

A special problem that became acute toward the end of August was that of determining what to do about Paris. During all preliminary operations we had been at great pains to avoid direct bombing of the French capital. Even in the process of destroying French communications we had, in the Paris region, done this by attacking railway bottlenecks outside rather than terminals inside the city. Pursuing the same general purpose, we wanted to avoid making Paris a battleground and consequently planned operations to cut off and surround the vicinity, thus forcing the surrender of the defending garrison. We could not know, of course, the exact condition and situation of the city's population. At the moment we were anxious to save every ounce of fuel and ammunition for combat operations, in order to carry our lines forward the maximum distance, and I was hopeful of deferring actual capture of the city, unless I received evidence of starvation or distress among its citizens.

In this matter my hand was forced by the action of the Free French forces inside Paris. Throughout France the Free French had been of inestimable value in the campaign. They were particularly active in Brittany, but on every portion of the front we secured help from them in a multitude of ways. Without their great assistance the liberation of France and the defeat of the enemy in western Europe would have consumed a much longer time and meant greater losses to ourselves. So when the Free French forces inside the city staged their uprising it was necessary to move rapidly to their support. Information indicated that no great battle would take place and it was believed that the entry of one or two Allied divisions would accomplish the liberation of the city.

For the honor of first entry, General Bradley selected General LeClerc's French 2d Division. The veterans of this organization had started at Lake Chad three years before, made an almost impossible march across the Sahara Desert, joined the Eighth Army to participate in the latter part of the African campaign, and now, on August 25, 1944, its commander received the surrender from the German general commanding the Paris garrison. It was a satisfying climax to an odyssey which, in its entire length, carried all the way from central Africa to Berchtesgaden in Germany.

However, before the Germans were completely subdued in Paris and the city restored to order, the American 4th Division had to be brought in. Fortunately the fighting involved no great material damage to the city. From our viewpoint the most significant of all these for-

tunate circumstances was that the bridges over the Seine were left intact.

Immediately after the capture of Paris, I notified General de Gaulle that I hoped he would quickly enter the capital; I desired that he, as the symbol of French resistance, should make an entrance before I had to go in or through it.

On the Saturday following the capture of the city I visited General Bradley's headquarters and there learned that General de Gaulle had already established his headquarters in one of the government buildings of Paris. I at once determined to push on into the city to make a formal call upon him. To present an Allied front, I advised Montgomery of my intention and asked him to accompany me. This he was unable to do because of the rapidly changing situation on his front, and so I contented myself, in this respect, with taking along my British military assistant, Colonel Gault.

On the forward journey Bradley and I made a slight detour around an area in which fighting was still in progress, but entered Paris quietly and secretly, as we supposed, before noon on Sunday, August 27. We went immediately to call on De Gaulle, who was already surrounded by the traditional Republican Guards in their resplendent uniforms. We visited General Gerow, at the headquarters of the American V Corps, and stopped to see General Koenig, who as a subordinate of SHAEF was commanding all the Free French Forces of the Interior. As we moved about the city word apparently got out that Bradley and I were in town and when we went past the Arc de Triomphe on the Etoile we were surrounded by a crowd of enthusiastic citizens. The exuberant greetings of the liberated population were a bit embarrassing and we made our way as quickly as possible to one of the exit gates and returned to Bradley's headquarters, near Chartres.⁹

While I was in the city General de Gaulle communicated to me some of his anxieties and problems. He asked for food and supplies. He was particularly anxious for thousands of uniforms for issue to the Free French forces, so as to distinguish between them and the disorderly elements who, taking advantage of temporary confusion, might begin to prey upon the helpless citizens. He also wanted additional military equipment, with which to begin organizing new French divisions.

A serious problem in view of the disorganized state of the city was the speedy establishment of his own authority and the preservation of order. He asked for the temporary loan of two American divisions to use, as he said, as a show of force and to establish his position firmly.