

higher authority by taking a plane to the First Army headquarters. There he learned that General Bradley was conferring with General Eisenhower on the question of Paris. Leclerc decided to await the outcome of the conference.

### *Eisenhower's Decision*

Reflecting on Choltitz' behavior after the truce arrangement, Resistance members were somewhat puzzled. They began to interpret his amenity as a special kind of weakness, a weakness for the physical beauty as well as the historical and cultural importance of Paris. They figured that Choltitz was appalled by the destruction he had the power to unleash, and they wondered whether he worried that fate had apparently selected him to be known in history as the man who had ravaged the capital.<sup>50</sup> How else could one explain his feigned ignorance of the Resistance, his calling the insurrection only acts of violence committed by terrorists who had infiltrated into the city and who were attempting to incite a peaceful population to revolt, his pretense that he had no authority over French civilians (despite his plenary power from Hitler to administer Paris), his acceptance of Nordling's explanation that the Resistance members were not terrorists or ruffians but patriotic Frenchmen, and his willingness to agree to a truce? Either that or he felt that the German cause was hopeless. His off-hand but perhaps studied remark to Nordling that he could of course not be expected to surrender to irregular troops

such as the FFI seemed a clear enough indication that to save his honor and protect his family in Germany he had at least to make a pretense of fighting before capitulating to superior forces. He apparently would surrender to regular Allied troops after a show of arms.

To convince the Allied command of the need for regular forces in Paris at once while Choltitz vacillated between desire and duty, Resistance emissaries, official and unofficial, departed the city to seek Allied commanders.<sup>51</sup> Nordling's brother Rolf and several others in a small group reached the Allied lines on 23 August and made their way up the echelons to the Third Army headquarters. Patton, who was disappointed in being denied the liberation of Paris, was contemptuous of their efforts. Deciding that "they simply wanted to get a suspension of hostilities in order to save Paris, and probably save the Germans," he "sent them to General Bradley, who"—he imagined incorrectly—"arrested them."<sup>52</sup>

Nordling's group reached Bradley's command post too late to affect the course of events, but another envoy, Resistance Major Gaullois (pseudonym of a M. Cocteau), the chief of staff of the Paris FFI commander, had left Paris on 20 August and had reached Bradley's headquarters on the morning of 22 August.<sup>53</sup> He may have had some influence, for he spoke at some length with Brig. Gen. A. Franklin Kibler, the 12th Army Group G-3, who displayed interest in the information that Choltitz would surrender his entire garrison as soon as

<sup>50</sup> See, for example, V Corps G-2 Jnl, entries 2100, 20 Aug, and 2100, 1 Aug.

<sup>52</sup> Patton, *War as I Knew It*, pp. 115, 117.

<sup>53</sup> Bradley, *Soldier's Story*, pp. 390-91, is in error because of an incorrect time sequence.

<sup>50</sup> This is Dansette's thesis (see *Libération de Paris*, pp. 138-39, 293-94); see also Resistance Unit, Liberation of Paris.

Allied troops took his headquarters—the Hôtel Meurice on the rue de Rivoli.<sup>54</sup>

It so happened that General Eisenhower had on the evening of 21 August (after his conference with de Gaulle) begun to reconsider his decision to delay the liberation of Paris. In this connection he requested Bradley to meet with him on the morning of 22 August. De Gaulle's letter, delivered by Juin, had had its effect, and Eisenhower had jotted down that he would probably "be compelled to go into Paris."<sup>55</sup> The Combined Chiefs of Staff had informed him on 16 August that they had no objection to de Gaulle's entry into the capital, certainly strong evidence of Allied intentions to recognize his government, and it was becoming increasingly clear that the majority of French people approved of de Gaulle and thereby reinforced his claim to legality.<sup>56</sup> Koenig's deputy, a British officer who reflected the British point of view of favoring (apparently more so than the United States) de Gaulle's political aspirations, also urged the immediate liberation of the capital.<sup>57</sup> Pressed on all sides, General Eisenhower set forth his dilemma in a letter to General Marshall:

Because of the additional supply commitment incurred in the occupation of Paris, it would be desirable, from that viewpoint, to defer the capture of the city until the important matter of destroying the remaining enemy forces up to include the Pas de Calais area. I do not believe this is pos-

sible. If the enemy tries to hold Paris with any real strength he would be a constant menace to our flank. If he largely concedes the place, it falls into our hands whether we like it or not.<sup>58</sup>

The dilemma had another aspect. If liberating Paris only fulfilled a political need, then the Supreme Commander's position of conducting operations on military grounds alone would not allow him in good conscience to change his mind—unless he turned Leclerc and the French loose to liberate the capital as they wished. If he could not approve such a politically motivated diversion of part of his forces, or if he felt he could not afford to lose control of the French division, he had to have a military basis for an Allied liberation. Yet how could he initiate action that might damage the city? The only solution seemed to be that if the Germans were ready to quit the city without giving battle, the Allies ought to enter—for the prestige involved, to maintain order in the capital, to satisfy French requests, and also to secure the important Seine crossing sites there.

Much indicated to General Eisenhower that the Germans were ready to abandon Paris. De Gaulle thought that a few cannon shots would disperse the Germans. Bradley had told Eisenhower that he, Bradley, agreed with his G-2, who thought "we can and must walk in." Bradley had even suggested, facetiously, that the large number of civilian newspapermen accredited to his headquarters comprised a force strong enough to take the city "any time you want to," and that

<sup>54</sup> Resistance Unit, *Liberation of Paris*, p. 1253.

<sup>55</sup> Handwritten note by General Eisenhower on Ltr. de Gaulle to Eisenhower, 21 Aug, SGS SHAEF File 092, French Relations; see Pogue, *Supreme Command*, p. 240, and V Corps G-3 Memo, 21 Aug.

<sup>56</sup> Pogue, *Supreme Command*, pp. 239, 241.

<sup>57</sup> Resistance Unit, *Liberation of Paris*, p. 1250; Pogue, *Supreme Command*, p. 231.

<sup>58</sup> Ltr. Eisenhower to Marshall, CPA-90235, 22 Aug, SHAEF G-3 File Ops A 322.011/1, Comd and Contl of U.S./Br Forces.

if they did, they would "spare us a lot of trouble."<sup>59</sup>

In the midst of conflicting rumors that Choltitz was ready to capitulate and that the Germans were ready to destroy the city with a secret weapon, the Resistance envoys appeared. They brought a great deal of plausible, though incorrect, information. They assured the Allied command that the FFI controlled most of the city and all the bridges, that the bulk of the Germans had already departed, that enemy troops deployed on the western outskirts were only small detachments manning a few roadblocks. They argued that the Germans had agreed to the armistice because the German forces were so feeble they needed the truce in order to evacuate the city without fighting their way through the streets. The envoys stated both that the armistice expired at noon, 23 August, and that neither side respected the agreement. Since the FFI had few supplies and little ammunition and was holding the city on bluff and nerve, the Resistance leaders feared that the Germans were gathering strength to regain control of the city and bring destruction to it upon the termination of the truce. To avoid bloodshed, it was essential that Allied soldiers enter the city promptly at noon, 23 August.<sup>60</sup>

Unaware that the reports were not en-

<sup>59</sup> Ltr, de Gaulle to Eisenhower, 21 Aug (and handwritten note); Bradley, *Soldier's Story*, p. 386; Pogue, *Supreme Command*, p. 240; Dansette, *Libération de Paris*, p. 316.

<sup>60</sup> Memo dictated by Bradley for Hodges, 22 Aug, transmitted by Hodges to Haislip and Gerow, XV Corps CofS Jnl and File. The memo is also Incl 1 of V Corps FO 21, 23 Aug, and a photostatic copy appears in *V Corps Operations in the ETO*, p. 200. This document contains all the information then known by the Allied command on the situation in Paris.

tirely accurate, the Allied command reached the conclusion that if the Allies moved into Paris promptly, before guerrilla warfare was resumed, Choltitz would withdraw, and thus the destruction of the bridges and historic monuments that would ensue if he had to fight either the Resistance or the Allies would be avoided.<sup>61</sup> Since the available "information indicated that no great battle would take place," General Eisenhower changed his mind and decided to send reinforcement to the FFI in order to repay that military organization, as he later said, for "their great assistance," which had been "of inestimable value in the campaign."<sup>62</sup> Reinforcement, a legitimate military action, thus, in Eisenhower's mind, transferred the liberation of Paris from the political to the military realm and made it acceptable.

To make certain that Choltitz understood his role in the liberation of Paris, an intelligence officer of the "Economic Branch" of the U.S. Service was dispatched to confirm with Choltitz the "arrangement" that was to save the city from damage. The Allies expected Choltitz to evacuate Paris at the same time that Allied troops entered, "provided that he did not become too much involved in fighting the French uprising." The time selected for the simultaneous departure and entry was the supposed time the truce expired—noon, 23 August.<sup>63</sup>

<sup>61</sup> Ltr, Bradley to OCMH, 7 Jan 55, OCMH Files; Interv by Pogue with Gen Bradley, 6 Nov 46, Washington, D.C., Pogue Files.

<sup>62</sup> Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe*, p. 296.

<sup>63</sup> Ltr, Bradley to OCMH, 7 Jan 55; FUSA Memo, Info [to be] Elicited from the German Commandant of Paris, 31 Aug, FUSA G-2 Jnl and File; Ltr, Pogue to author, 27 Sep 54, OCMH Files; Dansette, *Libération de Paris*, pp. 138-39.



*ALLIED AIRLIFT, planned on 22 August, began delivery of food and fuel to the people of Paris on 27 August.*

Since a civil affairs commitment was an inescapable corollary of the decision to liberate Paris, General Eisenhower ordered 23,000 tons of food and 3,000 tons of coal dispatched to the city immediately. General Bradley requested SHAEF to prepare to send 3,000 tons of these supplies by air. The British also made plans to fulfill their part of the responsibility.<sup>64</sup>

The decision made, Bradley flew to Hodges' First Army headquarters late in the afternoon of 22 August to get the

action started. Finding Leclerc awaiting him at the airstrip with an account of his differences with Gerow over Guillebon's movement to Paris, Bradley informed Leclerc that General Eisenhower had just decided to send the French armored division to liberate Paris at once. Off the hook of disobedience, Leclerc hastened to his command post, where his joyous shout to the division G-3, "Gribius, . . . mouvement immédiat sur Paris!" announced that a four-year dream was finally about to come true.<sup>65</sup>

<sup>64</sup> *V Corps Operations in the ETO*, p. 198; Bradley, *Soldier's Story*, p. 387; 21 AGP/5541/2/Q (Plans). Development of British Advance Base in Area Havre-Rouen-Dieppe, 22 Aug, 12th AGP File, Mil Obj, II.

<sup>65</sup> [Lt.-Col. Repiton-Préneuf et al.], *La 2e DB, Général Leclerc, Combattants et Combats en France* (Paris: Aux Editions Arts et Métiers Graphiques, 1945), p. 45.

*On to Paris*

"For the honor of first entry," General Eisenhower later wrote, "General Bradley selected General Leclerc's French 2d Division." And General Bradley explained, "Any number of American divisions could more easily have spearheaded our march into Paris. But to help the French recapture their pride after four years of occupation, I chose a French force with the tricolor on their Shermans." Yet the fact was that SHAEF was already committed to this decision. Neither Eisenhower nor Bradley could do anything else except violate a promise, an intention neither contemplated. Perhaps the presence and availability of the French division made it such an obvious choice for the assignment that the prior agreement was unimportant, possibly forgotten. Both American commanders wanted to do the right thing. Even General Hodges had independently decided about a week earlier that if he received the mission to liberate Paris he would include French troops among the liberation force.<sup>66</sup>

Suddenly General Bradley was at the First Army headquarters on the afternoon of 22 August with "momentous news that demanded instantaneous action." Since 20 August, he told General Hodges, Paris had been under the control of the FFI, which had seized the principal buildings of the city and made a temporary armistice with the Germans that expired at noon, 23 August. Higher headquarters had decided that

Paris could no longer be bypassed. The entry of military forces was necessary at once to prevent possible bloodshed among the civilian population. What troops could Hodges dispatch without delay?

General Hodges said that V Corps had completed its assignment at Argentan and was ready for a new job. From Argentan the corps could move quickly to the French capital with Leclerc's 2d French Armored and Barton's 4th Infantry Divisions. It would be fair for General Gerow, the corps commander, to have the task of liberating Paris because he and Collins had been the two American D-Day commanders and Collins had had the honor of taking Cherbourg.

Bradley accepted Hodges' recommendation, and the V Corps was alerted for immediate movement to the east. Then frantic phone calls were put in to locate General Gerow. He was found at the 12th Army Group headquarters and instructed to report to the army command post with key members of his staff. Late that afternoon, as Gerow and his principal assistants gathered in the army war room, a scene that had taken place a week earlier was repeated. Maps were hastily assembled, movement orders hurriedly written, march routes and tables determined, and careful instructions prepared for the French, "who have a casual manner of doing almost exactly what they please, regardless of orders."<sup>67</sup>

General Gerow learned that General Eisenhower had decided to send troops

<sup>66</sup> Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe*, p. 296; Bradley, *Soldier's Story*, p. 391; Ltr, Eisenhower to Marshall, CPA-90235, 22 Aug. SHAEF G-3 File Ops A 322.011/1, Comd and Contl of U.S./Br Forces; Sylvan Diary, 22 Aug.

<sup>67</sup> Sylvan Diary, 22 Aug; see Telecons, Gen Kean and Brig Gen Henry J. Matchett, 1720 and 1730, 22 Aug; V Corps G-3 Jnl, entries 1743 and 1745, 22 Aug; *V Corps Operations in the ETO*, pp. 197ff.

to Paris to "take over from the Resistance Group, reinforce them, and act in such mobile reserve as . . . may be needed." The Allies were to enter Paris as soon as possible after noon of 23 August. The Supreme Commander had emphasized that "no advance must be made into Paris until the expiration of the Armistice and that Paris was to be entered only in case the degree of the fighting was such as could be overcome by light forces." In other words, General Eisenhower did not "want a severe fight in Paris at this time," nor did he "want any bombing or artillery fire on the city if it can possibly be avoided."<sup>68</sup>

A truly Allied force was to liberate the city: the 2d French Armored Division, the 4th U.S. Infantry Division, an American cavalry reconnaissance group, a 12th Army Group technical intelligence unit, and a contingent of British troops. The French division, accompanied by American cavalry and British troops, all displaying their national flags, was to enter the city while the 4th Division seized Seine River crossings south of Paris and constituted a reserve for the French. Leclerc was to have the honor of liberating Paris, but he was to do so within the framework of the Allied command and under direct American control.<sup>69</sup>

The leader of the expedition, General Gerow, had been characterized by General Eisenhower as having demonstrated "all the qualities of vigor, determination, reliability, and skill that we are looking

<sup>68</sup> Memo dictated by Bradley to Hodges, 22 Aug, XV Corps CofS Jnl and File.

<sup>69</sup> See Montgomery, *Normandy to the Baltic*, p. 176; Notes of Mtg, 0900, 23 Aug, XV Corps CofS Jnl and File; VII Corps Opns Memo 73, 23 Aug (confirming oral orders, 22 Aug).

for."<sup>70</sup> Further, he had had the experience needed for a mission fraught with political implications. Serving with the War Plans Division of the War Department from 1936 to 1939, he was chief of that division during the critical year of 1941. He was thus no stranger to situations involving the interrelationship of military strategy and national policy. Yet he had not been informed of the political considerations involved, and his instructions to liberate Paris were of a military nature.<sup>71</sup>

Acting in advance on General Hodges' orders to be issued on 23 August to "force your way into the city this afternoon," Gerow telephoned Leclerc on the evening of 22 August and told him to start marching immediately. The 38th Cavalry Squadron was to accompany Leclerc to "display the [American] flag upon entering Paris."<sup>72</sup> According to the formal corps order issued later, the only information available was that the Germans were withdrawing from Paris in accordance with the terms of the armistice. The rumor that the Germans had mined the sewers and subways was important only in spurring the Allies to occupy the city in order to prevent damage. No serious opposition was expected. If the troops did, however, encounter strong resistance, they were to assume the defensive.<sup>73</sup>

<sup>70</sup> Eisenhower to Marshall, FWD-12428, 22 Jul, Pogue Files.

<sup>71</sup> Interv, author with Gen Gerow, Maj Gen Charles G. Helmick (formerly V Corps Arty Comdr), and Brig Gen John G. Hill (formerly V Corps G-3), 15 Oct 54, OCMH Files; Ltr, Gerow to OCMH, 22 Sep 54, OCMH Files.

<sup>72</sup> Gerow Memo for Rcd, 25 Aug.

<sup>73</sup> V Corps Ltr of Insts, Gerow to Leclerc, 22 Aug, and Dir, Gerow to 102d Cav Recon Gp (Mecz), 23 Aug; Ltr, Gerow to OCMH, 22 Sep 54, OCMH Files.

Despite the anticipated absence of opposition, Gerow commanded a large force that was to move on two routes—Sées, Mortagne, Château-en-Thymerais, Maintenon, Rambouillet, Versailles; and Alençon, Nogent-le-Rotrou, Chartres, Limours, Palaiseau. The northern column—the bulk of the French division, the attached American troops, a U.S. engineer group (controlling three combat battalions, a treadway bridge company, a light equipment platoon, and a water supply platoon), the V Corps Artillery (with four firing battalions and an observation battalion), in that order of march—had an estimated time length of fourteen hours and twenty-five minutes. The southern column—a French combat command, the bulk of the American cavalry, the V Corps headquarters, the 4th Division (reinforced by two tank destroyer battalions, an antiaircraft battalion, two tank battalions), in that order—had a time length of twenty-two hours and forty minutes. For some unexplained reason the British force, despite General Eisenhower's explicit desire for British participation, failed to appear. To make certain that the French troops, which led both columns, respected the truce in the capital, Gerow ordered that no troops were to cross the Versailles-Palaiseau line before noon, 23 August.<sup>74</sup> (*Map XIII*)

Although Gerow had ordered Leclerc to start to Paris immediately on the evening of 22 August, the division did not commence its march until the morning of 23 August. By evening of 23 August the head of the northern column was

several miles beyond Rambouillet on the road to Versailles; the southern column had reached Limours. At both points, the French met opposition.

Within Paris, before receiving Hitler's order to leave the city to the Allies only as a "field of ruins," Choltitz had had no intention of doing anything but his duty. His handling of the insurrection was sufficient evidence of that. When Aulock, who commanded the perimeter defenses west of the city, requested permission to withdraw on 22 August because he felt he could not stop an Allied advance, Choltitz said no. But after receiving Hitler's order and realizing that he was expected to die among the ruins, Choltitz began to reconsider. About the same time he learned that the 348th Division, which was moving from northern France to strengthen the Paris defenses, was instead to be committed north of the capital along the lower Seine.<sup>75</sup> At that moment he became rather cynical. "Ever since our enemies have refused to listen to and obey our Fuehrer," he supposedly remarked at dinner one evening, "the whole war has gone badly."<sup>76</sup>

One of Choltitz' first reactions to Hitler's "field of ruins" order was to phone Model and protest that the German high command was out of tune with reality. The city could not be defended. Paris was in revolt. The French held important administrative buildings. German forces were inadequate to the task of preserving order. Coal was short. The rations available would last the

<sup>74</sup> V Corps Ltr of Instrs, Gerow to Leclerc, 22 Aug. and FO 21, 23 Aug.

<sup>75</sup> Choltitz, *Soldat unter Soldaten*, p. 259; MS # B-728 (Emmerich).

<sup>76</sup> Quoted in Dansette, *Liberation de Paris*, pp. 293-94.

troops only two more days.<sup>77</sup> But Choltitz was unable to secure a satisfactory alternative from Model, so he phoned Speidel, Model's chief of staff at *Army Group B*. After sarcastically thanking Speidel for the lovely order from Hitler, Choltitz said that he had complied by placing three tons of explosive in the cathedral of Notre Dame, two tons in the Invalides, and one in the Palais Bourbon (the Chamber of Deputies), that he was ready to level the Arc de Triomphe to clear a field of fire, that he was prepared to destroy the Opéra and the Madeleine, and that he was planning to dynamite the Tour Eiffel and use it as a wire entanglement to block the Seine. Incidentally, he advised Speidel, he found it impossible to destroy the seventy-odd bridges.<sup>78</sup>

Speidel, who had received Hitler's order from OKW and had realized that the destruction of the bridges meant destroying monuments and residential quarters, later claimed that he had not transmitted the order forward and that Choltitz had received it directly from *OB WEST*. Yet, since Gestapo agents were monitoring Speidel's telephone to prove his complicity in the July 20th plot, Speidel later recalled that he urged Choltitz—as diplomatically and as obliquely as he knew how—not to destroy the French capital.<sup>79</sup>

Choltitz had no intention of destroying Paris. Whether he was motivated

<sup>77</sup> Telecon, Choltitz and Model, 1200, 23 Aug, *AGp B KTB*. His mention of the shortage of rations contrasts with his later statement that he had Eckelmann distribute army food to the French populace. Choltitz, *Soldat unter Soldaten*, p. 245.

<sup>78</sup> Telecon, Choltitz and Speidel, 2215, 23 Aug, *AGp B KTB*; Choltitz, *Soldat unter Soldaten*, pp. 256-57.

<sup>79</sup> MS # C-017 (Speidel).

by a generous desire to spare human life and a great cultural center, or simply by his lack of technical means to do so—both of which he later claimed—the fact was that representatives of the neutral powers in Paris were also exerting pressure on him to evacuate Paris in order to avoid a battle there.<sup>80</sup> Yet Choltitz refused to depart. Whether he was playing a double game or not, his willingness to avoid fighting inside Paris did not change his determination to defend Paris outside the city limits—a defense that eventually included orders to demolish the Seine River bridges, three rejections of Allied ultimatums to surrender, and refusal of an Allied offer to provide an opportunity for him to withdraw.<sup>81</sup>

The field fortifications on the western and southern approaches to the city formed a solid perimeter that was more effective than Aulock judged. Obviously, 20,000 troops dispersed over a large area could not hold back the Allies for long, but they could make a strong defense. Artillery, tanks, and antiaircraft guns sited for antitank fire supported strongpoints at Trappes, Guyancourt, Châteaufort, Saclay, Massy, Wissous, and Villeneuve-le-Roi. The roads to Versailles were well blocked, and

<sup>80</sup> Marcelle Adler-Bresse, "Von Choltitz, a-t-il Changé d'Avis?" (a review of Choltitz' *Brennt Paris? Tatsachenbericht des letzten deutschen Befehlshabers in Paris* (Mannheim: Weltbucherei, 1950) and his *Soldat unter Soldaten*) and notice of an article in the East Berlin newspaper *Tagliche Rundschau*, December 28, 1954, both in *Revue d'Histoire de la Deuxième Guerre Mondiale*, No. 19 (July, 1955), p. 116; Dietrich von Choltitz, "Pourquoi en 1944, je n'ai pas détruit Paris," *Le Figaro*, October 4, 1949; Telecon, Choltitz and Speidel, 2225, 24 Aug, *AGp B KTB*.

<sup>81</sup> Telecon, Choltitz and Speidel, 1100, 25 Aug, *AGp B KTB*; Eckelmann, Rpt to OKW.

forward outposts at Marcoussis and Montlhéry as well as strong combat outposts at Palaiseau and Longjumeau covered the approaches to the positions guarding the highway north from Arpajon.<sup>82</sup>

On the Allied side, there was practically no information on the actual situation inside Paris and on its approaches. When General Leclerc arrived in Rambouillet with a small detachment around noon 23 August, well ahead of his division, he learned for the first time from his reconnaissance elements and from French civilians that there appeared to be a solid defense line along the western and southwestern suburbs of Paris, a line reinforced by tanks, antitank weapons, and mines. This meant that a major effort by the whole division would be necessary to open the way into the city proper.

Eager though he was to come to the rescue of the FFI in Paris, which he thought might have by this time liberated the interior of the city, General Leclerc had to postpone his attack. He had to wait until the following morning because the main body of his division could not reach the Rambouillet area before evening of the 23d.<sup>83</sup>

### *The Liberation*

Leclerc's plan of attack departed from Gerow's instructions. Two combat commands, Colonel de Langlade's and

<sup>82</sup> MS # B-741 (Ziegelmann), including Sketch # 2b; Eckelmann, Rpt to OKW; Even, *La 2e D.B.*, p. 118; *V Corps Operations in the ETO*, pp. 200-202; CI 32 (4th Div); 2d French Armored Division G-3 Report, Operations, is a basic source for the military activity of the division.

<sup>83</sup> Ltr, Leclerc to de Gaulle, 1330, 23 Aug, reproduced in Even, *La 2e D.B.*, facing p. 118.

Colonel Dio's, in that order, were advancing toward Rambouillet on the northern route; Col. Pierre Billotte's combat command was on the south. Instead of making the main effort from the west through Rambouillet and Versailles, Leclerc decided to bring his major weight to bear on Paris from the south, from Arpajon. He directed Billotte to go from Limours to Arpajon, turn north there, and attack toward the southern part of Paris. He switched Dio to the southern route in direct support of Billotte. CCR was to stage a diversionary attack toward St. Cyr, while Langlade, skirting Versailles on the south, was to push through Chevreuse and Villacoublay to Sèvres. When Leclerc showed his operations order to General de Gaulle, who was at Rambouillet that evening, de Gaulle said merely that Leclerc was lucky to have the opportunity of liberating Paris, and thereby, by inference at least, approved.<sup>84</sup>

Not so the Americans, who years later could not understand Leclerc's reasons for disregarding the V Corps instructions. Was Leclerc reluctant to attack through Versailles because he did not want to endanger that national monument? Was he concerned about securing the right flank protection afforded by the Seine River and the destroyed bridges between Corbeil and Paris? Though he had cautioned his troops to avoid the large traffic arteries, was he attracted nevertheless to the wide Orléans-Paris highway, which passes through Arpajon? Did he want to display his independence and his resent-

<sup>84</sup> 2d Fr Armd Div Ops Order, 1800 [23 Aug]; see Even, *La 2e D.B.*, pp. 117-18, and Dansette, *Liberation de Paris*, pp. 329, 336.



GENERAL LECLERC AT RAMBOUILLET, ON THE ROAD TO PARIS

ment of American control in a matter that seemed to him to be strictly French? Perhaps he had not even seen Gerow's instructions.<sup>85</sup>

Actually, the military basis of Leclerc's decision was his estimate that the opposition along the Arpajon-Paris axis seemed "less robust" than in the Rambouillet-Versailles area.<sup>86</sup> Guillebon's detachment on the previous day had encountered German outposts near Arpajon.

These were weak when compared to the positions in the Rambouillet area, where American troops of the XX Corps had swept aside the outposts and laid bare the main line of resistance. By deciding to make his main effort at Arpajon, Leclerc inadvertently selected as his point of intended penetration the place where the German defense was in greatest depth.

There were other unfortunate results. By directing his southern column to go from Limours to Arpajon, he impinged on the sector of the 4th Division. By switching his principal effort from Versailles to the southern axis through

<sup>85</sup> Interv with Gerow, Helmick, and Hill, 15 Oct 54, OCMH Files; see Even, *La 2e D.B.*, p. 118.

<sup>86</sup> 2d Fr Armd Div G-2 Rpt, Opns; Even, *La 2e D.B.*, p. 118.