peasant whose ancestors settled in this corner of France more than 200 years ago.

We walked along the village street, or rather what was left of it. Anti-tank guns were concealed behind a fragment of wall, their crews on the alert, ready for any enemy attempt to return.

We went down into a cellar where a farmer's wife had been sheltering a dozen children. In the dim candle-light we could see straw pallets and ragged sheets. An infant, only a few months old, rosy and innocent, was sleeping with his tiny fists clenched.

We asked a nervous little girl who looked about 13: "What did you do while the battle was going on?" "I prayed for it to end quickly. . . . I said three decades of my rosary. . . . I said my Hail Marys, and my little brother and I were saved." The child Jeanne d'Arc must have spoken with the same faith.

We left and made our way back through almost complete darkness in which the ghostly outline of the ruined church could barely be distinguished. Tanks, standing motionless, loomed up out of the night. The turrets were open and we could hear the men talking quietly inside.

At one crossing the battalion commander accompanying us recognized some familiar faces, a few survivors of his old battalion. He went down to talk to the men with whom he had fought in the glorious Italian campaign before being badly wounded. "What's happened to X . . . ?" "Killed," they answer. "And Y . . . ?" "Missing." "And W . . . ?" No answer. Spoken by men whose dim forms were all we could see now that the night was all enveloping, the names of the dead sound a knell. We could hear the sound of a stream running down below, and overhead, one star like a promise, was shining in the cloudy sky. . . .

We reached the little house serving as Command Post for the general commanding the division. His aide asked us to wait a few minutes. "The Chief is giving orders," he told us. Through the glass door we could see the general, telephone receiver to his ear, leaning over maps, giving instructions. His voice was crisp calm and uncontradictable. Suddenly he put down the phone, got up and came toward us saying with a smile: "Welcome Gentlemen. Let's go and eat. I'm famished."

We had a very simple meal, as was fitting, and a few moments of relaxation. The general took this opportunity to tell us how proud he was to be in command of such splendid troops. Then he spoke of the campaign in Provence where he had played many a trick on the enemy. At the thought of some of them he burst out laughing with a youthful merriment that lighted up his suntanned face.

The telephone rang. An aide answered and then passed the receiver to his chief who, as he listened, drew mysterious diagrams on the tablecloth with his fork. "Perfect," he said, "lift your fire." Then, turning to us he said, "Some fresh German troops have been brought up. They'll get a warm reception." As we were saying goodbye shells began to explode nearby; the house trembled and the glasses on the table knocked against each other. "It's you they are trying to get," said the captain calmly.

The phone rang again. An officer grabbed it and his face sobered; he picked up a pencil and noted down some figures on a piece of paper. "OK," he answered in an expressionless voice. "Well?" asked the general. "The attack succeeded. We've had 17 men killed and 50 wounded, mon Général, but we are holding the village."

This is a Vosges village just like many another — a village which will not even be mentioned in tomorrow's communiqué.

(*LE TEMOIGNAGE CHRETIEN, Paris, December 2, 1944*)

One Officer Among Many — A Lieutenant's Letter to His Colonel — I have the honor of reporting to you the manner in which I captured 25 Germans and an officer.

On the morning of November 26, I was on reconnaissance in the woods north of X. I had driven out in a jeep with chauffeur Z . . . ; but we stopped the car and I walked ahead about 100 meters searching the road for mines.

I was going along, the sound of my steps muffled by the snow, when suddenly, at a turn in the road, I found myself face to face with two Germans whose surprise was as great as mine. My gun was in the car and both my hands were in my jacket pockets. I grabbed my searchlight and flooded them with the glare before they had time to recover. They raised their hands and I immediately snatched the first one's revolver. I called my chauffeur who arrived and kept them covered. Guessing that these men were surely not alone, I advanced through the woods with the thought that maybe two or three more Germans might be coming that way. Sheltered by the pine trees I saw an officer advancing toward me. When he was near enough, I emerged pointing my gun at him, and he raised his hands saying: "OK, don't fire."

I disarmed him and we had the following little conversation:

"Are there any more of you?"

"Yes."

"You are encircled; my company is in the woods."

From his words and attitude I guessed that I had him fooled.

"If you don't fire they will surrender."

"Warn them. But if they fire I will kill you."

We advanced a few meters and he called out in German. Seven or eight men appeared with grenades and guns.

"Tell them to come forward without their arms."

Then, as still others began to appear I said to the officer:

"Follow me to the road."

When we had reached it, I said:

"I will go and warn my soldiers not to advance and not to fire. In the meantime, assemble all your men on the road and no harm will be done to you."

I immediately went to fetch reinforcements. We returned in three cars and I found the German detachment waving a white flag. There were 25 men and one mule. We brought them in to the Command Post of the N. Infantry Regiment and they were transferred later.

(*Ministry of Information, Paris, December 11, 1944*)

A Company From Chad Opens the Way to Strasbourg — From a French war correspondent: This happened on November 22. The Americans attacking Phalsbourg met with stiff resistance. The capture of the town was of great strategic importance for the city commanded the Saverne Pass, the gateway to Alsace. The Germans resisted desperately. Despite their struggles, the Americans remained at a standstill for several days. The evening of November 21, thanks to a daring offensive through the woods, elements of the Leclerc Division managed to capture Saverne, at the other end of the Pass, on the road to Strasbourg.

However, despite their brilliant success, the French found themselves in a situation which could have been extremely dangerous for German forces were entrenched in their rear. Under threat of being completely cut off and encircled, they had at all cost to reestablish contact with the American forces. This amazing feat was accomplished by an infantry detachment of the Chad Regiment.

After entering Saverne on November 21, and spending a night in the open, on the 22nd, the company reached the Saverne Pass leading to Phalsbourg on the Paris-Strasbourg highway. At a crossroad just at the entrance to the village of Quatre Vents, the Germans had set up a veritable fortified camp: its defenses consisted of a few 88-mm. guns, four 47's, three 20's, one 20-mm. quadruple machinegun supported by a 120-mm. gun set up on the west side of the crossroad.

In the face of such artillery our infantry seemed to have slim chances of success. The French column was supported by only three armored cars, a tank destroyer and two Sherman tanks. Despite these tremendously disproportionate forces, the attack was immediately launched.

The first detachment slipped through the woods to the south of the road and moved toward a pillbox protected by four 20-mm. guns and one 47.

Meanwhile, the second detachment launched a frontal attack but, caught under the fire of the 20-mm. guns and two 88's, it was stopped.

Then, the daring encircling movement carried out by the third detachment reversed the situation. Through the woods to the north, it bypassed the fortified posi-



French Press and Information Service

Moroccan soldier welcomed by citizen of a liberated town

tions defending that side of the road and emerged on the opposite side of the crossroad taking the defenses from the rear. Realizing they were encircled, the Germans overestimated the importance of the attacking forces and, giving up the struggle, fled in a general stampede.

But fighting had been fierce. Twenty Germans were left on the field and fifteen, two of whom were officers, were taken prisoner. The French lost one officer and two men were wounded, but a tremendous amount of equipment fell into their hands. With the exception of one 88-mm. gun, wrecked by the tank destroyer, all the others were intact. Some ten cars, parked on an adjoining road, were also seized. A sergeant who had taken part in the action told us, some time later: "We certainly took a lot of equipment. It is no exaggeration that every one of us inherited at least one gun. As for me, I fell heir to an entire casemate and another man got an 88-mm. gun."

"What are you going to do with it?"

"We'll take them home as souvenirs."

"Will you put them on the mantelpiece?"

"With all that, the 120 that gave us so much trouble during the day disappeared during the night."

But that did not really matter, what was more important was that thanks to this handful of Leclerc's men, the Americans were able to take Phalsbourg, and the Saverne Pass was open.

The following day we entered Strasbourg.

(Ministry of Information, Paris, December 25, 1944)

Allied General Staff Commends French Intelligence

The following excerpt from a letter addressed to General Alphonse Juin, Chief of Staff of the French Army by General W. B. Smith, General Eisenhower's Chief of Staff, is being presented for purposes of record. Tribute is paid the French Intelligence whose efforts enabled the Allied Invasion Army to organize and carry out landings in the North and South of France under the best possible conditions:

My Dear General Juin,

At a time when the main work of French Intelligence comes to a close, except for a few small groups operating behind the enemy lines in the East of France, I feel that it is fitting to transmit to you the congratulations of our Command for the magnificent results achieved by those who have devoted their efforts, and in countless cases their lives, continually to furnish the Allies with abundant military information on the German forces stationed in France. Since 1940, a number of courageous men and women have built an organization designed to supply the Allied Command with a constant flow of information. The culminating period was that immediately preceding the invasion and, despite the tremendous risks run by those carrying out their task, they continued until in many cases entire groups of agents were taken by the Allied Forces.

I will not attempt to go into detail on the formation of these organizations nor how they managed to continue in the face of arrests and executions. But in order to form an idea of what they have accomplished, and although statistics do not always give a correct picture in such matters, I would like to mention that I have been informed that, during the month of May 1944, these organizations in France sent 700 reports by underground radio and that each broadcast was in itself a risk for the operator; during the same period 3,000 documentary reports were sent from France to London. . . . (Signed: W. B. Smith, Lieutenant General, United States Army, Chief of Staff to General Eisenhower)

(Ministry of Information, Paris, November 14, 1944)

II—MILITARY NEWS

General de Gaulle's Message to French Armies

General de Gaulle, President of the Provisional Government of the French Republic, addressed the following message to the officers, non-commissioned officers, and men of the Land, Sea and Air Forces:

Officers, non-commissioned officers, soldiers, sailors, pilots, of the Land, Sea and Air Forces, I send you my best wishes for the New Year.

Wherever you may be, on the Eastern or Western front, in camps completing your training, or mounting guard in all parts of the Empire, France sends you her wishes. Thanks to what you have accomplished at the side of the Allies, our country is free once again. Thanks to what you will accomplish in 1945, she will be victorious, more powerful and more glorious than ever. Have courage and confidence, comrades.

The last days of this war are drawing near. They will bring with them the greatest glory in the world.

(Ministry of Information, Paris, January 3, 1945)

Airmen Decorated

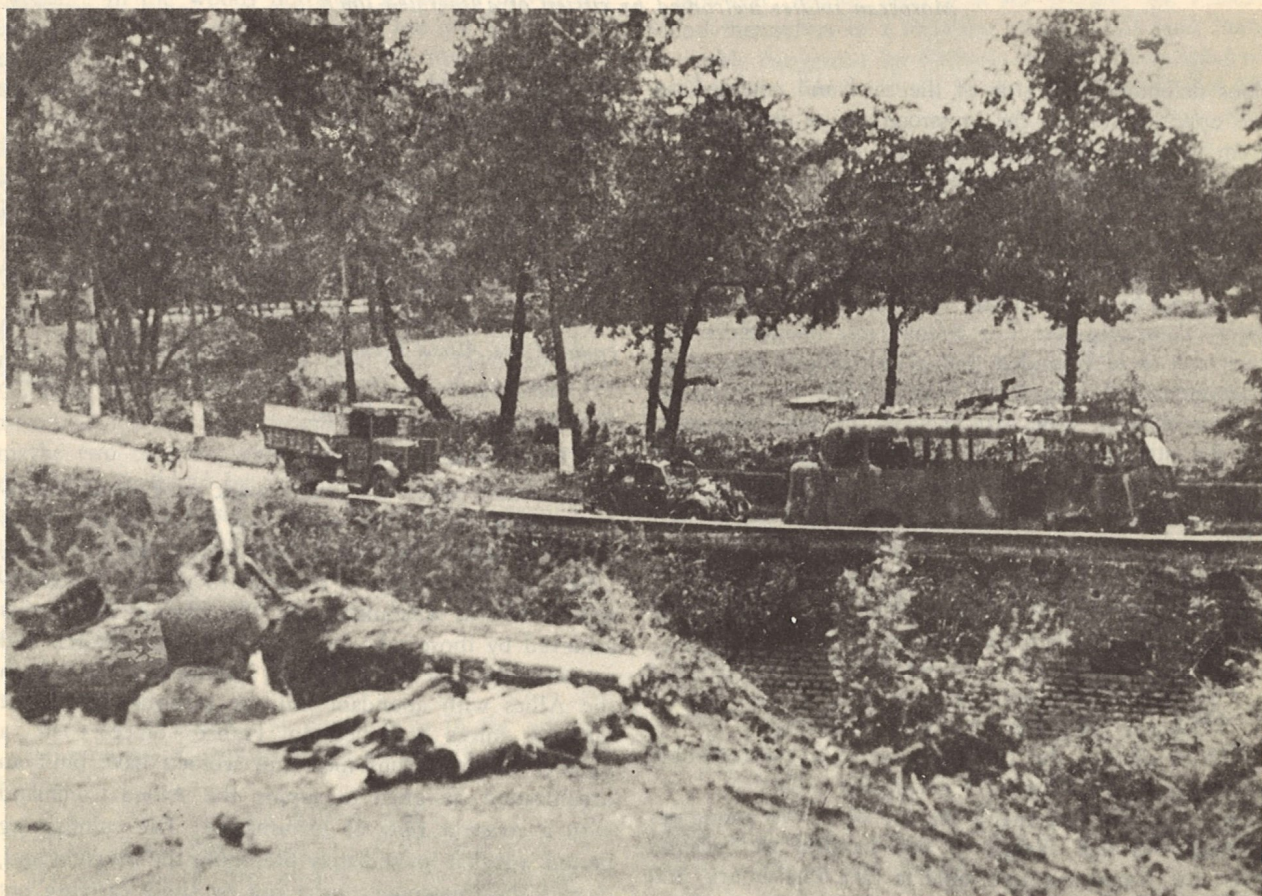
American pilot officers have the greatest respect for the French First Tactical Air Corps which forms part of the American First Tactical Air Force.

In one French bomber unit, 39 officers and men have received the Air Medal.

General Piollet, an Air Force veteran and Executive Secretary of the French Ministry of Air, received the Distinguished Flying Cross with citation for exceptional qualities of leadership.

Accompanied by General Paul Gerardot, commander of the French First Tactical Air Corps, M. Tillon, Minister of Air, awarded the Croix de Guerre to several bomber units.

(FRANCE, London, December 22, 1944)



French Press and Information Service

German convoy halted by FFI