

FRANCE AT WAR



French Press and Information Service

The Wehrmacht retreating toward the East.

I—MILITARY OPERATIONS

The German Front

A communiqué from the National Defense General Staff dated April 1, summarized as follows the operations of the French First Army after the final mopping-up of Alsace:

On March 15, after having overcome enemy resistance in the region of Oberhoffen, French troops in cooperation with the American Seventh Army, completed the liberation of Alsace. On March 19, crossing the Lauter, they penetrated into Germany and seized the village of Scheibhardt. The following day, tanks and infantry units under General de Montsabert occupied Berg and reached the Bienwald Forest. On March 22, the French forces reached the Siegfried Line whose defenses are particularly heavy in this zone and pierced it, despite stiff resistance. On March 24, they reached the banks of the Erlen and mopped up the last nests of enemy resistance in the Bienwald Forest. By the evening of March 25, after having seized the towns of Rheinsbaden, Grinen, Hagenbach, Neuburg, and Maximiliansau, the French First Army was holding both banks of the Rhine

and had liberated several thousand Russian and Polish prisoners and captured 1,100 Germans and vast quantities of matériel. Over 200 kilometers along the Rhine were in the hands of the French. On March 31, French troops crossed the Rhine north of Karlsruhe and advanced on Stuttgart.

Below are the Official French communiqués as reported by the Federal Communications Commission on the developments of the French advance following April 1:

The Rhine Crossed — The French First Army, starting from German territory on a 15-kilometer front, crossed the Rhine this morning in spite of strong resistance. The crossing was completely successful. The operation is developing satisfactorily.

(New York TIMES, April 1, 1945)

Bridgehead Reinforced — Vigorously continuing their advance east of the Rhine, in spite of increasing enemy resistance, the French First Army forces have again extended and reinforced their bridgehead, which now stretches over a front of more than 40 kilometers.

Some 60 localities have been occupied in the last 48 hours. A considerable amount of material and many prisoners have fallen into our hands.

(New York TIMES, April 3, 1945)

Generals de Montsabert and Valluy Seize Karlsruhe — Paris, April 5 — Communiqué from French First Army Headquarters — This morning, April 4, the French First Army, under the command of General Delattre de Tassigny, seized Karlsruhe. Despite fierce enemy resistance, the defense installations protecting the large capital of Baden were overcome and fell into our hands thanks to the combined action of the forces of General de Montsabert and General Valluy. To the east, our troops are ten kilometers from the Neckar. Despite fierce counterattacks and difficult terrain, our advance is progressing.

(Ministry of Information, Paris, April 5, 1945)

Fighting in the Siegfried Line — The Neckar has been reached at another point and its bank is now held along several kilometers. Despite violent counterattacks, the advance in the direction of Pforzheim continues. Pockets of resistance have been wiped out in the rear of our line. The town of Bretten has been captured by storm.

To the south, Karlsruhe has been left well behind. Our troops are fighting in Siegfried Line fortifications which are barring the way in the direction of Rastatt.

Yesterday 1,100 prisoners and a considerable amount of material was captured.

(New York TIMES, April 7, 1945)

Enz River Reached — French troops progressed about 15 kilometers east of Karlsruhe and reached the Enz River in the Muehlacker region. South and southwest of Karlsruhe the enemy is stubbornly resisting in the Siegfried Line fortifications, trying at all costs to prevent our units from breaking through toward Rastatt.

In the course of the last two days more than 4,000 French war prisoners and displaced workers have been liberated by our troops.

Yesterday more than 1,000 German prisoners were captured.

(New York TIMES, April 8, 1945)

General de Gaulle on the German Front — Last Friday night, General de Gaulle left Paris on an inspection tour of the French First Army front. Saturday, on his way to General Delattre de Tassigny's Headquarters, he crossed the frontier between France and the Palatinate. Shortly later, he crossed over to the right bank of the Rhine into Baden where our troops are launching an attack in the direction of Stuttgart and pursuing the enemy who is counterattacking violently.

General de Gaulle went to Karlsruhe by way of Spire, where a military ceremony was organized. In that town, three quarters of which have been destroyed, the President of the Government attended an impressive parade of our troops at the close of which he awarded many decorations.

The following day, General de Gaulle left by plane to inspect the troops holding on the Alps front.

(Ministry of Information, Paris, April 9, 1945)

In the Foothills of the Black Forest — Despite the opposition of the enemy, who is defending himself more

stubbornly, French troops yesterday continued their victorious battles. German opposition is particularly strong in the district between the Rhine and the valley of the Neckar.

South of Karlsruhe, between Ettlingen and the Rhine, the Wehrmacht is making a stand in the fortified positions of the Siegfried Line protecting Rastatt. Toward the north troops started to outflank these fortifications by infiltrating into the woods in the foothills of the Black Forest. In this sector the Germans launched three counterattacks, which were all repelled with appreciable losses to the attackers. After taking Pforzheim, the First Army is now along the Enz on a front of 22 kilometers.

After taking the important localities of Brackenheim and Botenheim, General Delattre's forces took Aluffen. In this district German resistance is also stiffening and the Wehrmacht's desperate attempt to stop the First Army's advance proves it is not underestimating the seriousness of the French threat against the German redoubt.

(New York TIMES, April 10, 1945)

Radio-Stuttgart in the Hands of the French — Newspapers mention that the French First Army is actively participating in the battles on the Western front. If its advance is not as spectacular as that of the British and American Armies operating to the north, it is owing to the stubbornness of the German resistance in the southern sector.

The Wehrmacht is clinging to the last fortified positions of the Siegfried Line and endeavoring by every possible means to check the relentless advance of the French troops constituting the main direct threat to the famous "Hitlerite redoubt" where the last Nazi gangs intend to entrench themselves.

After mopping up the important communications center of Pforzheim, the French seized Radio-Stuttgart, 20 kilometers from the town. Advance elements crossed the Enz River at its confluence with the Neckar and thus eliminated the last natural barrier protecting the city.

The right wing of the French First Army encountered stiff resistance south of Karlsruhe, in the direction of Rastatt. An eight kilometer advance was made south of Ettlingen, through the foothills of the Black Forest.

(Ministry of Information, Paris, April 10, 1945)

Pforzheim Falls — General Delattre de Tassigny's forces are continuing their advance throughout the zone of action in spite of strong enemy resistance south of Karlsruhe. German troops are holding on stubbornly to Siegfried Line fortifications.

Farther east they are utilizing for defense all features of the terrain such as woods, villages and towns, which they are defending step by step, counterattacking and letting themselves be killed on the spot. Our troops dealing with these resistance centers are reducing them one by one. Armor of General Schleicher, under the command of General de Montsabert, succeeded in capturing Pforzheim by a bold maneuver.



Press Association

American prisoner after a few months under German care.



US Signal Corps

French prisoner after ten months under German care.



US Signal Corps

Mortar attack on Reipertswiller, France, as Allied forces move into the town.

The French Army now holds the whole length of the River Enz between Pforzheim and Neckar. On the other hand, our troops achieved considerable advances in regions south of Karlsruhe. In this sector advances are being made by outflanking rear fortifications of the Siegfried Line barring access to the Rastatt region.

(*New York TIMES*, April 11, 1945)

Before the Baden Heights — Exploiting results of deep penetration into the Black Forest, forces of the French First Army under the command of General Delattre de Tassigny have reached the suburbs of Rastatt, a stronghold stubbornly defended by the enemy. The Murg was crossed at several points to the east of the town.

French troops have reached the heights dominating Baden. Despite stiff resistance and difficult country, the advance is continuing.

800 prisoners and important booty were captured yesterday.

(*New York TIMES*, April 13, 1945)

Kehl Taken — Exploiting their previous success on the plain of Baden, forces of the French First Army under the command of General Jean Delattre de Tassigny, pushing toward the south irresistibly, threw back the adversary without giving him time to reorganize.

Kehl was taken, Strasbourg was freed of all threat and more than fifty localities, including Buehl, Achern, Reystadt, Gamshorst and Otterswier, have successively fallen into our hands in brilliant actions. Enormous quantities of material were lost by the enemy and prisoners are pouring toward the rear in such great numbers it is not yet possible to count them.

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

Rastatt Captured — James de Coquet, war correspondent of *Le Figaro*, reported some interesting details on the capture of Rastatt by the French First Army. He told how the advance French tank units penetrated into the city, and when the French arrived at the barracks which were no longer held by the Volksturm, the latter were lined up with their hands crossed on the tops of their heads, ready to surrender. Unfortunately, this was not the case throughout for a few nests of resistance held by fanatical SS had to be wiped out. Finally, after having crossed the Murg River, the French reached a castle. While the concierge was offering to place himself at the service of the French, two German soldiers inside the building came forward to surrender. One of them who was 20 years old was trembling with fear and constantly repeated, "Excuse me."

The Germans still held the building which had to be taken by storm: the battle lasted more than two hours

but at nightfall the last of those holding out were exterminated and their bloody bodies scattered in the streets.

Rastatt was occupied.

(*LE FIGARO*, Paris, April 16, 1945)

The Atlantic Front

The French Attack — The special correspondent of the newspaper *Ce Soir* toured the Atlantic Front where the French are attacking.

Flying above Royan in a spotter, he saw a group of bombers diving for the enemy pillboxes. 90,000 heavily armed Germans are still in the Gironde pocket. During seven months of continuous heroic battle, with no arms to speak of, without equipment or supplies, the FFI of the West have contained the Germans besieged in their Atlantic strongholds. Today, our "sabot-shod soldiers" have received some matériel. The battle is gaining in magnitude, and will make possible, when the time comes, the cleansing of the last open wounds on French soil. Thus, recently, the first group of Naval Air Force bombers, flying in two squadrons of twelve planes each, attacked enemy objectives. The special correspondent of *Ce Soir* gave a moving account of the attack:

"The first bomber tilted, then started a vertical 4,000-meter dive, straight for the ground. In a few seconds it released its bombs and skimmed the ground at an altitude of only four meters. Bombs exploded, raising tremendous clouds, while the other planes followed in a fantastic merry-go-round. The clouds thickened, rose in heavy spirals, like tremendous greyish trees in the plain. The bombers returned to formation. We counted them with a slight feeling of anguish. . . . They were all there."

(*Ministry of Information*, Paris, April 11, 1945)

Attack on Gironde Front — Paris, April 14 — Supreme Headquarters today reported that a limited attack began this morning in an unspecified sector of the Gironde front. The troops were under the command of French General Edgar de Larminat.

(*United Press*, April 14, 1945)

French and Americans Before Pointe-de-Grave — Early this morning a task force of the French Navy commanded by Admiral Rue, flying his flag in one of the French warships, commenced bombardment of German batteries covering the south of the Gironde.

The bombardment was maintained for some time in support of military operations now taking place to clear the enemy pockets of resistance on the west coast of France.

The task force was composed of large and small warships of the French Navy. Vice Admiral Alan G. Kirk, USN, commander of United States Naval Forces in France, directed the naval planning and execution of this operation, under the over-all direction of the Allied Naval Commander in Chief of the Expeditionary Force, Admiral Sir Harold M. Burrough, KCB, LBE, DSO.

(*New York TIMES*, April 16, 1945)

French Smash Into Royan in Drive to Open Bordeaux — Paris, April 15 — Veterans of Major General Jacques Leclerc's French Second Armored Division smashed into Royan, the principal German position on the east bank of the Gironde estuary, this evening and split the German pocket around the town in two after two days of shattering aerial bombardment and savage ground attacks in the drive to open the port of Bordeaux.

More than 1,300 Flying Fortresses and Liberators of the United States Eighth Air Force prepared the way for today's successful assault by drenching the enemy's positions on both sides of the Gironde controlling the route to Bordeaux with about 460,000 gallons of liquid fire that bathed in flame the German positions and strong points.

Tanks of the Second Armored Division led the assault this afternoon after infantry advances yesterday had seized high ground overlooking the town. They were supported by the American Thirteenth Field Artillery Brigade. The German position, which was 35 miles long and twelve miles deep, was bounded by Marennnes, Equille, Saujon, Cozes and Talmont. Yesterday's advances from Saujon and Talmont took Semussac and Médis. A ridge captured last night was only two miles from Royan.

Warships Shell Germans — While the tanks and infantry were hacking at the defenses today, a long line of French warships swung in from the Atlantic to bombard the German positions on the strip of land between the Gironde and the Atlantic. The shelling opened at 8 a. m.

French and Canadian minesweepers swept a path for the destroyers and heavier units that shelled the German positions. Many were silenced early in the bombardment, which lasted well into the afternoon.

The final assault on the Royan pocket was launched at 1:30 p. m. The French advanced under a heavy barrage from the American guns.

Shelling kept the Germans' heads down as the French tanks whipped through lanes in the minefields, fighter-bombers bombed and strafed positions untouched by the previous bombing and shelling. Marauders of the First Tactical Air Force hammered other positions.

It was the first time that the Eighth Air Force had employed its new bomb. The inflammable substance is dropped in tanks that are exploded on impact by detonators that ignite the fuel, splashing the flaming contents of each tank over an area of approximately 60 square yards. More than 600 100-pound incendiaries were dropped in the same area.

Coastal Guns Pounded — The large coastal guns on both sides of the estuary were pounded by almost 1,000 half-ton and one-ton high-explosive bombs. On Saturday more than 1,150 heavy forts and defended areas were hit with 3,500 tons of high explosives.

Medium bombers of the French First Air Force attacked the positions later today and fighter-bombers

swept down to strafe and bomb the enemy troops. A French naval squadron commanded by Admiral Joseph Rue set a twelve-mile stretch of the German-held Atlantic coast ablaze with a hail of shells. During the first half-hour of firing, the squadron, the first independent French unit to operate in these waters since the summer of 1940, knocked out at least three German batteries. Heavy units of the task force fired from several miles offshore, but the escorting destroyers moved in boldly to smash the German positions. Vice Admiral Alan G. Kirk, commander of the American naval forces in France, directed the naval planning and execution of the operation under the over-all command of Admiral Sir Harold Martin Burrough, the Allies' naval Commander in Chief.

Major General Edgar de Larminat opened the ground offensive against the 17,000 or more Germans in the area yesterday. His own French Forces of the Interior have been reinforced by artillery, tank and colonial infantry units of the French Regular Army. The German forces, which are commanded by Admiral Schirlitz, are composed of army, Elite Guard and marine units, as well as some air force ground personnel and anti-aircraft troops. The German positions around Royan, which were extremely well laid out, did not offer much trouble during the first few hours, according to front-line reports. The French, attacking on a 15 mile front, loosed two converging columns, one from Saujon, seven miles northeast of Royan on the main highway and the other from Cozes, ten miles to the southeast, early yesterday.

Columns Converge and Gain — The northern column advanced three miles through scattered resistance in the first few hours to capture Médis, while the southern force advanced four miles to storm the village of Semussac, dispatches said. Once the two columns had converged, the leading elements scrambled up the ridge protecting Royan and the main enemy position.

The enemy's artillery fire, which was expected to be heavy, was almost nonexistent in the first hours because of the tremendous aerial and naval bombardment and the accurate counter-battery fire of the American artillery. Because of marshes and numerous small waterways the French advance was channeled over corridors of high ground. The troops threaded their way through extensive minefields in these areas. (*New York TIMES*, April 16, 1945)

The Alps Front

Communiqué from the Ministry of War: After having stormed the Petit Saint Bernard advanced post on March 31, and relieved Maurienne on April 6 by storming the Montfroid Fort and the ridge dominating the Mont-Cenis Plateau to the west, a detachment of the French Alps Army launched an attack in the Maritime Alps on April 10.

After a fierce one-day battle, our troops gained a foothold at several points on the Aucion ridge. The ring is being tightened around the nest of resistance still holding out on the Aucion summits. Advances are continuing throughout the entire Maritime Alps sector.

(*Ministry of Information, Paris, April 13, 1945*)

The Indo-Chinese Front

The *New York Times* of April 11 published a Japanese report which stated that the kingdom of Luang-Prabang had declared its independence: "The kingdom's independence was formally proclaimed by King Sisavang Vong at a ceremony held at his royal palace last Sunday evening."

On April 11, while Domei was circulating this report, the French Government in Paris stated that it had received news concerning resistance in Indo-China which puts the situation in Luang-Prabang in a quite different light. Several members of the royal family were present when volunteers for the Laos "Maquis" assembled in a forest clearing for a distribution of arms. There was only enough equipment for a few hundred of the thousands who want to fight the Japanese. Those who could be armed are being trained and led by French officers. Luang-Prabang is one of the three kingdoms of Laos which with the Empire of Annam and the kingdoms of Cambodia, Tonk-king, and Cochin China make up the Indo-Chinese Federation.

Despite the tremendous inequality of numbers and arms, regular French troops are continuing their resistance. They cannot alone repulse the Japanese, but can considerably harass Japanese defense positions at the time of an Allied landing. For their part, the Franco-Annamese guerrillas in the mountain regions continue to harass Japanese troops and sabotage their communications and supplies. Below are official French communiqués as recorded by the Federal Communications Commission and the French Press Agency:

Guerrilla Forces in Laos — Communiqué from the National Defense General Staff: In Laos, our guerrilla forces are effectively operating on the major communication routes between Siam and Indo-China.

Note — Communication routes between Laos and Cham and Siam States served for all important traffic until the day when, following construction of large public works, it was made possible to export products from Laos to the east, that is, by way of the ports on the Tong-king gulf, and the railroad which follows the coast to Saïgon.

(*LE MONDE, Paris, March 29, 1945*)

French Troops Control Region West of Black River — Communiqué from the National Defense General Staff as recorded by the FCC: The military situation has changed little during the last week.

In Tong-king the French forces now control the whole region west of the Black River.

To enable the main body of our forces to organize themselves in prepared positions, the French command has engaged in a series of delaying actions crowned with success against the Japanese columns which are pursuing our troops.

Our units, and particularly the Foreign Legion, have shown magnificent drive, going so far as to undertake hand-to-hand fighting under the murderous fire of enemy mortars.

(*New York TIMES, April 1, 1945*)