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FRANCE AT WAR

I—GENERAL OFFENSIVE AGAINST THE SECRET ARMY OF RESISTANCE

The way in which the strategy of the occupation authorities in France against the Resistance forces has developed, helps us to realize the importance of Resistance and its secret army as a factor in the Allied invasion plans. Each blow struck by Resistance against the German army, whether through the sabotage of railroads or the destruction of factories and strategic points, is a military operation conceived and ordered by the French and Allied General Staff. This explains the measures taken by the occupation authorities in order to break up the vast underground organization that is threatening the safety of the German army. It also explains the offensive against the Maquis in the mountain regions of Savoy, described by Vichy propaganda as a campaign to wipe out "terrorism" as well as the increase in arrests and executions in all regions where the population is suspected of giving shelter to the Maquis, guerrillas and partisans. The Germans have declared the Dordogne department a restricted zone; they are strengthening the Waffen SS guards in the factories and extending Darnand's authority to the field of Civilian Defense. The secret Army of Liberation has to face a huge enemy offensive, the outcome of which will probably affect the progress of the Allied invasion.

The Battle in Savoie

It is confirmed that the Maquis has adopted a mobile strategy in face of the attack being carried out by 12,000 armed Germans, supported by aviation. Confronted by forces of such superiority, the Maquis groups refuse to be drawn into battle whenever they can avoid it, obeying in this way the orders they have received to spare men and munitions. They fall back, then reorganize to strike again; their chief concern is to keep the occupation troops constantly on the alert. After the epic siege of Glières (see Free France, May 1, — Vol. 5, No. 9,

"France at War") the battle spread to the Ain region and the Jura which had already been subjected to severe repressive measures in February. We are publishing below a number of news reports which have reached Switzerland or London, and which describe the progress of military operations in these regions.

COMMENTS ON MAQUIS ACTIVITIES: — Four important observations can be made on the subject of action taken by the Maquis: (1) the enemy command does not seem to know the strength of the patriots' effectives, but it must fear that they are large, since it is sending against them detachments of considerable importance in number and equipment; (2) generally, in spite of inferiority in numbers and arms, unless a Maquis group is taken by surprise, the enemy losses in killed and wounded are sometimes much higher, and rarely lower than the losses of the Maquis; (3) usually, the Germans kill their prisoners, particularly the wounded, probably because they constitute a burden which hinders their advance; (4) the Germans set fire to villages and farms if they suspect that the inhabitants feed or help members of the Maquis.

(French Information Services, London, April 9, 1944)

EPILOGUE OF THE GLIERES SIEGE — (1) One of the German companies which surrounded the Plateau, was commanded by a Frenchman. (2) Maquis fighters killed in the fighting, or executed at Glières, were buried by the regular gardes mobiles and militiamen. Their graves were not marked by an identification.

(French Information Services, London, April 14, 1944)

VICHY CELEBRATES THE END OF THE GLIERES SIEGE — Vichy is celebrating the end of hostilities against Resistance in Haute-Savoie, and Laval has thanked the militia for its courage in the performance of its civic duty. Yet, although it is announced that the repressive measures have been a success, reports of disturbances in Haute-Savoie keep coming in, and houses continue to be searched in Evian, which is completely

cut off from the outside world. A real reign of terror is reported from Thonon, where 300 militiamen were sent. The houses are subjected to a minute search, and the citizens are cross-questioned at length. Even boys and girls of sixteen and seventeen years of age have to give detailed accounts of their parents' activities. The Evian municipal authorities have been ordered to place hotel rooms at the disposal of a new contingent of wounded German soldiers (whose number is estimated at 4,000), by May 1. The Evian hotels have already taken 2,000 wounded.

(*DAGENS NYHETER*, April, 1944)

OPERATIONS ARE RESUMED IN THE JURA AND THE AIN — The situation has become much worse in the Ain department. Fairly large contingents of Wehrmacht troops left Bellegarde in trucks, and surrounded Lons-le-Saunier and Saint Claude, where they searched all the houses, trying to discover Maquis youths. Numerous arrests have already been made. On the other side of the Jura, several farms, where members of Resistance had taken refuge, were set on fire. In Bresse, the German soldiers are requisitioning increasingly large quantities of food.

(*JOURNAL DE GENEVE*, April 14, 1944)

BELLEGARDE — Vast operations carried out by the Wehrmacht in Pays-de-Gex, ended April 12. Army trucks, loaded with butter, eggs, preserves, meat, and thousands of bottles of wine, left for Bellegarde. Actually, it was a real looting foray. Every farm, where the occupation authorities knew they could find something to carry off, had been designated in advance and the requisitioning was carried out with the utmost dispatch.

While this was being done by the very young German soldiers under the orders of non-commissioned officers, Gex, and other towns in the Jura mountains, as far up as Collonges, and Fortecluse, were surrounded and kept completely isolated from early morning on April 7, until the afternoon of April 12. Curfew was imposed at 8:00 p.m., and immediately on arriving, the Germans sent out the town crier to announce everywhere that all persons between the ages of 16 and 60 must report at once to the Town Hall to have their identity papers checked.

(*TRIBUNE DE GENEVE*, April 14, 1944)

Three hundred Boches, and fifty regular Gardes Mobiles succeeded in surrounding a band of Maquis fighters in the Jura. The Germans launched the attack. To fight back on the spot was impossible. In order to save their comrades, two of the Maquis men volunteered to sacrifice themselves so as to hold back the Germans, and allow the others to withdraw. Armed with tommyguns, the two young men went to meet the Germans and fired at them for an hour, until their ammunition was used up. During this time, the rest of the Maquis group were able to scatter. The Germans set fire to a chalet, but found no one. Resistance salutes

with profound emotion these two heroes who gave their lives on the field of honor in order to save their comrades.

(*French Information Services*, London, April 15, 1944)

GENEVE — Contradictory rumors have been spread regarding Wehrmacht operations in the French Jura. According to well-informed sources, occupation troops are operating from the following bases: Besançon, Bourg, Nantua and Gex. Their operations have just been halted and the units stationed in this region have been hastily sent elsewhere. Recently, the Wehrmacht was very active along the Champ Fromier, and the road between Morez and Ser.

(*LA SUISSE*, April 18, 1944)

As early as the beginning of February, 1944, the first mopping up operations against the Maquis in the Ain department had failed. To avenge themselves of this stalemate, the German troops under General Schaack, have lashed out against the civilian population of the region, massacring women and children, and burning over 400 houses.

A new offensive was launched on April 22, 1944. While the 150th German Division was hurled against the Jura Maquis, other large enemy forces started operations against the Ain department. The German troops met with stiff resistance. All along the line they were forced back, and in the Ain department alone, 500 Germans were killed and 700 wounded. The patriots' losses were 10 killed, including one patriot leader of the Jura region, and 64 killed, including four officers in the Ain department.

The voluntary sacrifice of a detachment led by a heroic officer who leaves six children, saved the village of Viry from being razed to the ground, and 20 hostages from being shot. In the Ain as in the Jura, the Germans who are furious at their setbacks, are seeking revenge on the civilian population. The inhabitants are arrested "en masse" and indiscriminately massacred. By April 24, 1944, more than 300 farms had been burned.

Many trucks and buses belonging to the German troops have been blown up by grenades, and the fighting is continuing.

(*French Information Services*, London, April 25, 1944)

The French official communiqués announced on April 18 that the Resistance Army had been defeated in Savoy, that its supply lines had been cut, and the mopping up operation completed. But, at the same time, they specifically stated that when one center was wiped out, another immediately appeared. In fact, Resistance is everywhere. The men of the Maquis have little difficulty in obtaining food, — all the groups hidden near the Swiss frontier get butter, cheese and meat, but it is true that their clothes are in rags. Quite recently five men and two girls crossed the frontier to escape the police. They were wretchedly

clad and shod, but smiling. One girl had on a man's trousers, the seat patched with a piece of burlap. They all had boots which were worn through, and their clothes were faded and torn, but their morale was high.

(TRIBUNE DE LAUSANNE, April 18, 1944)

The Battle Begins All Over France

German strategy calls for the suppression of the Maquis before a second front can be opened, but the French Forces on the home front, supplied by the population, and armed by the British, are defending themselves, and inflicting severe losses on the Germans and the militia. In spite of militia informers, and repeated executions, Resistance, when beaten in one place, reappears in another. Here again, it is a question of keeping the German army constantly on the qui-vive. The struggle is manifesting itself in sporadic engagements in some regions, in operations of much larger scope in others.

RESISTANCE IS EVERYWHERE — (Vichy, March 31). Philippe Henriot, speaking over the radio, acknowledged the strength of Resistance, and declared: "The French Government has been compelled to evacuate the entire population from various places in France where groups of partisans are gaining more and more influence, and are well on the way to take complete control of the regions, in spite of the stubborn opposition furnished by the police and militia. At the present time, fierce battles are being fought between guerrilla bands and detachments of police in different parts of the country.

(FRANCE, London, April 1, 1944)

IN THE ALPES MARITIMES — Because of the growing activity of Resistance, Vichy has taken severe measures: the *Journal Officiel* publishes a decree whereby the powers of the Marseille Police Superintendent are extended to the departments of the Alpes Maritimes, and the Basses Alpes. Duraffour, the Police Superintendent for the Nice region, with the rank and attributes of a prefect, is placed at the disposal of the Secretary of State for the Interior.

(L'ECLAIREUR, Geneva, April 5, 1944)

THE DROME REGION — The German Labor Chief, Bodde, accompanied by a German soldier named Kenile, and Schefeld, a German who says that he became a French citizen 20 years ago, completed a tour of inspection in the Valence region (Drôme). Two days later, a detachment of SS, nearly 200 men, set out in search of Resistance hideouts and engaged the Maquis. The patriots, who numbered 27, fell back, after inflicting losses on the attacking forces, destroying one truck, which fell over the parapet of a bridge when hit by a grenade. According to the first reports, the Germans lost seven dead, 30 wounded. One patriot was killed. The German troops divided to return by two different routes. On the way, they completely sacked two small villages: Roussets and Les Barraques, as well as the Col

Rousset Hotel, from which they stole linen, silver and jewelry. Before leaving, they set fire to everything.

(French Information Services, London, April 6, 1944)

MASSIF CENTRAL REGION — One morning at six o'clock, 800 armed Germans arrived at Aubusson, Creuse, coming from La Courtine. They closed in around the little town, and kept everyone in a state of terror for four hours. They overran all the houses, ransacking everything, and threatening the inhabitants. They spoiled furnishings in most of the houses, which were all turned upside down, and they committed many thefts. A girl of 13 who tried to escape, was shot. To the horrified parents the Germans explained that they had mistaken her for a young man. They arrested 200 people. Several of the men were seriously wounded. Only 23 of the arrests were maintained, and the prisoners were taken off to Limoges.

(French Information Services, London, April 8, 1944)

At the beginning of February, a violent fight took place in the Massif Central between French patriots and a German regiment estimated at 1,500 men. The latter had been brought up in trucks during the night. When the alarm was given in the French camp, a guard of eight men was ordered to hold off the Germans so that the rest of the group could withdraw. The Germans, who were equipped with flame throwers, grenades and sub-machine-guns, succeeded only in capturing the rearguard after a whole day of desperate fighting. Four of the patriots were killed. The patriot forces fought their way through the German ranks and were partially successful in disengaging themselves. Eight of the French were killed, while German losses amounted to 40 men. The patriots managed to set fire to the munition dump and food stocks before retreating. The Germans celebrated their victory in their usual way: with their flame-throwers they set fire to the villages and all the adjacent farm houses. The leader of the French unit has drawn up a report of the fighting. After the liberation of France, this document will permit tribute to be paid to the men who gave their lives gloriously in such an unequal battle.

(French Information Services, London, April 12, 1944)

IN THE NORTH — From reliable sources we are informed that the male population of the village of Asse, in the Lille region, was massacred by SS troops. On the night of April 1, 1944, a railway sabotage caused a German troop train coming from Belgium to derail near the Asse station. German soldiers leaped from the wrecked train and immediately shot the station master, his assistant and the switchman. Then obeying the orders of their commanding officer, they overran the village, broke into the houses and herded away all the adults, children and old people. The village priest and 19 men were shot in their homes. The other men were taken to the scene of the train wreck, where they were machine-gunned. The village "curé" was shot in

the back while ministering to the dying. In all, 86 persons were executed and many others were seriously wounded. The local newspapers refused to print a German statement claiming that the shots that were heard had been fired at the train when it derailed. The Germans seized the newspaper offices to publish their own version.

IN BRITTANY—In the Vannes arrondissement (Morbihan) a real manhunt has started again. The Germans are arresting every male over 16 years of age they can lay hands on, in the streets, houses, and offices. They have even taken cripples. But a warning had come through, and a number of men were able to flee to the countryside. The students from the Roman Catholic seminary in Vannes hid in the fields.

IN TOULOUSE—A young man who was being seized by the Germans in Toulouse on February 2, shook himself free and jumped into a passing trolley car. The Germans fired at the street car with a tommygun and several women and children were killed.

(*French Information Services, April 15, 1944*)

II—ITALIAN FRONT

The battle is continuing on the Cassino and Anzio fronts. French troops are still holding their lines consolidated with those of the Fifth Army. The communiqués speak of attacks and counter-attacks, and the Allies keep on shelling communication lines. The following reports come from war correspondents with the French troops.

Provisioning by Plane

From Marcel Chouraqui. — "The center of the panorama is Cassino, the mont Cassin . . . Fighting is chaotic at present. It is no use mentioning the date or the hour, for each day in this city of death and devastation is exactly like the one before. Every day there is another quarter, another building, the railroad station, or the gutters of the Hotel Continental, and God knows what besides, to be cleared of the enemy. It is a real "Cassinograd." Between the monastery and our positions, a few hundred yards from the entrance to the Abbey, there used to be the terminus of a funicular railway which carried tourists up. What was the station for tourists in happier days, is now known as Hill 435 . . .

"The situation along the slope is confused. The men who are holding 435 are almost cut off. Contacts are difficult. Have they managed to arrange some method of getting supplies? . . . Look where a jade green line of fire, like a serpent writhing and biting its own tail, draws an ellipse, with its greatest diameter running from north to south. It marks out about 2 acres of Hill 435. During the daylight hours this serpent becomes a dragon belching smoke and flames, and forming a ring of fire around the position which marks the target. A peaceful target this time, since it indicates the place where barrels of water, provisions and ammunition must be dropped, so that the soldiers there may continue to defend themselves.

"But, where are the planes? The question has hardly been put before a formation of planes sweeps down from the clouds. They come low to the west of the Abbey, between Cassino and us, then gain altitude, to fly high over the Rapido Valley. Now they glide down again, almost touching the ground, to win through the narrow passage which separates the Castellone du Majolo, hills rising about a mile and a half north of Cassino. We lose sight of the planes as they fly round the

Majolo, then they bank, and skim like birds through the valley. They pass Cassino on the south-east to bank in a hairpin turn. We see white dots and black ones, some reflecting the light. Is it German anti-aircraft fire? No. Those are the parachutes softly swinging in the air before most of them, (unfortunately never all) float to the ground between the green fires. The Allied light bombers have accomplished their mission: 435 has received supplies. And it will be the same tomorrow, and the day after . . . until the Abbey is taken."

(*ALGER REPUBLICAIN, April 1, 1944*)

Relief

From Elisabeth de Miribel. — "Five men, four non-coms and one officer, have arrived at the command post. They are the guides for the troops which are being relieved. Their faces are grey, their eyes brilliant with fatigue. They talk very little, and what they do say is brief. They have come to guide some 600 men down the mountain to the positions in the valley where they are expected. If all goes well, they will be here by 11 o'clock at night. And towards 11 they do begin to come in from a thick darkness which is lit only by the whiteness of the trail, and chalky walls of the ridge. They are like moving shadows . . . marching along, weighted down by their heavy packs, two at a time, four, six. The night is calm. Suddenly, a German "mouchard" passes, droning over our heads . . . but the column continues, climbs over one hill, descends again, up another slope, and so on interminably. One has to keep going forward, even if one is dead tired.

"The men feel that they enjoy a momentary safety as they wind along. They let themselves go to the utter weariness which engulfs them after 65 days in the lines — where, stretched flat like hares, at distances of 50 to 100 yards one from the other, they had to keep unceasing watch, to be ready to attack and counter attack, and to hold each inch of ground. Every now and then, an electric torch lights up haggard faces streaked with dirt, the eyes smudged and blinking with fatigue . . . These men, who have been admirable soldiers up in the mountain, follow their instinct which is strong enough to tell them how to make a hole, and to lie down and sleep . . . Tomorrow, when day breaks, in the small hours of a dull grey morning of early spring, this column will be on its way again. Then there will be the next relief, and others, until the greatest comes with the day of Victory."

(*Commissioner of Information, Alger, April 9, 1944*)

A Day With the Women's Ambulance Corps

From Elisabeth de Miribel. — "The personnel of the battalion is lodged in big American tents marked with the Red Cross on their green canvas. The "pick up" section is absent. After working night and day during the worst shelling, their unit is resting further behind the lines. About 500 drivers, men and women, medical orderlies, doctors, and officers of the Army Service Corps, work cheerfully here, in spite of the mud, and the noise of shells passing over — sometimes from the Allied lines, sometimes from the German positions.

"Madame de Lhuart's surgical ambulance, with two shifts of surgeons, is attached to the battalion. An ingenious system of three ambulances permits the wounded men to receive treatment for shock, have X-rays taken, and operations performed immediately. The ambulance service under Mlle de Chambrais, picks them up 200 yards further along, and evacuates them to the rear hospitals. Mlle Clarenc's unit provides liaison between the front line First Aid posts and the clearance stations.

"I spent several days with Mlle Clarenc's ambulance service. I saw some of the members of it decorated with the Croix de Guerre, but I had great difficulty in getting them to tell me of