

Operation Dragoon: Journal of a French Resistant

August 14, 1944:

It's 7:10 p.m. and my wife is preparing dinner. I'm listening to the BBC, waiting for any coded messages to indicate any course of action. I joined the Resistance in 1941, after progressively realizing that the Vichy regime wasn't what we had expected. Maréchal Pétain promised peace and stability, but instead we got inflation, high unemployment, freedom restrictions and property appropriation which opened my eyes. The Vichy regime which I thought would save my country from total Nazi control was in fact a puppet government to execute their orders! By 1943, our growing Resistant group in our village of La Motto near St. Raphael was introduced to Michel Hollard and his network "Agir", which connected us with the British and the French Resistants living in Great Britain. Our activities then became more dangerous and coordinated with the Allies' military operations. Currently, our main focus is on "Operation Dragoon", an ambitious plan of the Allies led by the US to liberate the South of France in order to regain the two crucial ports of Toulon and Marseille to reinforce Allies' troops and supplies. We have been helping by mapping out the enemy mine fields and artillery placements, in order to limit Allied casualties. Everything is ready; we just need to hear the message to let us know that they are ready, too. I hear on the radio "Nancy has a stiff neck". That's the message! Operation Dragoon will begin tonight, I have to get together with my group. It's 7:15 p.m., there is little time and much to do.

August 15, 1944:

There is much afoot. Last night, my team and I sabotaged Nazi communication lines at a nearby town. We were shot at and nearly caught, but we hid in the scrub, territory unknown to them but familiar to us since our childhood. We ran to our hideout, bandaged our cuts caused by sharp branches or bullets, and waited until the sun rose. Cap Nègre on the coast must have

been taken by now, by the regiment of Lieutenant-Colonel Bouvet under General de Gaulle, my brother being one of regiment team members. Hopefully, some of the other coastal invasions were also successful.

My team has sabotaged things before, but never for such an important operation. At the start of the Vichy regime, we limited ourselves to listening to the BBC radio and discussing what we heard with our friends. Slowly, our actions became more daring, from painting V's on public property and secretly handing out resistance leaflets, to sabotaging supply and communication lines.

When we got back to the village of La Motte, we were greeted with the pleasant surprise of Allied forces resting and recovering in the town center. We began chatting to French forces consisting of FFL's (Forces Françaises Libres) and other soldiers from French colonies and offered them food while asking for news about the operation. They told us that the Germans were overwhelmed by the surprised attacks so they encountered little resistance, and that our village is apparently the first freed town! Sadly, many Allies' soldiers died for our freedom, and I hope my brother isn't one of them.

I am truly grateful to the US for Operation Dragoon, as it will bring many troops and weapons, and General Eisenhower who insisted on going through the South of France. The British Prime Minister Churchill vehemently opposed this plan as he favored going through Italy or the Balkans. I'm not sure if that would have been as successful since there is no resistance movement to help in those parts..

August 16, 1944:

Members of French Resistance are bringing the Allied forces up the Rhône river valley to reach Toulon and Marseille. Hitler called his forces to retreat and abandon everything but those two port cities. I will be joining the fight in Toulon soon, along with the Allied forces

resting in the village. Once everybody is ready, we will go by truck, as it's only around a two to three hour drive from here. I don't have any news from my brother yet, I hope he's alright.

August 18, 1944:

We have arrived in Toulon. In the city, twenty thousand German soldiers have the orders to defend it until the last man alive, and if they cannot defend it, they are to destroy the port. The Americans sank the battleship *Strasbourg* and the cruiser *La Galissonière*, both belonging to the Vichy government, as the Germans planned to use them to block the southern channel. Unfortunately, I heard that there were also many American casualties and I will always be grateful for their sacrifice. I just received a letter from my brother; he is alive but wounded in the knee, rendering his leg immobile. Although he is in great pain, he is ecstatic about the success of Operation Dragoon and dreams of walking in a liberated France one day!

Today, I joined the fighting against the 242nd Infantry Division, a division of the German army. What remained of it retreated into Toulon. The left wing of the Allied force and the 242nd Infantry Division had been fighting for a few days already; I just joined on the last day. The original plan for the capture of Toulon was scheduled for the 24th of August and required the 3rd Algerian Infantry Division to attack from the north and for the 9th Colonial Infantry Division to follow. The other units would provide distractions and flanking protection. But, as the liberation of the South of France was much quicker than expected, General de Lattre of the FFL decided to start putting the plan into action today with the available troops, rather than wait for the second wave of Allied landings. This plan is risky, but I believe that it's the right course of action because if we wait, the Germans might bring in more reinforcements.

August 20, 1944:

Digne and Sisteron have been liberated yesterday, and Gap today! If only we could take Toulon as quickly. The 3rd Algerian Infantry Division reached Mont Faron, in the suburbs of

Toulon. The 1st French Division is south of the city, supported by the 1st Armored Division and the 2nd Algerian Spahi regiment. I can feel that we are cornering the Germans, but we need to be careful, because animals act viciously when cornered!

August 21, 1944:

Toulon is surrounded. The 3rd Algerian Infantry Division is moving down the town's streets. The Germans are defending themselves with old French tanks in the eastern part of the city. The enemy is resilient, they haven't surrendered yet, but it's only a matter of time now that they're surrounded.

August 23, 1944:

Grenoble has been liberated yesterday! As for Toulon, French troops are everywhere! The city is full of French soldiers waving the French tricolor flag, and more and more German soldiers are getting imprisoned. Victory is close!

August 24, 1944:

Almost all of the German defenses have been defeated, and we have now taken 1,000 prisoners. Only the Toulon naval base remains to be taken.

August 27, 1944:

A victory parade was held today, which made all of us very happy. I believe that it isn't long until the Germans surrender, even though they're still firing artillery guns at us. Some of them are trying to escape by sea, but American naval ships are stopping them from escaping, though one ship escaped, another has been captured, and four other were sunken. We will surely free Toulon, with the powerful American Navy closing in! They have helped us so

much in reclaiming our country. They have provided weapons, supplies, and more importantly troops, so under their leadership, we are confident to win.

August 28, 1944:

I was asleep, but last night, at 10:45 p.m., the German commander, Admiral Rufus, agreed to unconditional surrender. Today, we see all 1,880 German soldiers marching out. It seems that none of the soldiers demonstrated the level of devotion to completely destroy the port, as Hitler demanded, so it should be able to receive ships by mid-September to supply the Allies in the rest of France. Victory is ours! Toulon is liberated, and I've heard that the Germans in Marseille, Nice and Montélimar have surrendered too! We've captured 17,000 prisoners and the Toulon naval base. Our perseverance has led us to victory. General Eisenhower, the Americans, the Allied forces, and the Resistants made winning possible and liberated millions of people. Without Operation Dragoon led by the US, our freedom, property and way of life would have remained under Nazi control and we would have continued being oppressed. But our sacrifices and hardships will not be in vain. This experience taught me that you must fight hard in face of adversity for what you love and believe in. Yes, there may be a dear price to pay, but there is no price that one can put on freedom. Soon, we will win the war and the Axis will be defeated!

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