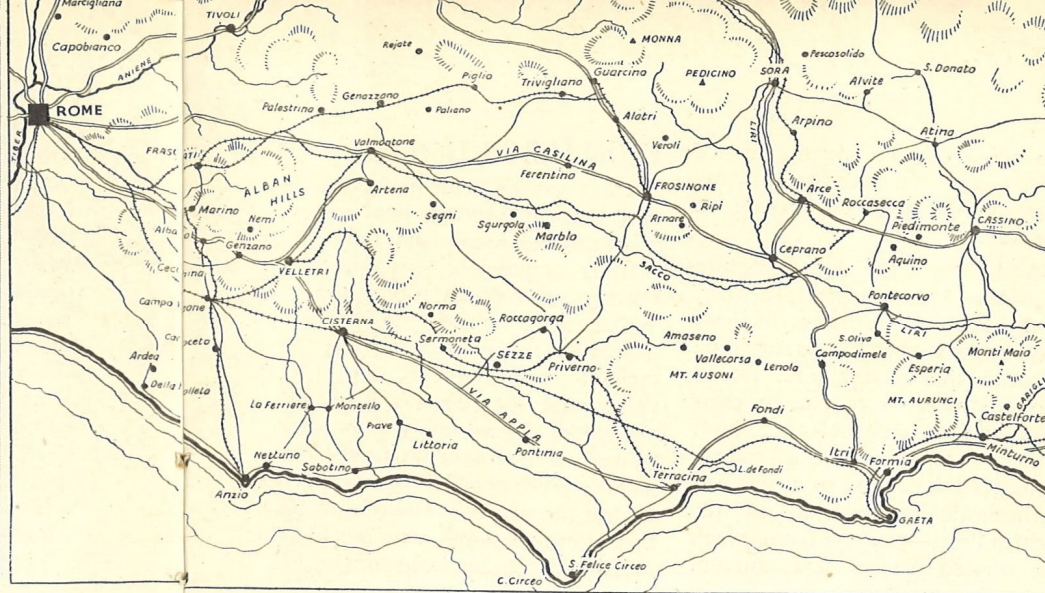




General Alphonse Juin, Commander of the French forces in Italy.



THE VICTORS OF MONTE MAIO

Four years ago the British Expeditionary Force left a bewildered French Army laying down its arms on French soil because French leaders gave the word—*cesser le combat*. How hard those orders were to bear, only a Frenchman can really understand. Had not conscription and total mobilisation made him part of what, between the two wars, he believed to be the finest army in Europe? If for the Frenchman the situation was stunning, for his English ally it was inexplicable. And for the Frenchman, temporarily, there was no solution. How the words of a French *agent de liaison* with the B.E.F., evacuated from Dunkirk, remain clearly in my mind. "If we killed a hundred Boches, there were a hundred more behind him, and a thousand behind that hundred waiting to fill the gaps." Was this the end of the *armée d'élite* which he and his ancestors had known, and the beginning of a new war where numerical superiority of men, tanks, guns and

planes was the sole decisive factor? Mass production, in fact, had come into its own on the battlefield.

In time the men of the French Army found the answer to the new war-problem, and French armies with new ideas and new equipment re-entered the fight. The heroic action at Bir Hakeim proved that these men of the *armée d'élite* were of the stuff that is indispensable to the making of a first-rate fighting force under the new conditions as under the old. Three years after the collapse, re-equipped with the finest American material, the French armies are back on the Italian fighting front, proudly conscious of deserving to rank on an equal footing with the Allies. The British Press has given unstinted praise to the men who captured Monte Maio, and to their commander, General Juin. The British soldier, too, has been quick to hold out a welcoming hand to his French ally. One who had been in the thick of the fighting in Italy wrote in a letter to his father, recently published

in the correspondence columns of *The Times*: "So far the outstanding feature is the performance of the French. All the glory of the French Army has been reborn and Frenchmen when attacking are truly formidable. They press on and on with great dash. The loss of valuable lives and the inevitable suffering are merely attributed by them to 'C'est la guerre.' They are an inspiration."

The sector which was allotted to the French troops, and which they had occupied some weeks ago without the enemy observing the troop movements, included the bridgehead on the lower bend of the Garigliano and stopped north of the confluence of the Liri and the Rapido. This terrain was the pivot of the attack, wrote a French war correspondent, and the Germans had neglected none of the precautions to make the heights which the French forces had to take as impregnable as was possible, with mine-fields, block-houses and barbed wire. Our success was due to the surprise, violence and speed of the assault.

Breaking completely with all

military tradition, orders were given that the assault would take place at 23.00 hours, and that it would not be a mere "coup de main" limited to the first enemy defence lines, but a general attack pushed to its utmost limits. In addition, there was to be no preliminary artillery preparation. When the firing started on a line from Cassino to the sea, the infantry was to attack. Finally, at the break of day, the air force was not to bring its support to the troops engaged, but merely to isolate the battlefield, to make it into a closed area by attacking the enemy in the rear. Fierce resistance was expected, and the battle was indeed very violent, but the first objectives had been reached by morning. Fuito was taken, the French were on the edge of Castelforte, and at the foot of Monte Maio.

On the evening of the second day, all along the Allied offensive front, notable successes had been obtained. The fierce resistance put up by the Germans had an important information value: it proved that the Gustav line was

the spine of the enemy defence system, and that once this line was crossed, victory would be well on the way.

And, in fact, the skilful capture of Monte Maio on the 15th May, and the six-mile advance in three days by the French troops smashing through the Gustav line, forced the Germans to retreat to their next line of defence—the Adolf Hitler. How this act of valour influenced the course of events was enthusiastically reported in the British Press—extracts from which are quoted in the next column. Subsequently, British and Indian troops of the 8th Army, battling through the Liri valley, and American troops of the 5th Army advancing near the coast had the way considerably eased for them. Next success of Juin's forces came at Esperia, at the foot of Monte d'Oro, while the British troops of the 8th Army a day later took Cassino. A letter on a captured German soldier which he had written to his wife said, "Our Free French and Moroccan opponents are remarkably good. My heart bleeds when I look at my poor battalion—after five days, 150 men lost." Pressing on through Ceperano, the French troops, operating as the hinge between the 5th and 8th Armies took part in the capture of Frosinone, last important junction in Highway Six before Rome.

When Rome fell on the 5th June, General Juin's forces had the satisfaction of knowing that their contribution had been great to the fall of the capital of the country which, on the 11th June, 1940, seven days after the evacuation from Dunkirk, had stabbed a lone and out-classed French army in the back.

M.I.M.K.

FROM THE BRITISH PRESS --

The French Corps, fighting with typical *furia francese*, has broken clean through the Gustav Line. . .

It is impossible to rate the French achievement too highly.

The progress of the French troops of the Fifth Army in the tangled hills between the Liri valley and the sea has been remarkable. These fine troops, well trained in mountain warfare, have already given proof of their quality during the winter. Their work in this offensive shows that the high opinion which has been formed of them was justified.

THE TIMES.

16:5:44.

The magnificent advance of the French on the left flank through high mountains has forced the Germans at the southern end of the valley to swing back very near to their second defence line—the Adolf Hitler.

NEWS CHRONICLE.

16:5:44.

The speed and power of the French attack has been the surprise of the offensive. On the map their sector is shown as consisting almost entirely of mountains and steep valleys.

DAILY MAIL.

16:5:44.

There is a buoyant confidence throughout the French forces and they say that they have only just begun.

DAILY TELEGRAPH.

16:5:44.

French troops in twin-thrusts have made the most sensational gains—"whirlwind" is one description from the front of their advance.

DAILY SKETCH.

16:5:44.

The spectacular French advance overran the defences of an entire division.

DAILY EXPRESS.

16:5:44.

GENERAL ALPHONSE JUIN

by Jerome Willis

Four years ago the Germans rendered homage to a French general and his troops for their brave fight against terrific odds.

That general was Alphonse Juin. On 17th May, 1940, Juin was retreating before a sea of German tanks. He was bringing back the remnants of his division into France before the avalanche. He halted before Lille, when everything to the left and right of him was going.

There he stuck and fought for several days. It was a hopeless fight. To the south the Germans were flowing through to the sea. To the north the confusion that ended in Dunkirk.

Juin, with his Algerian, Moroccan and hard-bitten French desert troops, fought on. He was surrounded. He had lost 80 per cent. of his effectives. In the end Juin was forced to surrender.

The German General Wagner, on orders from Von Reichenau, paid tribute to Juin's courage by allowing him and his men to carry their arms through the streets of Lille, while the German troops presented arms.

This was the only instance of German homage to French generals in the Battle of France.

A close friend of Juin who fought with him in North Africa told me this story. Juin he termed "*un vrai général français*."

Juin went to a German prison with the men left from his division. There he fretted until Weygand, through Pétain, claimed him.

Pétain negotiated his release with the Germans, and the day arrived when General Juin was taken straight from his German prison to the shores of North Africa. The Germans, no doubt, are regretting this to-day.

Juin knows North Africa well.

He was born there 55 years ago, and went to school in Constantine, in Algeria, before going to St. Cyr.

In the last war Juin's right hand was crippled by a bullet. To-day he cannot raise it much above his ribs. When he writes he holds the pen between his second and third fingers. And he always salutes with the left hand.

When Juin returned to North Africa after the last war as a 30-year-old colonel, Marshal Lyautey took him on his staff. He was one of the chiefs who directed the operations in the Riff war. Juin acquitted himself brilliantly.

When the Allied campaign in North Africa started, Juin was put at the head of the French troops. They numbered about 78,000. The Armistice had stripped them of any real armament. Many of them were ragged, their only arms were primitive.

With these they fought their way beside the British and American armies that stormed their way into Tunisia. Then they were re-equipped.

It is this army, with General Juin, which is now forging ahead against the Germans.

Juin is a popular general among his officers. Before battle he takes them into his confidence and discusses his strategy with them. He is approachable, always open to new ideas.

With his light, quick step, alert figure and unlined face he looks about forty. He smokes a pipe for preference and plays bridge.

As a soldier he has one idea at the moment: To fight his way back to release the remnants of his old division in France. These men are still prisoners of the Germans.

(By courtesy of the "Evening Standard.")

ITALY: THE FRENCH ADVANCE

In the mountainous terrain - on the right - French troops commanded by General Juin (talking to General Roosevelt below) have achieved their spectacular successes over the enemy and captured 5000 prisoners - a few of whom are seen in the centre picture.

