

Two YANK men rode into Paris behind the first tank of the Second French Armored Division, following the story of the city's liberation in their commandeered German jeep. Here is a picture of Paris and the reaction of Parisians to their first breath of free air in four years.

PARIS—The French GI has come home to the center of his world over a long and bloody route whose mileposts were marked by the names of the cities and villages written on the tanks in which he crashed through the German defenses between Arpajon and the Porte d'Orleans, the eastern gateway to Paris.

Riding with three others in a captured German Volkswagen which sported a new coat of GI paint, I entered the city behind the men in the first tanks of Gen. Jacques Leclerc's 2nd French Armored Division, after watching these veterans of the long march northward from Lake Chad to the Mediterranean cut a path through German armor and artillery that sought to keep them from their capital. The four of us saw the first tank of the division reach the first barricade inside Paris, and we saw the willing hands of eager Frenchmen and women tearing away the branches of trees and the paving-blocks with which they had built a barrier against the German armor that still roamed the streets of the city.

We followed the fighting from the first shell fired by the French liberators at a German barricade, and went on in with them to the center of the city. We watched the battle of the rooftops against the elusive collaborationist outfit called the Milice Française and saw the men of the French Forces of the Interior slowly but surely winning it. We saw some citizens of France take their revenge against other citizens of France who had betrayed their country.

Together with YANK photographer Sgt. Reg Kenny, I had spent a week wandering about the area just outside Paris, part of the time with an American armored division which was skirting the city to the south and part of the time alone, traveling in our Volkswagen from whose hood flew a home-made American flag given to us by a Frenchwoman in a little village which the two of us "liberated" by driving up and stopping in the market-place. Then just before the advance on Paris, we joined the French division a short distance east of Arpajon, taking along with us a French journalist named René Andre and a French lad named Gil.

Driving through the village of Longjumeau, we passed a long line of tanks and halftracks and jeeps, some of them manned by Spahis in their brick-red service caps. The Spahis scorn the use of the helmet, or "casque," except when the fighting is heaviest.

Near Le Petit Chilly, where there was a halt to clear the enemy out of some adjacent fields and barns, we saw a line of the newest American Sher-
(color and added)

THE FREE- ING OF PARIS

By Pvt.
HOWARD
KATZANDER
YANK Staff
Correspondent

THE FREEING OF PARIS



mans, manned by the French, speeding across the flat French countryside toward a clump of trees from which German artillery had been shelling the road. From a vantage point on top of a hill, we watched a brief but bitter duel which ended with the rounding up of a handful of prisoners. Almost at our feet lay the body of a German, and near us some villagers gathered excitedly to talk to the first French soldiers they had seen in four years.

There we met a French sergeant, a Parisian who had fought with Leclerc's small army in Africa. The sergeant, a Jew, had escaped from France in 1942 just after the Americans had invaded North Africa. He had been interned for seven months in Franco's Spain, along with several thousand other Europeans of every nationality who were seeking to cross through Spain to join in the struggle then going on in Africa. Sixty per cent of the members of the sergeant's company were men who had escaped the same way from France. They had got out of Spain's concentration camps in time to take part in the closing phases of the African campaign.

A little further up the road we came on a group of olive-skinned soldiers, speaking Spanish. They were part of a battalion of Spanish Republicans—men who had fought the troops of Hitler and Mussolini in the long war against Franco. After the fall of the Spanish Republic, they had crossed the Pyrenees into southern France, where they were interned for several months. To these men the battle for Paris was only a continuation of the battle they had fought while defending Madrid back in 1936. It was part of their battle to return to their homes in a democratic Spain.

Eight miles from Paris, between Le Petit Chilly and the village of Antony, there was another halt and, when it appeared that the column would not get going for some time, we decided to drive back to Longjumeau and look for a telephone in the hope that Andre, the journalist, might be able to call his sister-in-law in Paris.

Back in Longjumeau, Andre placed his call. Much to our surprise, it went through, and in a few moments he was talking to his sister-in-law. This was the day before the first Allied troops entered Paris.

We started back up the road, and found that the column was moving again. At one point the 88s opened up, and we dove for a ditch, plunging face

THE FREEING OF PARIS

down while the shells thundered to the earth on both sides of us, beating the breath from our lungs. After that, we went back about 100 yards and waited, but no more shells came. Cautiously, then, we returned to the car and started on down toward the village of Antony.

There we found the column stopped again on a hillside leading through the town. The road was jammed with vehicles parked three and four deep, facing downhill. On both sides of the vehicles, the people of Antony were welcoming their fighting men. They paid no heed to the small-arms fire from up ahead.

Kenny climbed to the top of a tank to see what was ahead. He told me when he'd jumped down again that there was a road block about 50 yards ahead of us, still manned by German troops, firing machineguns. We walked on down the hill, and just as we neared the front of the column, we heard the whine of approaching shells.

We ducked back and into a driveway, flanked by buildings. There was a shower of leaves and dust, and then we went into a garage at the end of the drive. Some French soldiers came into the garage,

bringing the limp body of a girl, which they placed on the cement floor and covered with canvas. One of the soldiers told me the girl had seen her brother for the first time in four years only a few minutes before the shell had struck her. The brother was a member of Leclerc's division and had had to move on with his outfit.

The German resistance at Antony was heavy; the enemy had strong points on both sides of the village. One of these, an old French prison at Fresnes, was especially strong and bitterly defended, and it delayed the entrance into Paris until early Friday morning.

We sat for a while in the garage. Gil, the young Frenchman, spoke some English, which he had learned in a French naval academy where he had been a student, and he told us that before meeting us he had joined a reconnaissance unit because it was heading for Paris.

"Will you do me one favor?" he asked. Kenny and I agreed, and he drew his identification card from his pocket. "I have here the address of my father," he said. "If anything happens to me, will you go and tell him?" We assured him that we were going to take him right to his father's home in Paris within a day at the most, and he seemed to feel better. Gil was armed with a British rifle, one of the many which had been dropped to the resistance forces in France by parachute. He wore GI fatigue trousers, a faded cotton khaki shirt, and a GI helmet, complete with net and camouflage stripes. He looked very rugged. He was only 18.

The road block at Antony had been partly cleared away and the column was advancing through the village again. There was still heavy fighting on both sides of the town. We dug out some rations and, after supper, drove up to the head of the column, which was cautiously prodding its way into the Paris suburbs. We learned then that Gen. Leclerc had decided against trying to take his division into Paris that night and would wait until



THE FREEING OF PARIS



A FRENCH JOURNALIST TALKING TO PARIS BY PHONE FROM THE TOWN OF LONGJUMEAU—BEFORE FRENCH TROOPS ENTERED THE CAPITAL.

morning. So we returned to Antony, where we dropped into a café before trying to catch some sleep.

The café was crowded and in an uproar. In one corner sat a French gendarme, playing a harmonica. A woman and a man were doing a peasant dance. Wine was flowing and everyone was full of good cheer. They brought us some excellent white wine and we joined the celebration. Then someone started singing the *Marseillaise*. The first chorus went fine. Gil, fresh out of school, managed to get through the second stanza. That finished, the crowds demanded the American anthem from Kenny and me. We tried to duck it, but it was no go. So we stood up and sang *The Star Spangled Banner* in our somewhat weak and unmelodious voices. Just the first verse. I learned one thing that night: Frenchmen don't know the second stanza of the *Marseillaise* any better than Americans know the second stanza of our national anthem. After that came *God Save the King* and the old French marching song, *Madelon*, and *Aupres de ma blonde*. Then the party broke up.

We went out to the courtyard of the café to sleep, spreading our blankets on the stones, but no sooner were we settled, than shells began crashing into the town. We learned the next night that they came from German 105s firing from near Porte de Versailles. Whatever they were, they made quite a racket, so we went back into the café, spread our blankets on the floor of the dining room and went to sleep.

The column was already moving when we got up at dawn next day. The tanks and halftracks were speeding by like fire horses on the way to the stable. We skipped breakfast and joined the procession. Our Volkswagen was beginning to feel the beating it had been taking, and it was all we could do to push past the rushing armor. Little by little, though, we crept toward the head of the column. The sun came up just as we passed through Porte d'Orleans, between lines of cheering, frenzied Parisians. The crowds pressed in so close that only a narrow lane was left for the convoy column. So we whipped our German jeep up on to the broad sidewalk and cruised ahead to the front of the column.

We went straight down the Avenue du Maine—yes, Paris has its Main Street, too—to the Boulevard Montparnasse. There Gen. Leclerc's car, which was at the head of the column, had been stopped by the crowd. The tanks went on and we stayed with them, heading down the Boulevard des Invalides toward the Tomb of Napoleon.

From there on progress was slow. As they caught sight of the American flag on our car, people crowded around and almost smothered us with kisses. At the Rue de Sevres we reached the first barricade.

THE FREEING OF PARIS



YANK MAGAZINE'S VOLKSWAGEN IS SHOWN CRASHING THROUGH THE FIRST STREET BARRIER IN PARIS BEHIND A TANK OF THE FRENCH ARMORED DIVISION.

The French are old hands at street fighting. They tore up the paving blocks during the French Revolution to build barricades in the streets, and it was no surprise to find them now using the same tactics against the Germans. They had all but immobilized the German forces in a few small areas of the city, and the FFI were in almost complete control before we moved in.

The first tank pulled up in front of the road block, a heavy one. People swarmed over the barricade, pulling and pushing aside the huge branches of trees and the heavy paving stones of which it was made. Women and children lent a hand. In a few moments the way was clear enough for the tank to get over. Kenny was already on the other side, waiting to catch a picture of the tank coming over the barrier. Behind the tank, I swung our Volkswagen into line and followed it through that and another barrier.

The column halted outside the Church of St. Francis Xavier for the first brush with German troops barricaded inside the Ecole Militaire. To the left, down the Rue d'Estrees and just beyond the church, was another German roadblock. The lead Sherman nudged forward until the muzzle of its gun was pointed at it. The tank's machinegun began chattering and then its big gun let loose.

The tank sent several more shells towards the barricade, but there was no return fire from the other side. Meanwhile, other vehicles had skirted the tank and gone on toward the Place Vauban, from where we could hear the thunder of tank artillery rising over the high soprano chatter of Schmeisser machine-pistols and our own .50 calibre machineguns.

The battle for the Ecole Militaire was one-sided and was over in about an hour. We then went over to an apartment building in the Place Vauban and climbed to the roof, from where we could see members of the FFI and the French troops exchanging fire with the Germans in

We wanted to get across the river to the Champs-Elysees and the Arc de Triomphe, but the bridges in that direction were blocked. So we made a long swing through the city, detouring around the fighting with the Milice, which was taking place at almost every main intersection, and finally approached the Arc de Triomphe through the Avenue Marshal Foch.

THE FREEING of PARIS

There was fighting going on all around us and on all the streets that stem out from the Arc de Triomphe like the spokes of a wheel. Just as we were parking our car, a member of the FFI came running up to ask if we were armed. Kenny produced his .45, which was our only weapon, from under the seat, and the FFI man asked us to go up to a nearby building in search of some Milice who had been peppering the crowd gathered below to the grounds of the Ecole Militaire, turning occasionally to answer the fire of a member of the Milice Française, whose men were hiding in nearby buildings. The resistance here was gradually overcome, and we went down to the street again. Farther down, at the foot of the Esplanade des Invalides, another German barrier blocked our approach to the Quai d'Orsay, which runs along the Seine.



A GROUP OF AMERICAN SOLDIERS WHO WERE WITH THE FRENCH ARMORED DIVISION WHICH ENTERED PARIS ARE GETTING THEIR SHARE OF THE LAVISH GALIC WELCOME. ESPECIALLY THE LAD LEANING OVER THE TAILBOARD.

In the kitchen of an apartment at the top of the building, we found a French Indo-Chinese and an Italian. There were empty bottles and wine glasses on the table. Their apartment opened out on a balcony from which the shots had been fired.

We gave them time to put on their coats, and the Indo-Chinese stuck several packages of English cigarettes*in his pockets. Then I took him by the arm and led him down the steps. On the way he offered me many English cigarettes and the finest French cognac to let him go.

In the street we checked their papers. The Indo-Chinese was listed in his passport as a chef, the Italian as a café proprietor. The Italian's passport showed that he had travelled extensively and quite freely about Europe during the German occupation. We turned them over to the FFI for investigation.

The Gestapo had made the area around the Arc de Triomphe their headquarters and German troops and Milice were posted through the buildings. The bodies of dead Germans lay a few yards from the Arc de Triomphe most of the afternoon. Around them moved the people of Paris, the young girls in their bright skirts and crisp white blouses, the older women and their men all in their best, with tanks and halftracks as a background and an obligato of the machine-pistols, rifles, and machineguns as music.

THE FREEING OF PARIS

The Milice must have been very poor shots. In all the fighting I saw that day, I never saw a bullet strike home, although there were some casualties, of course. Only once did I see one of the rooftop snipers. On that occasion we were driving down a street when a shout from the crowd on the sidewalk warned us to stop. Looking up, we saw a man leaning from a window with a grenade in his hand. We ducked.

During a lull in the excitement along the Avenue Marshal Foch, two women suddenly took off down the middle of the street after a third. They caught her after a few steps and, in a shrieking bedlam of accusations, stripped the clothes from her body. Some French soldiers intervened and the unlucky girl who, we gathered, had been too friendly with the Germans, found shelter against a tank, hidden by the soldiers. Her skirt had been blue, her blouse white, her sash red—an attempt at protective coloring, perhaps.

From the Arc de Triomphe we went down to the Place de la Concorde, where most of the French governmental buildings are centered. There had been bitter fighting all around that area, particularly at the Hotel Continental, where the German military governor of Paris had his headquarters. On the roof of the naval ministry building, French gendarmes were stripping down the swastikas from the flag-staffs. A gendarme with a feeling for the dramatic stood on the cornice high above the street, blowing a whistle in short, excited blasts to attract the attention of the people. Someone behind him handed him a Nazi banner. He held it up above his head, still blowing his whistle, and then threw it to the crowd below. There was a scramble for souvenirs and in a few minutes the flag was ripped to shreds. The lucky ones emerged from the mêlée with their bits and pieces held high above their heads.

In the midst of the throng was a peddler with a cart loaded with tiny American flags and pins of crossed American and French flags. Where he'd got them from in a city so thoroughly combed by the

Gestapo for four years was a mystery equalled only by the origin of the larger American, British, and French flags that decorated so many of the buildings.

That night and the next morning were comparatively quiet. We met Andre at his home about ten and had supper there. Paris was hungry, so we made a meal of C rations and wine—a fine combination. Next morning, we roamed about the city, visiting the Place de la Republique and the Bastille until it was time for the reception for General de Gaulle. Then we joined the throng pushing its way into the Champs-Elysees, but the crowd closed in on us before we could get near the general. It took us almost two hours to get back to our headquarters. Almost every main intersection was cut off by gun fights. They went on until dark and then the city grew quiet again.

That night we had dinner at the home of an Englishwoman whose mother and father were both interned by the Germans. She had been living in Paris under an assumed name and with fake papers. We ate late, and just as we were finishing our coffee, the German planes came. We were in a large, modern apartment building with three subcellars and we accompanied the Englishwoman down to the second cellar where the shelters were located.

The people in the shelters were stunned. They had just been liberated, and here they were being bombed. We warned them that they should expect raids and tried to cheer them by telling them how fortunate they were to have escaped so long. For

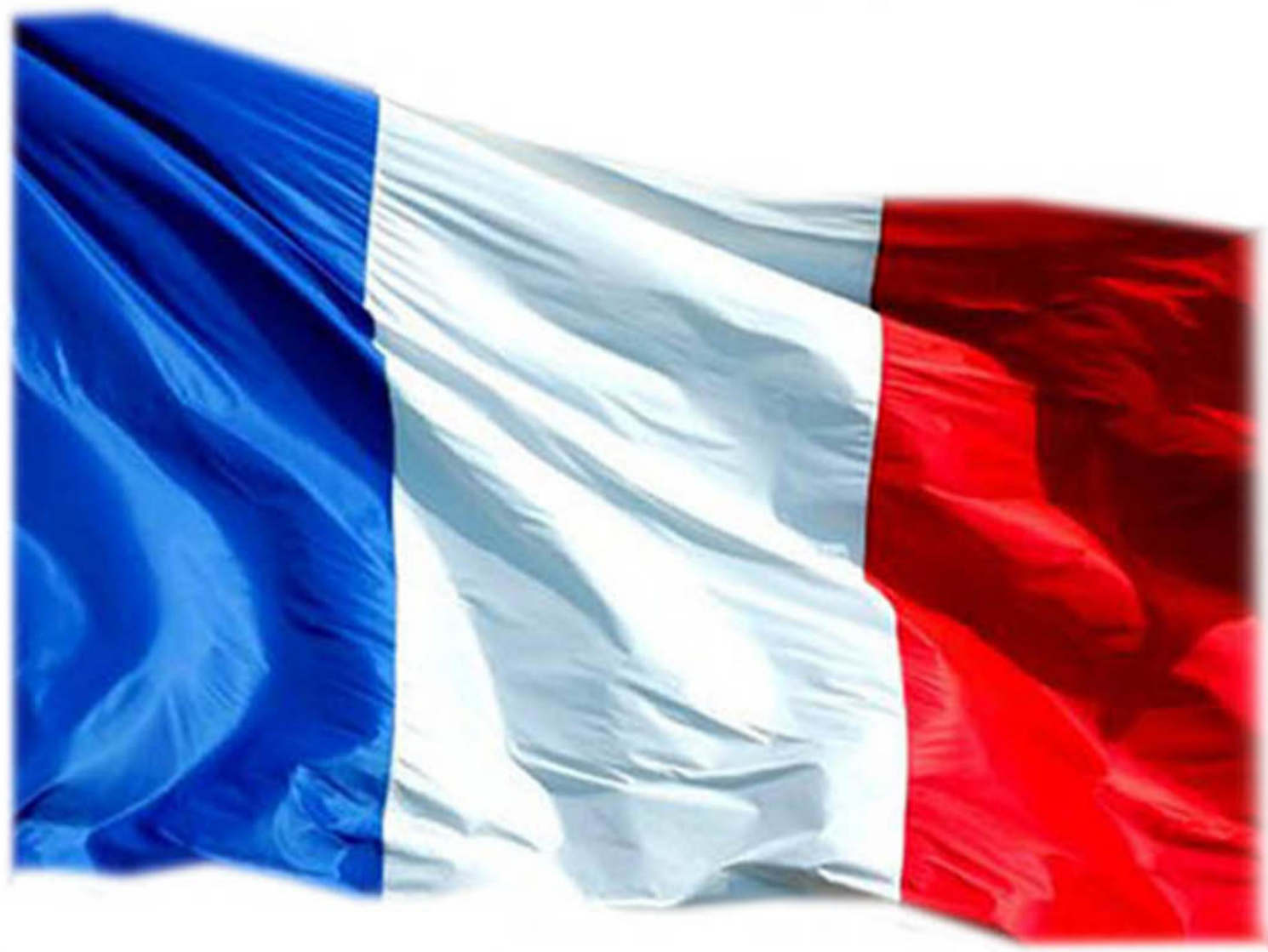


THE FREEING of PARIS

Paris really seemed untouched by the war, at least by comparison with London. The Parisians had had nothing like the London blitz or the flying bombs. They looked as though they'd been better fed, too—at least as though their diet had been better balanced than that of Londoners. They were far better dressed, but that may have been only because we were seeing them in their finest clothes.

After the bombs stopped falling, Kenny and I climbed to the roof to look at a fire in the distance. I lit a cigarette, which proved unwise, for immediately someone fired at us from the street. We went downstairs and drove toward the fire to see what was burning. The flames seemed perilously close by the Cathedral of Notre Dame, but actually the famous old church was untouched. The Germans had hit a huge wine cellar nearby. The FFI, who seem to be Joes of all work, were doing a creditable job of fighting the fire, even with leaky hoses, and a "bucket brigade" was passing cases of wine from hand to hand out of the burning building.

That Saturday-night raid seemed to have a sobering effect on Paris. The people awoke the next morning with the realization that, although their capital was liberated, there was still a war to be won. Every place we went Parisians approached us and asked where they could join Leclerc's forces. Whatever the French casualties were, it looked as though the division would leave Paris even stronger than when it started the campaign. For the French know that you don't win wars merely by liberating cities. You win them by killing the enemy. And they want to get on with the job.



YANK

THE ARMY



WEEKLY

SEPTEMBER 17, 1945

p. 5

OldMagazineArticles.com

(flag image added)