



French Press and Information Service

General de Gaulle in Alsace. Above: in Mulhouse; below: in Colmar.

FRANCE AT WAR

I—FINAL PHASE OF THE BATTLE OF ALSACE

As the Russian offensive has carried the Soviet Armies to within 30 miles of Berlin, German resistance on the Eastern front has merely served to make their retreat orderly. On the Western front, the Allied offensive is developing along the entire front, the British moving northward and the American First and Third Armies into the Siegfried line which has been pierced at several points.

In a victorious offensive in Alsace, on February 1, the French and Americans mopped up the Colmar pocket and liberated the city after twelve days of heavy fighting.

Farther north, the American Seventh Army has continued to advance beyond Haguenau, while in the south the French First Army is clearing the last Vosges strongholds forcing the Germans to retreat across the Rhine. The threat to Strasbourg has been eliminated, the liberation of Alsace is being completed. On February 6, General Jean Delattre de Tassigny, speaking to the French and American soldiers of the French First Army could well say:

"All the soldiers of the Army of Liberation were in this fight and each one in his own way and with an equal love for France has gloriously marked his place in the battle. The German has been chased from the sacred soil of France. He will not return."

The War From Day to Day

French Plunge on in South — February 1 — On the southern end of the Seventh Army front French forces edged to the north yesterday and captured the villages of Bettenhoffen and Gamsheim, eleven miles north of Strasbourg and five miles southeast of Bischwiller. The Germans showed no determination to hold on to these villages.

South of Strasbourg the two-day attack by French forces has now cleaned out most of the panhandle of the Colmar bulge, which extended from Krafft, ten miles south of Strasbourg, along both sides of the Rhône-Rhine Canal down to the Colmar pocket itself. On a rampage through the panhandle today French tanks swept into a series of villages, ranging all the way from Krafft south to Marckolsheim. Krafft, Marckolsheim, and several others are on the road south from Strasbourg to Neuf-Brisach, where the only permanent bridge leading into the Colmar pocket crosses the Rhine.

The result of the French action was to drive the enemy back to the Rhône-Rhine Canal along a 20-mile stretch and to the east of it at several points. The canal parallels the Rhine River, and the crossing of it makes the panhandle virtually useless to the Germans as a salient imperiling Strasbourg. It contained only light forces in the beginning and probably will be entirely evacuated now.

The area south of Marckolsheim to Neuf-Brisach, ten miles away, also is rapidly being cleared, and the main German forces now stand at least 40 miles south of Strasbourg.

South of the Colmar Canal, which runs eastward into the Rhône-Rhine Canal below Marckolsheim, French and American troops with armor thrust farther eastward today after taking Durrenentzen and Urschenheim, two miles from the Rhône-Rhine Canal. As early as yesterday they were within four miles of Neuf-Brisach, which is across the Rhine from Brisach.

They already control a considerable stretch of the Germans' main escape road from Colmar to Brisach, and due east of Colmar they moved into Harbourg, a suburb of Colmar, where fighting was still going on this morning.

At the southern end of the Colmar pocket there was sharper resistance around Cernay, where German troops were thicker, but the French forces have fought into the outskirts of Cernay on both the east and west sides. East of Cernay, toward Mulhouse, the French have driven virtually all the Germans out of Nonnenbruch Forest, but there was still fighting in Wittelsheim, on the northwest side of the Forest. North of Mulhouse, Wittelsheim was occupied yesterday after a hot brawl in the streets.

(New York TIMES, February 2, 1945)

Franco-American Troops in Colmar — February 3 — A communiqué, as transmitted by the French Press Agency and reported by the Federal Communications Commission:

Yesterday the menace to Strasbourg was definitely eliminated.

Today the battle for Colmar and the pocket of Upper Alsace entered its final phase. Under the irresistible thrust of a vigorous and methodical French offensive the enemy, completely helpless, is retreating all along the region north of Neuf-Brisach, from which we are only four kilometers distant.

The Second Corps of the French Army cleared all the region between the Ill and the Rhine rivers from Erstein as far as the Sasbach bridge. In 24 hours infantry and armor liberated 25 localities, including Gerstheim, Bootzheim, Herbsheim, Rossfeld, Hilsenheim, Muttersholtz, Wittelsheim, Ohnenheim, Elseheim, Rhinau, Schoenau, Sundhouse, Mackenheim and the important locality of Marckolsheim.

South of the Colmar Canal United States infantry and units of the French Fifth Armored Division penetrated several kilometers into the enemy's defenses and after extremely hard fighting took Horbourg, Andolsheim, Widensohlen, Urschenheim and Durrenentzen. The investment of Colmar is taking place.

In the south violent fighting is taking place for Cernay and Wittelsheim and in the Nonnenbruch Forest.

A later communiqué, as transmitted domestically by the French Press Agency and reported by the Federal Communications Commission:

The French First Army, under the command of Major General Jean Delattre de Tassigny, is in the heart of Colmar. The enemy is in retreat, closely harassed by our armor.

Under the pressure of pincers inexorably closing in on him from the north and south, the enemy is desperately trying to disengage, abandoning enormous quantities of war material. At midday French forces, fraternally united with American divisions, were in the heart of the town.

(New York TIMES, February 3, 1945)

Colmar Liberated — February 3 — With the city of Colmar completely liberated the German escape gap in the shrinking pocket south of the freed Alsatian city has been reduced to less than twelve miles, it was announced tonight.

Allied artillery fire is smashing at the straggling Germans trying to flee back to the Rhine through the corridor now funneling through the Neuf-Brisach area and Chalampé on the south.

French First Army troops driving north freed Wiltelsheim, east of Cernay, and reached the outskirts of Rossallemand and Tulbersheim. In the Rhine pocket north of Gambsheim, American Seventh Army forces maintained their grip on Oberhoffen, but withdrew in the Herrlisheim and Offendorf areas, where stiff opposition and a flooded terrain hampered operations.

Raiding operations and air blows at Neuf-Brisach communications and at targets across the Rhine continued.

(New York TIMES, February 4, 1945)

French Troops Enter Colmar — General Delattre de Tassigny, commanding the French First Army on the Alsace Front, issued the following communiqué when his troops entered the key town of Colmar:

Today, February 2, 1945, the French First Army fought its way into the heart of Colmar. The enemy, closely followed by our armored units, is in full retreat. He has been caught in a North-to-South pincer movement which is relentlessly closing in on him. In his desperate efforts to disengage, the enemy has been forced to leave behind vast quantities of matériel. At noon today, French troops, fighting beside American divisions, hold the center of the town.

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

General Delattre de Tassigny to the People of Colmar — People of Colmar, after four and a half years of oppression and suffering, four and a half years of heartbreaking separation, your city is returning to France and to the tricolor. On this day, February 2, Frenchmen of the Fifth Armored Division and American infantry, fraternally united, enter Colmar, spared by our strategy from the destruction of battle. Henceforth, under the protection of our troops, all threat is obviated, you have regained liberty and are returning to French life.

In the name of General de Gaulle, President of the Provisional Government, Commander in Chief of the Army, liberator of France, I salute the people of Colmar, the living and the present, the absent and the dead.

(Ministry of Information, Paris, February 2, 1945)

German Defenses Probed — February 5 — A French First Army communiqué, as transmitted yesterday to the French press and reported by the Federal Communications Commission:

Only 15 kilometers separate our forces which, advancing from Colmar in the north and from Mulhouse in the south, are breaking all enemy defenses.

The First Army Corps was yesterday evening on the River Thur from Cernay to Ensisheim and Staffelfelden. Cernay, Steinbach, Uffholtz, Pulversheim and Cité Thérèse are in our hands.

Following up the successes it achieved in the last few days the United States Twenty-first Corps broke the defenses of Neuf-Brisach one after the other. Colmar, Ingersheim and Turckheim were occupied. East of Wolfgantzen, Baltzenheim, Kunheim and Biesheim were captured after heavy fighting.

We captured 2,200 prisoners and we continue gathering a large amount of booty.

(New York TIMES, February 5, 1945)

Junction of Franco-American Troops — February 5 — The Ministry of War issued the following communiqué: On February 5, the seventeenth day of our offensive, the American and French First Army, commanded by General Delattre de Tassigny, joined in the Alsace Plain. At dawn, the troops of the French First Army Corps of General Béthouart and the United States Twenty-First Corps under General Milburn joined in Rouffach.

(Ministry of Information, Paris, February 6, 1945)

3,500 Prisoners in 24 Hours — February 7 — A French First Army communiqué, as broadcast from Brazzaville and recorded by the Federal Communications Commission:

Exploiting their success of yesterday, the American and French forces of the First Army have conquered the entire regions contained between the Ill and the Vosges, from Colmar to Mulhouse. More than 20 important localities have been liberated.

In the Vosges the enemy, blocked in the valleys, is surrounded from all sides. Several large towns, among them Munster, have fallen into our hands. Resistance nests are in the process of being reduced. Bridgeheads have been established already on the Ill. Brisach is outflanked to the east.

Our progress south goes on. We took more than 3,500 prisoners in the last 24 hours.

(New York TIMES, February 7, 1945)

German Nineteenth Loses Offensive Power — February 11 — On the American Seventh Army front, local battles continued inconclusively in Oberhoffen and Drusenheim, east of Haguenau, near the Rhine. The purpose of these street battles for two small towns is not clear from this distance.



French Press and Information Service

French armored units reach the Rhine and dip their flag in the river in token of rejoicing.

The French First Army remained inactive after having deprived the German Nineteenth Army, which is opposing it, of 75 percent of its combat effectiveness and 100 percent of its offensive power.

German casualties were reported today as 22,808, including 17,467 prisoners, 2,773 dead and 2,568 seriously wounded. The figures for the dead and wounded are so small in relation to the number of prisoners and so precise that they presumably represent only those casualties actually counted by the French.

(New York TIMES, February 12, 1945)

French Capture 88,279 German Prisoners — February 14 — General Dwight D. Eisenhower's armies in Western Europe have captured 903,206 German prisoners, of whom 568,529 were taken by four American armies, The Associated Press reported.

The total is equivalent to ninety German divisions as they are now constituted and greater than the number of troops the enemy is believed to have now on the entire Western Front. Battlefield dispatches gave these latest estimates by the armies today:

US First	245,691
US Third	171,663
US Ninth	61,708
US Seventh	89,467
French First	88,279
Canadian First	124,520
British Second	101,878
French, British and Canadians	20,000

Total903,206

(New York TIMES, February 14, 1945)

II—REPORTS FROM THE FRONT

French Flag Once More Over Colmar — The Germans had ringed Colmar with an anti-tank trench and various other defenses. But none held. On February 2, in the morning following a diversionary attack on the eastern side of the town, an infantry section forced a passage to the barracks which they captured. At noon, the first French tanks entered the town.

The enemy still held the southern section, but despite its gunfire, the population had flocked into the streets to welcome the liberators. "We have waited five years for you," they would say and literally hugged the soldiers. Mopping-up of the town was completed that day without loss to our side. German soldiers emerged from their hide-outs, arms raised. They appeared weary, discouraged, and obviously happy to be out of it all so easily.

One scene typifies the liberation of a town: it is when the posters in honor of Nazi leaders are taken down from the walls. We had hardly reached the center of the town when soldiers, perched on their vehicles, started ripping down Adolf Hitler and Hermann Goering to the delight of the crowd. The Nazi régime had oppressed the people with a yoke they will not forget. The Colmar people who had experienced the pre-1914 German régime say that it was extremely liberal in comparison with the one they have just endured and in which life and liberty were at the mercy of informers. One phrase was spoken: "At last we can breathe!"

Colmar only started breathing freely today. Yesterday, the advance elements with which we arrived were not completely reassuring. But when they saw the size

of the French and American divisions ploughing the streets with their tanks, and pushing toward the south in pursuit of the enemy, then their foreheads cleared, and flags decked the windows, flags which had been stored away for five years.

(*LE FIGARO*, Paris, February 5, 1945)

Colmar a Franco-American Victory — (Report by Jacques d'Arras broadcast over Radio-Alger February 5, 1945) — The terrain was all in the enemy's favor. In order to pass from one sector to the other the French divisions had to make a wide detour around the west of the Vosges, along mountain trails almost impassable in winter while German reinforcements proceeded directly to Neuf-Brisach and could then reach any desired position within a few hours. For two months the enemy has repeatedly thrown against our soldiers, exhausted by their initial rapid advances, fresh troops ready to counterattack immediately.

The capture of Colmar was postponed because the French General Staff did not want to add the horrors of bombardment to the suffering already endured by the Alsatian people. The town could quite possibly have been freed any day after the end of December 1944, when a French Army Corps and an American Division came within four kilometers of Colmar. But the enemy was still offering savage resistance and it would have been necessary to blast the German defenses by artillery action. The French Command, therefore, preferred to undertake an extremely difficult and dangerous operation rather than risk destroying Colmar. This began on January 20. The surprise maneuver was completely successful and the desired result was achieved: there was a battle for, not of Colmar. Our troops succeeded in isolating the town before entering it. To do so they had to disrupt communications within the German lines, to cut off the Rhine bridges. There were many obstacles, including weather conditions which made this a particularly difficult task and the narrowness of the Alsatian Plain which forced our troops to advance on a front only a few kilometers wide.

Colmar is a great victory for it is the reward for months of effort. This Alsatian soil has cost the lives of many Allied soldiers who suffered severely to liberate it. Within the last two days the snow has begun to melt, revealing the bodies of American and French soldiers, stark evidence of the price paid for a freed and undamaged Alsace. Colmar is a victory for the Americans as well as for the French. American units fought beside our men for twelve days. The French and Americans helped each other with a single sector and on several occasions French infantrymen covered the advance of American infantry, indicative of the mutual esteem and admiration the American and French soldiers feel in their joint struggle and common sacrifice. All this will not be forgotten soon. The page of history the Allies have just written here is one of the last in the war but it will also prove one of the most glorious and the most costly.

(*Ministry of Information*, Paris, February 9, 1945)

French Is Again Spoken in Alsace — (From a French War Correspondent) — The jeep was rolling toward the Rhine, by the shortest route—crossed through Riespach, Waldighoffen, Steinsoultz, the three Muspach—and the rain did not scatter the groups gathered along the roadside to welcome the French cars.

Hésingue—combat cars, half tracks, tanks. We stopped and were directed to the Colonel's temporary CP. The Colonel began to explain the situation. . . . We were cold and hungry and two elderly women took us into the kitchen. They spoke constantly in French, apologizing at the end of every sentence, "You understand, in four years you get out of the habit. . . . A simple 'bonjour' was enough for them to send you to the Shirmeck camp."

A joyful humming from outside and laughter attracted us from the kitchen. A small truck bringing in a group of prisoners had just drawn up in front of the town hall.

While the village feasted on the spectacle, the town hall revealed its secrets, the calamity which had struck first the young ones, then the women, then the aged, forced to leave the country, many of whom will never return.

At Muspach, where we were to spend the night, we were welcomed by a 16-year-old boy who would have gone too had we not arrived that very morning. Muspach gave me the most picturesque proof of Alsatian loyalty. A tall, young farm laborer, after trying in vain to make us understand his feelings, expressed in dialect, stepped back, and standing in the middle of the inn sang the Marseillaise, not one word of which he had forgotten.

(*RAFALES*, Paris, December 14, 1944)

On the Alps Front—Those Who Are Never Mentioned — (By Pierre Jarry, war correspondent) — We are in the Briançonnais advance posts. The Tirailleurs and FFI who hold the positions I visited today are serving only as frontier guards for the moment but this is a hard and dangerous job. It means constant patrolling of fields of snow and ice and at times complete isolation for days on end. Above all, it is no longer a question of watching a peaceful frontier, but of keeping on the alert in time of war.

Our "colleagues" on the other side are past masters in the art of mountain warfare, venturesome and fearless. Our patrols have always to be on the lookout for ambushes or traps. Everyone in the sector is wary, and with reason, of the observation posts set up by the enemy to the east of Mont Genève, the one on the Plana for instance. Every day there is a small scale artillery duel with mortars and cannon. We all know that shells are falling into Briançon itself. Both sides are on the defensive but it is, as one officer said, "an aggressive defensive."

These frontier guards deserve all the more credit for their activities because they are rarely equipped as they should be. The Tirailleurs are shod with American shoes

which turn into something like wet towelling after being worn a few times in the snow. Most of the FFI are wearing boots made in France to German order. These are soled with some kind of composition which wears through within three weeks. The men try to repair them with any makeshift they can but there have already been a number of cases of frozen feet. As for clothing, some woolens and sheepskin coats would not do them any harm.

I was able to walk beyond the village of Mont Genève to the limits of no man's land and wandered through the wood at Sestrières and along the slopes of the Rocher des Dix Heures. . . . My most unforgettable impression was of cheerfulness of the good lads who man the advance posts on Mont Genève, the halo of confidence and courage they wear as naturally as their FFI berets or their Tirailleur helmets.

Some of the men holding before Briançon had never before seen snow and there are members of the Maquis who find it quite natural to complete their army training behind barbed wire entanglements. There is a 36-year-old sergeant major there (a volunteer in 1944 as he had been in 1939) with one good eye which twinkles as he sucks on his pipe . . . who, like all the peasants who form the élite of the FFI in that sector, embodies the very spirit of our victory—inexhaustible and unyielding patience.

(TAM, Alger, December 23, 1944)

III—MILITARY NEWS

General Eisenhower Pays Tribute to French Troops

Communiqué issued by the Press Services of the Ministry of War: Lieutenant General Jacob L. Devers, commander of the American Sixth Army Group, sent the following message to General Jean Delattre de Tassigny, commander of the French First Army in Alsace:

It is with great pleasure that I convey to you a personal message I have just received from General Eisenhower: "Please accept my congratulations for the splendid achievements of your troops in the liberation of Colmar and in the elimination of the enemy bridgehead on the west bank of the Rhine. This victory, achieved despite extremely unfavorable weather conditions and difficult terrain, is owing to the skill, courage and determination of all forces engaged.

"Kindly offer my congratulations for this heroic feat to the General commanding the French First Army and to all the men under his command."

(Ministry of Information, Paris, February 13, 1945)

General Devers' Message to French Forces

Soldiers of the French First Army. Attacking boldly in blinding snowstorms and difficult terrain, you have succeeded by your strength and by your determination



French tanks and infantry advance in Alsace.

French Press and Information Service