Collier's

AUGUST 14, 1944: p. 11

FRANCE, TODAY AND TOMORROW

BY FRANK GERVASI

RADIOED FROM FRANC

"One afternoon recently in Grenoble I saw six young men shot by Maquis. All had borne arms against France. Each was tied to steel stakes. Three died well"

The apathetic France of 1939 is dead. Collier's correspondent, journeying across southern France, found high hope of unity and determination to punish all collaborationists. France, he feels, is reborn

LONG before her liberation, France planned for unity and for revenge on her Jacques Doriots and her Pierre Lavals and her Marshal Pétains. You recall the feeble efforts made to arouse France to decisive military action in the fall of 1939 with the cry "We must be done with it"—meaning be done with Germany. The French used the same phrase after the Allied invasion, but it was aimed at all who betrayed France and it meant that they expected the tumbrels to rumble through the streets of Paris and Vichy, Marseille, Toulon and Bordeaux and every village and town and hamlet n all France. The French hatred for the Boches is no greater or less than their detestation for all collaborationists.

France has entered the revenge phase. What is happening and what will happen here will undoubtedly shock the sensibilities of foreigners. Executions are unlovely things and they are understandable only to those mentally and emotionally able to exchange places with the executioners.

One afternoon recently in Grenoble in a cold rain I saw six young men tied to rusty steel stakes and shot by a platoon of Maquis. All had borne arms against France. They were tried in the morning by a civilian judge and two military assistant judges in a shabby palace of justice in the town. They were defended by the town's two best lawyers and they were duly found guilty of treason under the laws of the French Republic.

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"The leaders of the FFI assured me they want justice to be fairly administered. They will avoid grudge killing." Here, Maquis patrol a town in South France

At the appointed hour they were walked out to the spot where, a few weeks before, twenty-three Maquis were shot by the servile French Militia at Nazi orders. Three died well, which is to say they died at once. Three did not. They sagged there on their stakes, and one even stood erect shaking his head from side to side as if uncomprehending. He and two others received final pistol bullets in their heads.

There was a crowd of 5,000 that had come to the spectacle, and there was laughter and shouting and pushing and noise. There were men, women, children, and women with infants in their arms. It might have been a crowd going to a bullfight in Madrid or a prize fight or a lynching. They booed when the condemned walked rather bravely to their places. They cheered when at last the volley came from the Maquis' rifles with one dull ugly sound.

The leaders of the Forces Françaises de L'Interieur (FFI) assured me they want justice to be fairly administered and that they will avoid grudge killing. They know the names of the guilty. They are trying hard to avoid grudge killings in that portion of France between the Rhone and the Swiss and Italian frontiers.

Some collaborationists sincerely believed in the Nazi idea. Others became the servants of the Nazis. They made money out of the contracts for the construction of barracks, airfields and defenses for the Germans and by selling food and raw materials and manufactured goods to the enemy. The best anthracite and bauxite produced in France went to the Huns. The most convinced of the pro-Nazis was the infamous Jacques Doriot, former Communist mayor of Saint-Denis. He turned Fascist and organized the Parti Populaire Français.

The gunmen of the PPF were particularly strong in Marseille. They helped the Germans in defense of the port and gave France its first touch of civil war. They fired on their fellow Frenchmen from the trees, windows and rooftops of La Cannebière in the bitter six days of fighting in Marseille.

It is impossible to gauge the exact extent of French callaboration with the Nazis, but many resistance leaders say that it was largely confined to bourgeoisie doctors, lawyers, engineers, businessmen and merchants who thought more of their social and economic positions than they did of the fate of France. This animosity against a section of the upper middle class was surprising in a country, which, until June, 1940, was a great stronghold of that category of people.

If proof were needed after the examples of Italy and Yugoslavia that the Nazi-Fascist ideals find no wide response in the hearts of men, the utter failure of the Germans to sell the great body of Frenchmen their totalitarian bill of goods provides eloquent proof. And if there is any doubt left in anyone's mind about the esteem in which Charles de Gaulle is held by Frenchmen, the doubters should come to France, at least to southern France, where Ivan Kolleff, a Frenchman by

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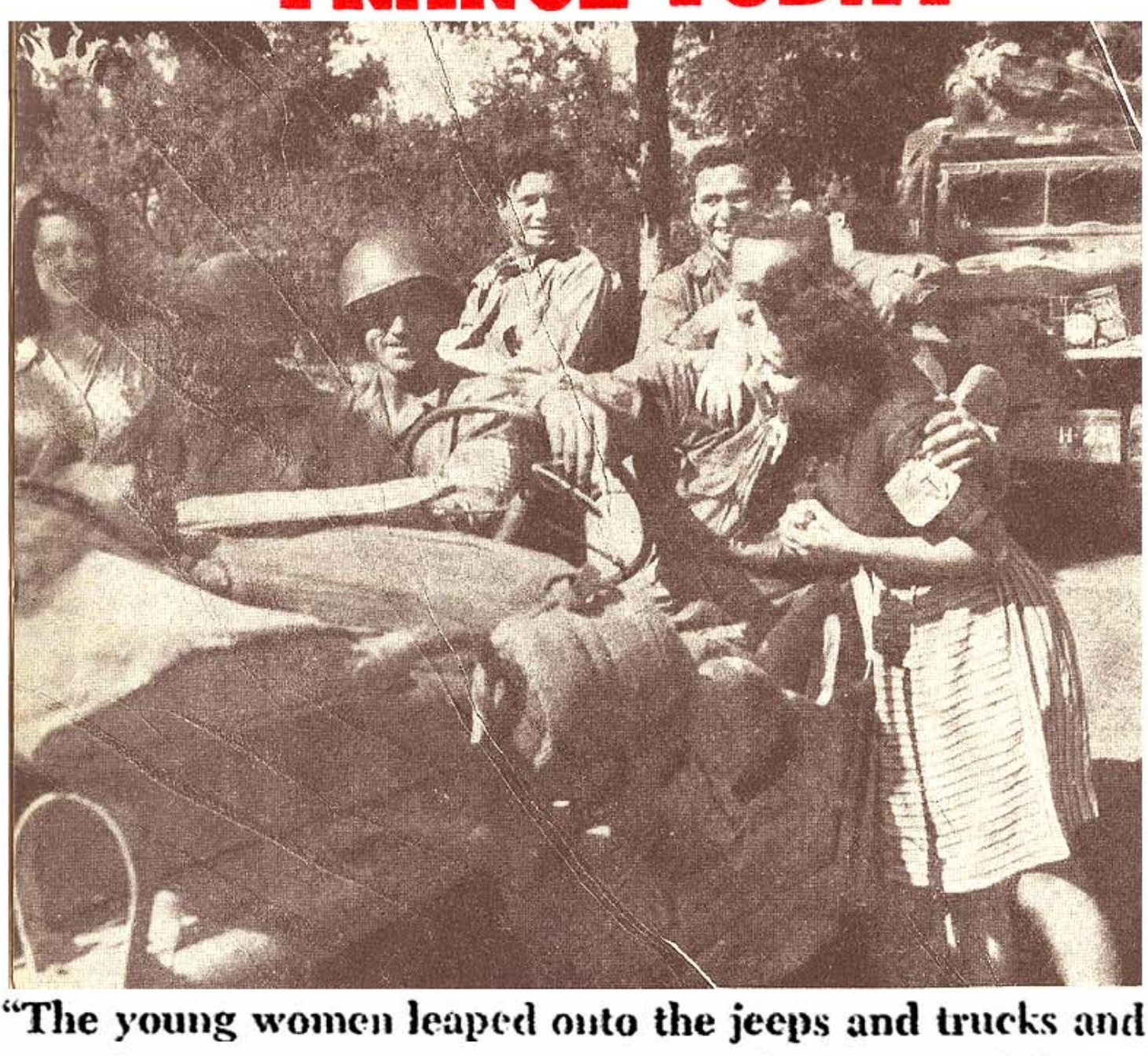

"The young women leaped onto the jeeps and trucks and kissed our troops, who soon learned that you don't kiss a Frenchwoman on the mouth—not unless serious developments are contemplated—but on the cheek"

naturalization and FFI Maquis leader in the town of La Roquebrussanne, told me, "We need De Gaulle as we need the air we breathe."

Some of De Gaulle's more enthusiastic supporters have spoken of him as a Joan of Arc in pants. Well, he is—at least to many people of Provence and Dauphiné and Savoie, who are, for the most part, people hard to convince.

From their resistance movement, the French have attained new unity. The FFI leaders believe it forecasts new political solidarity after the war and after the cleaning out of collaborationists. The manner in which the FFI itself came into existence required the submersion of all political parties and ambitions in favor of two immediate objectives: the liberation of France and the purging of the nation's political and economic system.

By the beginning of 1944, all political barriers between the various elements of resistance were well broken down, and the National Committee of Liberation, with De Gaulle at its head, was the recognized political power in the land, and American and British weapons, medicines and ammunition were being supplied on regular schedules to the FFI and their fighting Maquis. The Germans knew about it, of course. They couldn't stop it and they couldn't stop the night terror attacks on their convoys, so they tried to cow southern France with atrocities.

The Truth of Atrocity Stories

I have seen no actual atrocities, although I have talked with numerous persons who claimed they saw Maquis and men, women and children mutilated by the Germans. One of the leaders of the underground in a Villard mountain village in the Vercors region told me she saw many mutilations, and in one case the cheeks of a man were slit by his captors so that they could wrench the gold bridgework out of his mouth more easily. Much of what I and other correspondents in this theater have heard at third and fourth hand about atrocities may be fantasy, hysteria or delusion born of hatred against the Huns. Some may be true.

I saw photographs of a score of bodies taken from a common grave near Grenoble where they had allegedly been buried alive in an old bomb crater. This incident wasn't fictitious, and the pattern of bestiality it illustrates fits too closely with what I have seen of German handiwork in Italy, to ignore the possibility that the Boches are all that I was told they were, as a boy.

Abbé Pitavy, a village padre, told the story of what happened the day that Vassieux and La Chapelle, two Maquis strong points in the mountains, were bombed by the Nazis from 1 P.M. until 6:35 P.M., when the village clock stopped—especially between the time the clock stopped and the time four American correspondents arrived at La Chapelle. The padre is a man of medium height, sturdy at sixty, with a round head and gray hair cut short *en brosse*.

"The planes returned that night," the padre said. "And from eight-thirty until nine-fifteen they dropped incendiary bombs. I stayed just outside the village on a hill above and behind the town, and watched. There were no Maquis here then—I give you my word—and no civilians, for they had fled with the first attack. From the fifteenth to the twenty-fifth of July there was intermittent bombing, and we had a few casualties, and then on the afternoon of the twenty-fifth the Germans came.

"I waited for them on the road and met them and told them there was no one in the village. In spite of the bombs and the incendiaries, the village was quite whole, for, as you see, it is built well of stone, and the walls resisted the flames. The German commander ordered his troops to sack the village. They tore open the doors and took the wine and linen and the silver plate and the furniture.

"I knew how they had come into the plateau. They had been dropped by glider and parachute, and some had come with their light fieldpieces up the roads in their vehicles. It was obvious they were here for a major operation and they were in no mood to argue or to be deterred in any way."

The padre didn't know at the moment that Vassieux had been attacked and razed in a battle between the Maquis and German airborne troops and that one of the two columns which converged on La Chapelle was the one coming from Vassieux. The commander of the column which first entered La Chapelle ordered its citizens to be summoned. They came down out of the hills. The padre went on:

"They divided us into three groups, one of men from forty to sixty, another of men from seventeen to forty, and a third of women and children. It was growing late now. It might have been nearly eight. They allowed the older men and women and children to pick up what belongings were

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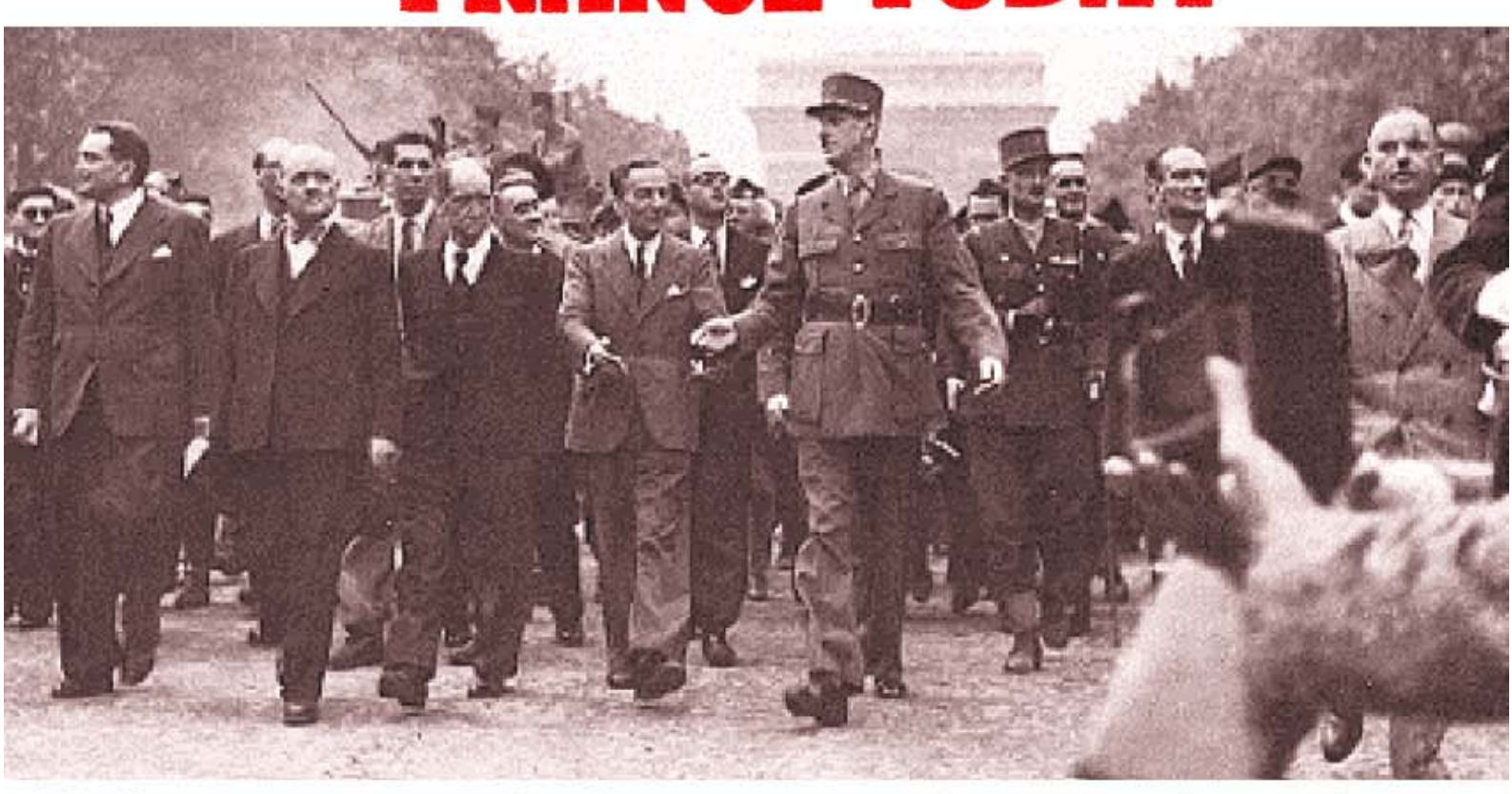

"If there is any doubt left in anyone's mind about the esteem in which De Gaulle is held by Frenchmen, he should come to France. Some of his supporters have spoken of him as a Joan of Arc in pants"

left in what houses remained whole or were not completely burned out. They guarded the younger men closely. Four of these were permitted to join the group of older men and women and children. Their children happened to run to them and embrace them, and I suppose the officer was moved to pity. He knew what fate was in store for them. We did not. We thought they were to be sent to Germany to work. . . .

"The young men—sixteen Frenchmen, two Italians and one Pole—were taken to a wall that forms one side of the boxlike house of Madame Lucia Albert, the side where she keeps her geraniums in pots arranged in a row along the foot of the wall, for it is moist there and at the same time quite sunny in the afternoon. And *(Continued on page 42)* at ten o'clock that night, while the padre and his people started to climb the hills to the forest of Lente, they heard several bursts from machine pistols and then the explosions of grenades which the Boches threw among the bodies when they fell face forward or slumped onto Madame Albert's geranium pots. . . . The next day I buried them."

Behind him, Madame Rome, the wife of the harness maker who was among those killed, stepped forward to tell me that the Germans had killed her sister-in-law. Her crime was to have refused to give the Gestapo the name of the local Maqui chief.

In all, 137 civilians were killed by the Huns in Vassieux. Before the Boches left La Chapelle, they went from house to house and tossed incendiary grenades into each one.

All that stopped, as you know, when General Alexander M. Patch and his Seventh Army landed in southern France and hammered out a sword-shaped salient to the Swiss border.

The relationship between our troops and the people of France is fine. It is very much better than the relationship between our G.I. Joes and the people of Italy. There, it was rare that the Yank referred to an Italian as an Italian. It was always "Wop," "Dago," "Guinea" or "Eyetie." It is the exception here rather than the rule to hear the word "Frog."

Our troops love the French and they love France. They find the people clean and honest and willing to help themselves. The veterans of the Thirty-sixth, Third and Forty-fifth Divisions act, for the first time in my knowledge, like troops who know why they fight and where they are going. It wasn't always so. Once they were cantankerous and grumbly and wanted only to "get it over with and go home." Now they seem to want to stay a while and see it through.

There may be many reasons for this new attitude. One reason certainly is that they are winning troops, and the best possible morale builder in war is a succession of victories. Much of the responsibility for this metamorphosis, however, lies with the French themselves.

The other day a couple of other correspondents and I gave five men a lift along a lonely road in the Alps. They were bareheaded, clean-shaven, tough and dressed in baggy threadbare pants and shirts. All carried packs and cord-bound cheap fiber suitcases. We took them about five miles on their way and where the road turned off into a wood, they asked us to halt. A great valley swept away downhill to our left and in the distance, perhaps fifteen miles off, we could see a small town.

"We're going there," one of them said, pointing toward the distant cluster of red-tiled roofs around a church spire. They shouldered their packs and picked up their bags and started off downhill, turning once to wave to us. They were all former French army officers. They were going to report to

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a French army post after having fought for nearly four years as Maquis.

We sat in our vehicle and watched them go down the green hillside into the valley. We watched for a long time, thinking how different the French were now from the apathetic French we had known in 1939. They had been reluctant to take a train to war; now they walked many miles to enlist in the new army of new France.

This new France has affected the spirits of our soldiers. You hear numbers of them say what they've never said before: "I'm coming back here after the war and have a real look at this place—maybe with my wife." Some have said they'd like to remain and settle down, and others are planning honeymoons in southern France.

"Just Like Home Almost"

When we entered the gray, prim, clean city of Grenoble, one G.I. remarked that here at last was civilization—"just like home almost" —and his last suspicion that he might be wrong was swept aside with the discovery that in the cafés there was excellent beer, pale and somewhat bodyless, but beer and at ten cents a glass.

Grenoble loved our soldiers. The people threw flowers and fruit and vegetables at and into the passing vehicles. The young women, clean and good-looking, leaped onto the jeeps and trucks and kissed our troops, who soon learned that you don't kiss a Frenchwoman on the mouth—not unless very serious developments are contemplated—but on both cheeks.

On Sunday the people were at cafés where they sat at tables and sipped *apéritifs* or ate ice cream made with real milk. There were "Hellos" and smiles wherever we turned. Small children came out to take our hands, or merely to touch us. Many stood squarely before us with uplifted faces to be kissed, and it took a little while before we knew what they wanted.

The grownups with whom we exchanged a few words from time to time courteously informed us how well we spoke French, just to make us feel at ease.

It had been like that all the way up from the beaches. In every town, village and hamlet, people waited for us on the sidewalks or leaned out of windows or stood in the public squares to wave at us and shout and make the victory sign.

Anything we have wanted or have had to requisition in order to push the war forward they have allowed us to have without hesitancy and without quibbling over indemnities. I made a long reconnaissance tour with an aviation engineer, a colonel seeking sites for airfields for our fighters and bombers and transports. He obtained the rights to use vineyards, farmlands and pastures without the slightest trouble. At one place one of our officers made out requisition papers, and the Frenchman concerned with the deal said they weren't necessary. The land we wanted, he said, belonged to the state and had been leased to four or five farmers to be turned into wheat, but they hadn't planted the wheat. "So there is no expense to anyone," he said. "The land belongs to the French Ministry of Air, and now there is no French Ministry of Air, so take it."

This particular strip turned out to be longer than we had expected. It cut across a slab of melon patch which another farmer owned. He asked simply whether we could wait until the melons ripened, which should be in another week or so. The colonel told him that we couldn't wait, and the farmer sighed and said it didn't matter about the melons, as they wouldn't have been very good this year anyhow. For a half-hour he gave us the meteorological history of that portion of France and invited us to come to his house to have some of his wine, which we did.

The nearest thing to self-interest in the campaign so far was the case of the hotel-keeper in badly bombed and shelled Saint-Raphaël, who had asked the reporters to be sure to mention in their dispatches the fact

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that they had been at his bar for drinks and had interviewed certain Maqui notables there. I've forgotten his name.

French helpfulness on the road is becoming a legend among American troops. Unlike the Italians they know where their roads go, and their directions are explicit and accurate. In this lightning campaign you have no idea how valuable accurate road knowledge is. A wrong turn might easily lead headlong into a pocket of fleeing, trapped and vindictive Germans. The French have never given us a wrong steer. They have replaced the road signs which they had taken down or slewed around to confuse the Germans. They have repainted those which they had blacked out for the same purpose. Often a Frenchman will ride with you for miles to show you the right road to a certain town or crossroads—and walk back.

One night, riding down a road on the east bank of the Durance River, the same Air Corps colonel and I came to a road block in the darkness. Five yards more and we would have gone over the edge and down into a gorge. But the cries of children warned us, and when we stopped we heard the *clop-clop* of their wooden shoes. They came and shook hands gaily and were kissed and given "shooving goom." We conquered the hearts of the kids in Italy with biscotti and caramelle, and in France with chewing gum. The colonel studied his maps, looking for a way out of our predicament when an eight-year-old boy in the group grabbed me by the arm and showed me a by-pass around a blown bridge.

Then, as if reciting a lesson, he said, "And you will, monsieur, find another blown bridge along the route. My brother is a Maqui and he made it jump last night, but if you will examine the bushes to the right of the road, you will find your way around the gap very well and you will reach your destination safely." His information was accurate.

An old lady in a small town just north of Toulon probably expressed it best when she said, "For us it is a dream to see you." But it is more than relief at seeing us in place of the Boche. It is something like what drove a 17-year-old boy to risk his life to climb the spire of a Renaissance Gothic church in Voiron to tie a small American flag onto the steeple lightning rod five hundred feet in the air.

More nearly the motive for French love of America and Americans is the knowledge that we didn't desert them. Everywhere I've heard only expressions of gratitude—for President Roosevelt's encouraging speeches, for the cheering pamphlets scattered by Allied planes, for arms and weapons and food and medicines dropped by parachutes during the four dark years. Above all, Frenchmen are grateful for the uniforms and the guns and the trucks and the supplies of all kinds which we have placed at the disposal of the French army, and with which General de Gaulle has been able to build up a formidable fighting force.

Partners in Rehabilitation

Politics and economics are left exclusively to the French. As each town is liberated, a new mayor and a new staff of officials are installed pro tem. Collaborationists—known and suspected—are arrested and held for trial. All the Americans do is see to it that physical assistance in the way of food, spare parts and transport is provided.

The result has been that, in southern France, America enjoys undreamed-of prestige and esteem.

But love is a two-way street. Whether the French love us because our G.I.s love them or the other way around, I don't know. Anyhow it's a happy war down here and everything makes a whale of a lot of sense. How long that will last, nobody knows.

In Corsica, the patriots shaved the heads of the women who had had relations with the Nazis. They do that in France, too, although the cases are fewer than you would believe.

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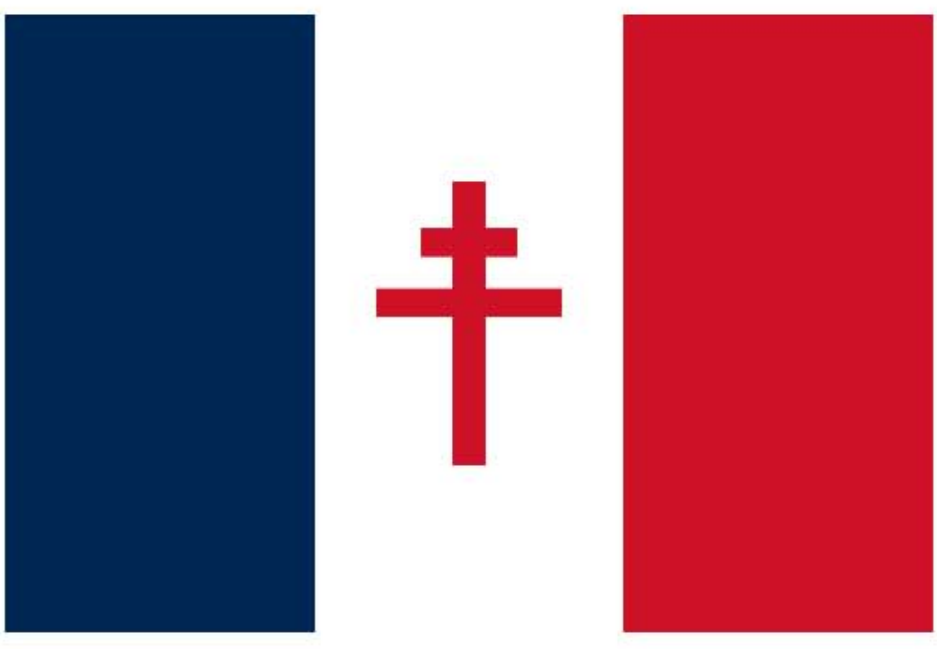
And it was so in Italy, but there some female heads were shaved because the girls were being too friendly with our boys. Everybody here hopes the French won't find such punitive measures necessary. These girls have such lovely hair.



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