



FRENCH SOLDIERS ATTACK TOWARD CHÂTEAUFORT

Arpajon, he placed his main attack outside the range of the V Corps Artillery.⁸⁷

When Gerow received Leclerc's operations order on the morning of 24 August, he immediately warned General Barton, the 4th Division commander, of French encroachment but instructed Barton to continue on his mission "without regard to movements of French troops." After informing General Hodges, the army commander, of Leclerc's activity, Gerow drove to Rambouillet to see Leclerc and straighten out the matter. He discovered that Leclerc had gone forward from Rambouillet. Gerow followed until traffic congestion forced him to return to his command post.⁸⁸

Meanwhile, Leclerc had launched his attack toward Paris at dawn, 24 August, in a downpour of rain that later diminished to a drizzle. On the left, CCR made a diversionary attack to block off St. Cyr, and Langlade moved toward Châteaufort and Toussus-le-Noble. The armored columns quickly encountered mines and artillery fire, but after a four-hour fire fight at close range, the French knocked out three of eight tanks and penetrated the German defensive line. With only slight enemy interference, Langlade's combat command then swept toward the Pont de Sèvres, the greatest obstruction being the enthusiastic welcome of civilians, who swarmed about the combat vehicles, pressing flowers,

⁸⁷ See V Corps Arty Jnl, entry 0700, 23 Aug.

⁸⁸ Msg, Gerow to Barton, 0840, 24 Aug; *V Corps Operations in the ETO*, p. 203; Dansette, *Libération*

de Paris, p. 401; Msg, Hodges to Gerow, 1240, 24 Aug; Interv with Gerow, Helmick, and Hill, 15 Oct 54, OCMH Files.

kisses, and wine on their liberators and luring some from duty. "Sure we love you," the more conscientious soldiers cried, "but let us through." At Sèvres by evening, Langlade found the bridge still intact and unmined. He quickly sent several tanks across the Seine and established a bridgehead in the suburb immediately southwest of Paris. French troops had almost, but not quite, reached the capital.

Billotte's combat command in the main effort north from Arpajon had a much more difficult time. Encountering resistance at once, the troops had to turn to a dogged advance through a succession of German outposts, roadblocks, and well-positioned strongpoints supported by numerous antiaircraft guns sited for antitank fire. Narrow, crooked roads through a densely populated region of small stone villages further frustrated rapid progress. It took two full-scale assaults to capture Massy, and costly street fighting was necessary to take heavily defended Fresnes that evening. American tactical air support could not assist because of the rainy weather.⁸⁹

Whereas Langlade had moved fifteen miles, had tanks across the Seine, and was almost touching Paris, Billotte, after advancing thirteen bitter miles, was still five miles from the Porte d'Orléans (the closest point of entry into the city proper), seven miles from the Pantheon (his objective), and eight miles from Ile de la Cité, the center of the capital. The easy entrance the Allies had expected had not materialized.

To the American commanders following French progress on the midafternoon of 24 August, it was incredible that

Leclerc had not yet liberated Paris. Since they expected the Germans to withdraw, Leclerc's slow progress seemed like procrastination. That the French had failed to move immediately from Argentan and to reach their designated line of departure by noon, 23 August, seemed to substantiate this feeling. If Leclerc's inability to move more rapidly on 24 August was due to his unwillingness to "jeopardize French lives and property by the use of means necessary to speed the advance," that too was insubordination, for Leclerc had been instructed that restrictions on bombing and shelling Paris did not apply to the suburbs.⁹⁰

It seemed to Bradley, as he recalled later, that the French troops had "stumbled reluctantly through a Gallic wall as townsfolk along the line of march slowed the French advance with wine and celebration."⁹¹ Gerow substantiated the impression. It appeared to him that the resistance was slight and the attack halfhearted, that the French were fighting on a one-tank front and were not only unwilling to maneuver around obstacles but also were reluctant to fire into buildings.⁹²

Exasperated because Leclerc was disregarding "all orders to take more aggressive action and speed up his advance," General Gerow requested authority to send the 4th Division into Paris. Permission might be enough, he thought, to shame Leclerc into greater activity and increased effort. Agreeing

⁸⁹ Ltr, Gerow to OCMH, 22 Sep 54.

⁹¹ Bradley, *Soldier's Story*, p. 392.

⁹² Interv with Gerow, Helmick, and Hill, 15 Oct 54. General Gerow was also troubled by reports that French troops were stopping in towns along the way to celebrate with the inhabitants. Sylvan Diary, 23 Aug.

⁸⁰ See V Corps G-3 Jnl, entry 1520, 24 Aug.

that he could not wait for the French "to dance their way to Paris," Bradley exclaimed, "To hell with prestige, tell the 4th to slam on in and take the liberation."⁹³

Actually, Leclerc had all the incentive he could possibly need to enter Paris quickly. He was quite conscious of the prestige involved for French arms and aware of the personal distinction that awaited him as the hero of the liberation. He had heard conflicting and exaggerated reports of the German threats, reprisals, and destruction that only the entrance of regular troops could prevent. He knew that de Gaulle expected him to be in Paris on 24 August to resolve the internecine struggle for power in the capital—"Tomorrow," de Gaulle had written the previous evening, "Tomorrow will be decisive in the sense that we wish."⁹⁴

Four factors had retarded Leclerc: faulty attack dispositions; the reluctance of his troops to damage French property; the real problem posed by the enthusiastic welcome of the French population; and the German opposition, which had been stronger than anticipated.

The 4th Division staff understood that the American division was being ordered into Paris as a normal procedure of reinforcing a unit that was having unexpected difficulty with an enemy who was not withdrawing, but instead strengthening his defenses. A British intelligence agency reported no evidence that the

French were moving too slowly and declared: "... the French Armored Division is moving into Paris at high speed. Those enemy elements . . . in the way . . . have been very roughly handled indeed." Finally, French losses in the battle toward Paris did not indicate an absence of opposition; 71 killed, 225 wounded, 21 missing, and 35 tanks, 6 self-propelled guns, and 111 vehicles destroyed totaled rather heavy casualties for an armored division.⁹⁵

The American commanders, however, were less interested in reasons than in results. Ordered to liberate Paris and dissatisfied with Leclerc's progress, they committed the 4th U.S. Infantry Division without regard to preserving the glory of the initial entry for the French. "If von Choltitz was to deliver the city," General Bradley wrote, "we had a compact to fulfill."⁹⁶

Advised by Hodges that it was "imperative" for Allied troops to be in Paris without delay and that considerations of precedence in favor of the French no longer applied, Gerow ordered Leclerc: "Push your advance vigorously this afternoon and continue advance tonight." He notified General Barton that he was still to secure a Seine River bridgehead near Corbeil, but now he was to shift his main effort from east to north and use all the means at his disposal "to force a way into the city as rapidly as possible." When Barton said that he would start north from Villeneuve-le-Roi two hours

⁹³ Ltr, Gerow to OCMH, 22 Sep 54, and Interv with Gerow, Helmick, and Hill; Msg, Gerow to Leclerc, 24 Aug. Quote is from Bradley, *Soldier's Story*, p. 392.

⁹⁴ Ltr, Gen de Gaulle to M. Luizet, 2230, 23 Aug, quoted in Even, *La 2e D.B.*, p., 121; Dansette, *Libération de Paris*, pp. 329-30.

⁹⁵ CI 32 (4th Div); Resistance Unit, Liberation of Paris, p. 1252; 21 AGp Phantom Sitrep, U.S. Armies, 2400, 24 Aug; Even *La 2e D.B.*, p. 131. The losses are through 29 August, but most occurred on 24 August.

⁹⁶ Bradley, *Soldier's Story*, p. 392; Ltr, Bradley to OCMH, 7 Jan 55, OCMH Files.

after midnight, Gerow informed Leclerc that Barton would help the French and that Leclerc was to render assistance to Barton "in every way."⁹⁷

Leclerc decided to make one more effort that night. Although Langlade was practically inside the city at Sèvres and faced no opposition, Leclerc could get no word to him, for, as the French admitted, "liaison between the columns for all practical purposes no longer exists."⁹⁸ For that reason, Leclerc called on Billotte to dispatch a small detachment of tanks and half-tracks to infiltrate into the city. A small force under a Captain Dronne rolled along side roads and back streets, through the southern suburbs. Civilians pushed aside trees they had felled along the routes to hamper the Germans, repaved streets they had torn up to build barricades, and guided Dronne into the capital by way of the Porte de Gentilly (between the Porte d'Orléans and the Porte d'Italie). Following small streets, Dronne crossed the Seine by the Pont d'Austerlitz, drove along the quays of the right bank, and reached the Hôtel de Ville shortly before midnight, 24 August.⁹⁹

Although the Germans had resisted effectively on 24 August, their defenses melted away during the night as Choltitz ordered Aulock to withdraw behind the Seine.¹⁰⁰ General Barton, who had as-

sembled the 4th Division near Arpajon, selected the 12th Infantry—which was closest to Paris and had lost over 1,000 casualties while attached to the 30th Division at Mortain and needed a boost to morale—to lead the division into Paris on 25 August. Motorized, the regiment started to take the road through Athis-Mons and Villeneuve-le-Roi, but gunfire from the east bank of the Seine deflected the movement away from the river. Without encountering resistance, the troops, screened by the 102d Cavalry Group, reached Notre Dame cathedral before noon, 25 August, "the only check . . . being the enormous crowd of Parisians in the streets welcoming the troops." Units of the regiment occupied the railroad stations of Austerlitz, Lyon, and Vincennes, and reconnaissance elements pushed northeast and east to the outskirts of the city.¹⁰¹ (*Map 18*)

While American troops secured the eastern half of Paris, the French took the western part. Langlade's command advanced to the Arc de Triomphe, Billotte's to Place du Châtelet, the spearheads of both columns meeting later at Rond Point des Champs Élysées. Dio's troops, split into two task forces, moved to the Ecole Militaire and to the Palais Bourbon. Several sharp engagements took place with Germans entrenched in public buildings, some of them of great historic value—Luxembourg, Quai d'Orsay, Palais Bourbon, Hôtel des Invalides, and Ecole Militaire among

⁹⁷ Msg, Gerow to Leclerc, 24 Aug; Gerow Memo for Rcd, 24 Aug; Ltr, Gerow to Leclerc, 2345, 24 Aug; Interv by author with Gen Barton, 10 Jun 54, OCMH Files.

⁹⁸ 2d Fr Armd Div G-3, Rpt, Opns.

⁹⁹ Even, La 2e D.B., pp. 122-23; Dansette, *Libération de Paris*, pp. 334-39; 2d Fr Armd Div G-3 Rpt, Opns; Telecon, Choltitz and Speidel, 2225, 24 Aug, *AGp B KTB*.

¹⁰⁰ Telecons, Choltitz and Speidel, 2225, 24 Aug, and 1100, 25 Aug, *AGp B KTB*.

¹⁰¹ CI 32 (4th Div); *A Short History of the 38th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron (Mechanized)* (Prestice, Czechoslovakia, 1945), pp. 15-18; Johnson, *History of the Twelfth Infantry Regiment in World War II*, pp. 168-71; 4th Div AAR, Aug, and FO 24, 0800, 25 Aug (confirming oral orders, 2400, 24 Aug).



D. Holmes, Jr.

MAP 18

others. About two thousand Germans remained in the Bois de Boulogne.

To avoid a fanatic last-ditch struggle that might irreparably damage the city,

Choltitz' formal surrender was necessary. Though Nordling presented him with an ultimatum from Billotte, Choltitz refused to capitulate.



IN THE RUE DE RIVOLI, 25 August.

The end came after French tankers surrounded the Hôtel Meurice shortly after noon, set several German vehicles under the rue de Rivoli arcades on fire, and threw smoke grenades into the halls of the hotel. A young French officer suddenly burst into Choltitz' room and in his excitement shouted, "Do you speak German?" "Probably better than you," Choltitz replied coolly and allowed himself to be taken prisoner.¹⁰²

Leclerc had installed his command post in the Montparnasse railway station, but he himself went to the Prefecture of Police. Barton, who was in Paris and wanted to co-ordinate the dispositions of the divisions with Leclerc, located him there having lunch. Holding his napkin and appearing annoyed at being disturbed, Leclerc came outside to talk with

Barton. Without inviting him to lunch, Leclerc suggested that Barton go to the Montparnasse station. Barton, who was hungry as well as irritated by Leclerc's attitude, finally said, "I'm not in Paris because I wanted to be here but because I was ordered to be here." Leclerc shrugged his shoulders. "We're both soldiers," he said. Barton then drove to the Gare Montparnasse, where he found General Gerow already taking charge of the enormous responsibility of Paris.¹⁰³

Instead of taking Choltitz to Montparnasse, which would have been normal procedure, his French captors took him to the Prefecture of Police, where Leclerc was waiting. There Choltitz signed a formal act of capitulation in the presence of Leclerc and the commander of the Paris FFI, who together as equals

¹⁰² Choltitz, *Soldat Unter Soldaten*, p. 264.

¹⁰³ Interv with Barton, 10 Jun 54

accepted Choltitz' surrender—not as representatives of the Supreme Commander, Allied Expeditionary Force, but in the name of the Provisional Government of France.¹⁰⁴ Copies of the document were quickly reproduced and circulated by special teams of French and German officers to scattered enemy groups still in the city. All surrendered (including a large force of 700 men with several tanks in the Luxembourg gardens) except the troops in the Bois de Boulogne.¹⁰⁵ The V Corps took about 10,000 prisoners in the city and received a "staggering amount of information . . . from FFI sources." Choltitz made certain that the Allies understood that "he could have destroyed bridges and public buildings but despite pressure from above would not give [the] order" to do so.¹⁰⁶

Choltitz insisted that only the arrival of military forces had "saved Paris from going up in smoke." He stated that neither mines nor booby traps had been placed in the city. He said that he had concluded long before his capitulation that it "was hopeless" to defend the city; and he had thus "taken no great steps to do so." He asserted that the war among the French political factions had "surpassed all his expectations." He emphasized that "he was damn glad to get rid of the job of policing both Paris and the Frenchmen, both of which he apparently detests."¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ The surrender document is reproduced in *V Corps Operations in the ETO*, p. 204.

¹⁰⁵ Even, La 2e D.B., pp. 126–29; Dansette, *Libération de Paris*, pp. 349–73; Telecons, Emmerich and Tempelhoff, 2225, 25 Aug, and Feyerband and Speidel, 0810, 26 Aug, *AGP B KTB*.

¹⁰⁶ FUSA Rpt, 2055, 26 Aug; 4th Div G-2 Per Rpt, 2000, 26 Aug; FUSA AAR, Aug.

¹⁰⁷ Sylvan Diary, 29 Aug.

As for the internecine struggle for political power inside the capital, the de Gaullists had proved more astute and better disciplined than their opponents. Taking advantage of the insurrection on 19 August, they had quickly seized the seat of government and taken the reins of political control.

The Aftermath

Paris was liberated, but one more scene was required—the appearance of General de Gaulle. He arrived unannounced in the city on the afternoon of 25 August to an enthusiastic reception by deliriously cheering Parisians. The demonstration persuaded him to make an official entry to strengthen an uneasy political unity that prevailed and to display his personal power. He therefore requested Leclerc to furnish part of the 2d French Armored Division for a parade from the Etoile to the Place de la Concorde; and through General Koenig, who was also in the capital as the de Gaullist-appointed military governor, de Gaulle invited Gerow and his staff to participate, together with one American officer and twenty men and a like number of British.¹⁰⁸

Gerow was hardly ready to comply. Although the situation was "quiet in main Paris area except some sniping," groups of isolated Germans southwest of Paris near Meudon and Clamart, in the eastern part near Vincennes and Montreuil, and north of Paris near Montmorency and le Bourget claimed exemption from Choltitz' surrender terms. In addition to these forces, another group still held the Bois de Bou-

¹⁰⁸ V Corps G-3 Jnl and File, 26 Aug.



GENERAL VON CHOLTITZ shortly after his capitulation (above); high-ranking German prisoners in the Hôtel Majestic (below).



logne. Furthermore, Paris posed serious problems of control, both with regard to the civilian population and to the troops, particularly because of the danger that the liberation hysteria might spread to the soldiers. The thought of a German air attack on a city with unenforced blackout rules and inadequate anti-aircraft defenses hardly added to Gerow's peace of mind. The Germans north and east of the city were capable of counterattacking. Feeling that the city was still not properly secure, anticipating trouble if ceremonial formations were held, and wishing the troops combat-ready for any emergency, Gerow ordered Leclerc to maintain contact and pursue the Germans north of the capital.¹⁰⁹

Leclerc replied that he could do so only with part of his forces, for he was furnishing troops for de Gaulle's official entry. Acknowledging Gerow as his military chief, Leclerc explained that de Gaulle was the head of the French state.¹¹⁰ Profoundly disturbed because the de Gaulle-Leclerc chain of command ignored the Allied command structure, Gerow wrote Leclerc a sharp note:

You are operating under my direct command and will not accept orders from any other source. I understand you have been directed by General de Gaulle to parade your troops this afternoon at 1400 hours. You will disregard those orders and continue on the present mission assigned you of clearing up all resistance in Paris and environs within your zone of action.

Your command will not participate in

the parade this afternoon or at any other time except on orders signed by me personally.

To keep the record straight, Gerow informed Hodges that he had "directed General Leclerc to disregard those orders [of de Gaulle] and carry out his assigned mission of clearing the Paris area."¹¹¹

Some members of Leclerc's staff were purportedly "furious at being diverted from operations but say Le Clerq has been given orders and [there is] nothing they can do about [it]." They were sure that the parade would "get the French Division so tangled up that they will be useless for an emergency operation for at least 12 hours if not more."¹¹²

Torn by conflicting loyalties, Leclerc appealed to de Gaulle for a decision. To an American present, de Gaulle supposedly said, "I have given you LeClerc; surely I can have him back for a moment, can't I?"¹¹³

Although Barton suggested that Gerow might cut off Leclerc's gasoline, supplies, and money, Gerow felt that it would have been unwise, as he later wrote, "to attempt to stop the parade by the use of U.S. troops, so the only action I took was to direct that all U.S. troops be taken off the streets and held in readiness to put down any disturbance should one occur."¹¹⁴

Gerow's concern was not farfetched. When Hitler learned that Allied troops were entering the French capital, he asked whether Paris was burning,

¹⁰⁹ V Corps G-2 Msg, 1303, 26 Aug; Gerow to Hodges, 0010, 26 Aug; V Corps AAR, Aug; Ltr, Gerow to OCMH, 22 Sep 54, and Ltr and attachments, Maj Gen Harold W. Blakeley to author, 30 Sep 55, extracts in OCMH Files; Dansette, *Libération de Paris*, p. 420.

¹¹⁰ 2d Fr Armd Div Msg, 26 Aug.

¹¹¹ Gerow to Leclerc, Orders, 26 Aug; Msg, Gerow to Hodges, 1302, 26 Aug.

¹¹² Msg, 26 Aug, probably from V Corps liaison officer with the French division.

¹¹³ Quoted in Dansette, *Libération de Paris*, p. 403; see Ltr, Gerow to OCMH, 22 Sep 54.

¹¹⁴ Ltr, Gerow to OCMH, 22 Sep 54; Interv with Barton, 10 Jun 54.

"*Brennt Paris?*" Answered in the negative, Hitler ordered long-range artillery, V-weapons, and air to destroy the city. Supposedly contrary to Model's wish, Speidel and Choltitz later claimed to have hampered the execution of this order.¹¹⁵

Scattered shooting and some disorder accompanied de Gaulle's triumphal entry of 26 August. Whether German soldiers and sympathizers, overzealous FFI members, or careless French troops were responsible was unknown, but Gerow curtly ordered Leclerc to "stop indiscriminate firing now occurring on streets of Paris." Ten minutes later, Leclerc ordered all individual arms taken from his enlisted men and placed under strict guard. Shortly thereafter, in an unrelated act, 2,600 Germans came out of the Bois de Boulogne with their hands up. They might have instead shelled the city during the parade. Frightened by what might have happened, de Gaulle and Koenig later expressed regrets for having insisted on a parade and agreed to cooperate in the future with the American command.¹¹⁶

Meanwhile, part of Leclerc's division had, in compliance with Gerow's instructions, pushed toward Aubervilliers and St. Denis on 26 August, and two days later, after a three-hour battle with elements of the 348th Division (recently arrived from the Pas-de-Calais), the French took le Bourget and the airfield. Some French units seized Montmorency



GENERAL DE GAULLE. At his left is General Koenig, behind them, General Leclerc.

on 29 August, while others cleared the loop of the Seine west of Paris from Versailles to Gennevilliers and took into custody isolated enemy groups that had refused to surrender to the FFI.¹¹⁷

At the same time, the 4th Division had established Seine River bridgeheads near Corbeil on 25 August, had cleared the eastern part of Paris, and after assembling in the Bois de Vincennes, began on the afternoon of 27 August to advance toward the northeast. Two days later the troops were far beyond the outermost limits of Paris.¹¹⁸

All the corps objectives, in fact, had been reached "well outside Paris limits" by 27 August.¹¹⁹ To continue its at-

¹¹⁵ MS # C-017 (Speidel); Choltitz, *Soldat Unter Soldaten*, p. 256.

¹¹⁶ Gerow to Leclerc, 1710, 26 Aug; Leclerc to his subordinate officers, 1720, 26 Aug; V Corps AAR, Aug; Msg, Vissering to SHAEF, 26 Aug, SGS SHAEF File 092, French Relations; Pogue, *Supreme Command*, p. 242.

¹¹⁷ Even, La 2e D.B., pp. 129-30; Gerow to Leclerc, 0750, 27 Aug, 1020, 28 Aug; V Corps Dirs, 29 Aug.

¹¹⁸ 4th Div AAR, Aug; CI 32 (4th Div).

¹¹⁹ V Corps AAR, Aug.