The History of the Twentieth Century
Episode 446
"Is Paris Burning?"
Transcript

[music: Fanfare]

"[General] Ismay takes a sane and broad-minded view of the Americans—they have won their spurs, and the day is past when we could treat them as green and untried soldiers; in fact, he went so far as to say that we might well have something to learn from them, and that maybe we have been a bit too "staff college-y" in our conduct of the war."

Sir Alan Lascelles, private secretary to King George VI.

Welcome to *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

[music: Opening War Theme]

Episode 446. Is Paris Burning?

If you can remember all the way back to 1942, just after the United States entered the war, you will recall that the Americans initially wanted a ground invasion in Western Europe, most likely France, in 1943 or even 1942, designated Operation Sledgehammer. Fortunately for all concerned, the British were able to persuade their new allies that this timetable was, shall we say, a trifle optimistic.

Back in the days when Operation Sledgehammer was still on the table, thought was also given to an invasion of southern France, ideally to be conducted at the same time as Sledgehammer. This invasion was labeled Operation Anvil, because Sledgehammer, Anvil, get it? You have heard me reference Operation Anvil a few times, most recently in episode 423, when I told you that it was cancelled during the planning of the Normandy invasion.

Anvil was dropped because of the organizational problems that would have been created by preparing and executing two major amphibious landings at the same time at two widely separated landing sites. Eisenhower and his staff judged the Normandy landings to be the higher priority and failure to hold and expand from a beachhead there would be likely to delay the end of the war by a year or more. Thus it made sense to abandon Anvil for the sake of insuring the success of Overlord.

But as we've seen, by mid-July 1944, around D+40, despite weeks of fighting and a buildup of forces from eight divisions landing on D-Day to a total of 31 divisions, 16 American, 13 British, and two Canadian, by mid-July, the Allies were still constrained to a relatively narrow piece of coastland in Normandy. By this time, the demands of supplying this force, along with shipping additional ground units across the Channel and then supplying them as well, were straining Allies supply capabilities to their limits. The loss of one of the Mulberry harbors and the Germans' very thorough demolition job on the port facilities at Cherbourg had set a disappointingly low limit on how many ground units the Allies could support.

For this reason, among others, on July 14 the Allied Joint Chiefs approved a proposal to revive Operation Anvil, to be executed on August 15, just over a month later. Along the way, the codename of the operation was changed from Anvil to Dragoon.

American commanders, including Eisenhower, liked this idea for a few reasons. One was the logistical problem I already outlined. The hope was that French ports on the Mediterranean coast, such as Marseilles and Toulon, could be captured intact and used to supplement the movement of soldiers and supplies into France.

Another reason was the poor state of the German Army Group G, the force that was assigned the defense of southern France. The Germans had been stripping Army Group G of its best units and sending them north to help hold the line in Normandy. Consequently, though it was nominally an army group, Army Group G included only one army, and that army consisted of eleven divisions, ten infantry and one panzer. The panzer division was as good as any in the Germany Army, but these infantry divisions were filled with soldiers previously wounded in other campaigns, the so-called ear-and-stomach battalions, along with reluctant ethnic Germans drafted from occupied countries, and Eastern battalions: recruited Soviet POWs and volunteers from Eastern Europe. They were equipped with hand-me-down weapons confiscated from the Czechoslovak, Polish, French, and Italian militaries. Four of the ten infantry divisions were what the Germans called "static divisions," which meant they were garrison forces that were never intended to move from the position they were assigned to hold.

Army Group G could only call upon some 200 warplanes from the Luftwaffe. It did possess some powerful coastal guns, which were built by the French government in Vichy under German pressure.

A third reason to conduct Anvil, I mean Dragoon, was for the sake of the Free French. The Free French had numerous ground units available in Africa that could contribute to the operation. These were military units composed of soldiers from French possessions in Africa commanded by French officers. The Free French were eager to get these units onto French soil and it reasonable to hope that French Army units would be supported by French civilians and that French resistance fighters would flock to their banners.

These are the reasons the Americans liked the plan. The British did not like the plan. Harold Alexander, the commander of the Allied army group that was fighting in Italy, and who had been promoted to field marshal on the day Rome fell, did not like the plan. He didn't like it because it involved drawing three experienced American divisions away from his command to send to southern France. He believed the cause of defeating Germany would be better served by strengthening, not weakening, his own command.

I haven't talked about the Italian campaign since the Fall of Rome, two days before D-Day, but the Allied force there has been grinding its way steadily northward. By this time, they were approaching Florence, which the Germans had declared an open city. Beyond Florence lay the German Gothic Line, their last major defensive line in Italy, hastily built by 15,000 slave laborers. One through that line, Alexander envisioned advancing his forces into the Alps, toward Vienna and into the Balkans, where they would cut off the flow of oil and strategic minerals to Germany.

In exchange for the removal of these three veteran American divisions, two new green divisions were sent to Italy. One was the 1st Brazilian Division, consisting of about 25,000 Brazilian soldiers equipped and trained by the US Army. Its deployment to Italy made Brazil the only South American nation to send ground forces to Europe.

The government of Brazil at the time was basically a military dictatorship. It had previously pursued friendly relations with Berlin and was reluctant to go to war against Germany, even though by 1942 German U-boats in the Atlantic showed no comparable reluctance about sinking Brazilian merchant ships.

After some gentle prodding from Franklin Roosevelt and his administration, Brazil first agreed to allow US air and naval units to base in Brazil, and then declared war on Germany in November 1943. The country began recruiting soldiers for what was being called the Brazilian Expeditionary Force, or FEB, which are its initials in Portuguese.

The Brazilian government was slow to organize and deploy the FEB, slow to the point that the Brazilian public began to mock the idea, saying a snake will smoke a pipe before Brazil sends the FEB to Europe. This was a Brazilian figure of speech, comparable to "when pigs fly" in English. When the 1st Infantry Division was actually deployed to Italy, the unit adopted a shoulder patch depicting a snake smoking a pipe. The unit was sometimes called the *Cobras Fumantes*, that is, the Smoking Snakes.

The other new division sent to Italy was the US Army's 92nd Infantry Division, notable because it was an African-American unit, since the US Army was segregated at the time. The 92nd had originally been formed during the First World War and had fought in France. The division was deactivated after that war ended and was reactivated in 1942. Its shoulder patch displayed a silhouette of a buffalo, a reference to the Buffalo Soldiers of days past. The 92nd would be the first African-American US infantry unit deployed to Europe.

It has to be said, in light of the casual racism of the time, that these two divisions were likely regarded as inferior to a typical US infantry division and were sent to the less-important Italian Front because they weren't considered good enough to fight in France. Doubtless when Harold Alexander received these divisions, he understood their assignment to his army group in that light.

But whatever displeasure Harold Alexander was feeling about losing troops to Operation Dragoon, his sentiments were as nothing compared to Winston Churchill's disapproval, which was vigorous, loud, and frequently expressed. Churchill was still pushing his own pet idea, an invasion of the Balkans, perhaps at Trieste. A force landing at Trieste could conceivably turn west and threaten the supply lines of the German Army fighting in Italy, or it could turn east and advance into Slovenia, threatening Germany's supplies of oil and strategic minerals from the Balkans, or strike north toward Vienna, threatening supply lines that served the German Army on the Eastern Front, or some combination of these possibilities.

Lurking behind these surface arguments was the one not openly discussed: Churchill was worried that the Red Army would advance through Eastern Europe and install Communist puppet governments in every nation they occupied. He wanted Western Allied forces in Eastern Europe that could challenge any postwar Soviet dominance of the region.

These arguments only irritated Roosevelt and his military advisers, who complained that Churchill was thinking more about shaping the postwar world than he was about winning the war. Joseph Stalin supported Dragoon, and no doubt his unspoken thoughts were the reverse of Churchill's; keep the Westerners in the West and the East is for the Soviet Union.

When Roosevelt stopped listening, Churchill began to bend the ear of Dwight Eisenhower. He likely figured that if he could persuade Eisenhower of the military value of his proposal, Eisenhower would be able to persuade the President. He was still pressing Eisenhower as late as August 5, ten days before the invasion. As Eisenhower's aide put it, "Ike said no, continued saying no all afternoon, and ended saying no in every form of the English language at his command."

Dragoon began in the early morning of August 15 with US, Canadian, and British airborne landings inland, while air and naval bombardments struck German positions on the beaches. The amphibious landings of three American infantry divisions were a great success. Many of the "German" units populated with soldiers from the Soviet Union surrendered immediately. French resistance fighters and Allied paratroopers had cut many of the German communication lines, making it difficult for their commanders to coordinate their defense.

The invaders had more difficulty with land mines, but they did link up with the paratroopers and took Saint Tropez on the first day. On the second day, the Germans attempted a counterattack, which failed. Meanwhile, Free French forces landing behind the Americans moved west toward the valuable port cities of Toulon and Marseilles.

While these events played out along the French Riviera, farther north, the Allies were tightening the noose around the beleaguered German Seventh Army. I mentioned last time that Hitler had relieved Günther von Kluge of his post as commander-in-chief in the West. On August 17, he ordered Kluge to report to him personally at the Wolf's Lair. Field Marshal Walter Model arrived at Western Front headquarters the same day to take up his latest post. He approached his new command the same way Kluge had at first, that German reversals on the Western Front were obviously the fault of poor leadership. When Model arrived at his new headquarters, he found no one there but one army doctor, and he was drunk. An enraged Model shot him dead on the spot.

Model next rode to the Seventh Army headquarters in the chateau on the Seine, his car accompanied by two self-propelled anti-aircraft guns, on the orders of the *Führer,* who had had quite enough of Allied planes strafing his commanders. At his first staff meeting, he told Seventh Army commanders that their troops were a pack of cowards, that it was much easier to fight the British and the Americans than the Russians, and that he was there to see that this situation changed.

Meanwhile, a distraught Kluge, already humiliated by the collapse of his armies in France, felt certain that Hitler had relieved him and summoned him to a personal meeting because he had learned of Kluge's role in attempting to carry out the failed military coup on the evening of July 20. To Kluge, his future seemed clear: further humiliation, a trial, conviction, and execution. On August 19, as he was being driven back to Germany, Kluge swallowed a cyanide capsule and died. He left behind a letter to his brother and a letter to the *Führer,* in which he asked Hitler to end the war, while also swearing his loyalty.

The same day Kluge died, the Polish 1st Armored Division, part of the Canadian army advancing south from Falaise, met up with American units at Argentan. The Falaise Pocket was finally closed. The German forces inside spent two days attempting to fight their way out of the pocket before surrendering on August 21.

About half the soldiers inside the pocket had managed to escape before the gap at Falaise was finally closed. But since the orientation of the German Seventh Army had been toward the west, to execute Hitler's plan to advance to the sea at Avranches, most of those who made it out had been in the rearguard: higher-ranking officers, support staff, and such. Those taken prisoner were the front-line soldiers, about 50,000 of them. The Seventh Army had left behind the bulk of their tanks, artillery guns, and other vehicles. British and American medical units were soon swamped with cases of wounded German soldiers, many of whom had not been treated in days and whose wounds had turned gangrenous.

The destruction of the Seventh Army meant that Germany barely had any army at all left on the Western Front. Even Adolf Hitler, by this time notorious for his mule-headed refusal to permit the German Army to give up territory no matter how desperate the situation, hesitated only briefly before ordering surviving German Army units of Army Group B in northern France to

pull back to the Seine. The southern Army Group G was also ordered to retreat north to set up a new defensive line at the Vosges Mountains in Eastern France, where it would link up with Army Group B. The two army groups between them would form a defensive line from the Seine through the Vosges and on to the Swiss border. Two German divisions in southern France were ordered to move east into the French Alps to help hold the Italian border.

Also on August 19, the day the Falaise pocket closed, Paris erupted.

[music: da Silva, "Hino Nacional Brasileiro."]

The collapse of the German Army in France and its withdrawal to the Seine left Paris on the front line. On August 7, Adolf Hitler appointed a newly promoted general, Dietrich von Choltitz military governor of Paris, but not until after he'd subjected Choltitz to a 45-minute rant about the assassination plot and how he was now rooting all the traitors out of the Army. Choltitz also got the usual order from Hitler: Paris was to be a fortified stronghold, held at all costs, to slow the Allied advance toward Germany. If the Allies attempted to take Paris, Choltitz should level it and defend the city from the ruins.

Choltitz left the meeting convinced Hitler had lost his mind and the war was lost.

He arrived in Paris the following day to take up his new assignment and quickly discovered that the Paris garrison of around 20,000 was composed of what was by now the usual collection of unmotivated second-string "German" soldiers recruited from places under German occupation.

Thanks to the wizards of Bletchley Park, Allied command was aware of Hitler's orders regarding the French capital. Paris was a large and dense city; to attempt to take it from determined defenders would be a slow and bloody nightmare—another Stalingrad. Eisenhower ordered Paris be bypassed; he put a higher priority on harassing the enemy retreat and ending the war as quickly as possible. Indeed, the German defense in the West was collapsing so thoroughly, some dared to hope the war would be over by Christmas. Paris could surely wait until then.

Or could it? The citizens of Paris, and French resistance groups in Paris, didn't feel they could wait that long. The collapsing German position, especially after the Operation Dragoon landings in the south, was obvious. Choltitz ordered a unit of soldiers, accompanied by 17 Panther tanks, to parade through the city as a show of force. But soon the tanks and the best of his soldiers were ordered west to oppose Patton's advance.

The resistance in Paris was led by Communists. They persuaded the railway workers in Paris to go on strike and resistance fighters to begin cutting German communication lines. On August 15, Paris police responded to a German effort to seize their weapons by refusing to show up at work. This was also the day of the Operation Dragoon landing. The French Communist newspaper in Paris, *L'Humanité,* called for a popular uprising to begin the next day.

On the 16th, a number of French resistance fighters attended a secret meeting in the Bois de Boulogne, which is a wooded park in Paris, to plan the pending uprising. An informant tipped off the Gestapo, which interrupted the meeting and shot and killed 35 of them. Most of those killed were under the age of twenty.

During this time, German military engineers were planting explosive charges all over Paris, a fact which came to the attention of the chair of the Paris municipal council, a man named Pierre Taittinger. He met with General Choltitz on August 17 to discuss this. Choltitz told Taittinger that he was under orders to destroy the city to slow the Allied advance. In the days to come, Taittinger and the Swedish consul general in Paris, Raoul Nordling, made repeated efforts to persuade Choltitz to spare the city. And in case you were wondering, yes, Pierre Taittinger was indeed the founder of Taittinger Champagne.

As Taittinger and Choltitz were speaking, Parisians out on the streets marveled at the sight of caravans of vehicles transporting senior German military officers, accompanied in many cases by their French mistresses, eastward toward Germany, in an event which became known to the French as *la grande fuite des Fritz*, that is, "the great flight of the Fritzes." The fleeing officers left Paris in haste, stopping only long enough to loot the city of antique furniture, art works, carpets, and stocks of wine. Their booty was carried away by the truckload.

The next day, August 18, posters began to appear on walls across Paris, declaring that victory was near and calling on Parisians to rise up against the occupiers. The following morning, the 19th, those striking Paris police officers turned up at the Louvre and the Prefecture of Police in plain clothes, seized control of both buildings and raised the French revolutionary tricolors. Choltitz sent a small force to retake the Prefecture of Police, but this force, which consisted of a couple dozen soldiers and two Panther tanks, was ineffective and was forced to withdraw.

Well, when news of that got around, the uprising began in earnest. Citizens built barricades in the streets, which is practically a Parisian tradition. When German officers went out onto the balconies of the hotel rooms where they were staying to see what was going on, they drew fire and had to retreat back inside.

Two SS officers showed up at the hotel Choltitz used as his headquarters and informed him they had been sent under orders direct from the *Führer* to "rescue" the Bayeaux Tapestry, which you'll recall was stored in the basement of the Louvre at this time, and take it to Germany for "safekeeping." Cholitz escorted them to the window and pointed out the Louvre, which was within sight, just a couple of blocks away across the Tuileries. Resistance fighters in the Louvre fired shots at them; they had been sniping at Choltitz's headquarters all day. Choltitz couldn't resist telling the SS officers that the Army was stymied, but two of the finest of the *Führer's* SS would surely have no difficulty entering the museum and seizing the tapestry.

The SS officers went back to Germany empty-handed.

De Gaulle and his government-in-waiting went "tilt" when news of the uprising in Paris reached them. Bear in mind that the Warsaw Uprising was taking place at this very same moment and was going very badly for the Polish resistance. De Gaulle feared Paris was headed for the same sort of disaster. Also, the uprising in Paris was instigated by the Communists. Other factions of the resistance were also participating, but who and how many was not clear. De Gaulle worried that the uprising might end with the Communists in control of the capital, or that resistance groups in Paris might begin battling each other, and once either of those happened, who could say where it would lead? Could even Charles de Gaulle successfully intervene? And if not, wouldn't this give the Americans just the excuse they were looking for to impose an Allied military occupation of France?

Back in January 1944, Dwight Eisenhower and Charles de Gaulle had struck a deal. De Gaulle would put his Free French military units under Allied command during the invasion and liberation of France, but he wanted something in return. Of course he did. He wanted the liberators of Paris to be Free French soldiers. That's not a terribly unreasonable request. Senior American and British military commanders didn't think so either, although they raised one objection.

As I have been pointing out to you all along, de Gaulle's Free "French" forces were only about one-third white Europeans from Metropolitan France. The other two-thirds, mostly the rank and file, were soldiers from France's colonial possessions in Africa and the Middle East. American and British commanders agreed that the liberators of Paris needed to be 100% white.

As you well know, the United States segregated its own Army by race; the British did not, but they were equally interested in managing the racial makeup of Free French military units because [explanation to be added here later.]

Allied leaders identified the French 2nd Armored Division as the most suitable unit; in other words, the whitest. Its soldiers were three-quarters white Frenchmen. The division was in North Africa at the time; it was shipped to England in April. In August 1944, the French 2nd Armored Division was under the command of General Philippe Leclerc and was attached to George Patton's Third Army. On August 17th, Patton sent some of his forces eastward toward the Seine, but not Leclerc's division, which was ordered to assist in closing the Falaise pocket. Leclerc went to see Patton and told him if his division was not permitted to participate in the advance on Paris, he would resign. Patton told Leclerc that he was being a big baby and that he, Patton, was not accustomed to division commanders telling him where they were going to fight. According to Patton, after they had it out, they parted amicably.

On the 19th, de Gaulle himself arrived at Eisenhower's headquarters, as units of Patton's Third Army were taking Chartres, and told Eisenhower an Allied military presence in Paris was essential to maintain order in the city. Eisenhower told de Gaulle of his plan to bypass the city. But when de Gaulle heard the news that a shooting war was erupting in Paris, he sent a message

to Eisenhower: it was “absolutely necessary” that the 2nd Division be sent to the capital immediately. If Eisenhower and Patton would not give the order, then he, de Gaulle, would order Leclerc to Paris on his own authority.

On August 20, in Paris, resistance fighters loyal to de Gaulle took control of the Hôtel de Ville and raised the tricolor. Across the city, individual Parisians, moved by the sight of the French flag flying over public buildings once more, began hanging their own flags from their balconies, some within sight of German headquarters. Raoul Nordling, the Swedish consul, negotiated a ceasefire agreement. Choltitz agreed to recognize French resistance fighters as soldiers and to permit them to hold the buildings they had already seized, in exchange for the resistance fighters’ agreement to cease fire on German soldiers.

The ceasefire was ratified at a meeting of the resistance council. The next day, however, the Communists, who had missed the meeting, denounced the agreement as “treason.” The Communists and the resistance council agreed to respect the ceasefire for the remainder of the day, August 21. Tomorrow, though, it would be back to the war.

That same day, the British 11th Armored Division took over the position held by Leclerc’s division, freeing them to take on a new mission. But no orders came. When the news arrived that American units had reached the Seine south of Paris, that did it. Leclerc reached his breaking point. Were he and his soldiers supposed to let the Communists seize Paris while he and his men sat around doing nothing? Without consulting with his superiors, Leclerc ordered a small reconnaissance unit from his division to advance to Versailles and reconnoiter, with permission to proceed into Paris if possible, but only after ordering one of his staff officers to take their American liaison officer off to see the sights at Argentan.

Leclerc’s American superiors found out soon enough and ordered him to recall the reconnaissance unit. Leclerc refused.

On August 22nd, the ceasefire ended and open combat broke out in Paris. Raoul Nordling sent his brother Ralph west to find George Patton and ask him to come and save Paris. Ralph indeed found Patton’s headquarters and gave him an assessment of what was going on in the city, perhaps exaggerating a little. Patton told Nordling he could take Paris in 24 hours, but did not have permission to. Nordling told him no, he didn’t think so. The German garrison was too strong. “I am better informed,” Patton retorted.

Patton sent Nordling along to meet his superiors, Bradley and Eisenhower. De Gaulle got wind of Nordling’s mission and sent his own message to the two American commanders urging them to grant Nordling’s request. Nordling told Eisenhower and Bradley that thousands of children and elderly Parisians were dying of starvation every day and that the Germans were preparing to demolish the Paris Metro and the city’s famous sewer system.

Eisenhower turned to Bradley and said, “What the hell, Brad. I guess we have to go in.”

When Bradley returned from the meeting, Leclerc was waiting for him at the airfield. Bradley stepped out of his airplane and said to Leclerc, "Well, you win. They've decided to send you to Paris."

Leclerc immediately called to one of his staff, *"Mouvement immédiat sur Paris!"* The Free French soldiers present began to weep, even colonial soldiers who'd never set foot in the city. The liberation of Paris was the goal they'd been fighting toward for four years.

Eisenhower granted the French 2nd Armored Division the honor of first into Paris, but they would be soon accompanied by the US 4th Infantry Division. They were told to enter the city only if resistance was light. There was to be no artillery, aerial bombing, or heavy combat within the city. Eisenhower also invited the British to send a unit along to Paris to share in the moment, but Bernard Montgomery never did, for reasons that remain unclear.

Just after midnight the next morning, August 23, the 2nd Armored Division began its advance. They would stop along the way to ask local people for information on the placement of German units. At the town of Rambouillet, just outside Paris, they stumbled across a mob of Allied journalists waiting to cover the liberation of Paris. They included American war correspondent Ernie Pyle, whom we've met before, future American novelist Irwin Shaw, and already-an-American-novelist Ernest Hemingway, who swaggered about armed with a pistol, which is a very wrong thing for a noncombatant war correspondent to be doing.

Also on August 23, General Choltiz received a cable from Adolf Hitler reiterating his orders. Paris should be surrendered only after it was reduced to rubble.

It rained hard on the first two days of the 2nd Armored Division's advance, slowing them down, so that at dusk on the 24th, they were still not yet in Paris. General Leclerc ordered a company of soldiers to proceed into Paris and tell its citizens the rest of their division would enter the city tomorrow. The particular unit he chose was the 9th Company, known as *La Nueve*, because 90% of the soldiers in the company were Spanish Republicans in exile, who had been living in France until the German invasion forced them into a second exile.

The soldiers of La Nueve were fortunate enough to find a young Parisian man riding a beat-up motorcycle who knew the streets well and offered to guide them. He was able to lead them around German roadblocks and on to the Porte d'Italie, the southernmost entrance into the city itself. The soldiers cheered, then proceeded to the Hôtel de Ville, where they met up with a group of resistance fighters. Their leader tried to make a speech, but was too overcome with emotion. The resistance called on Parisian priests to ring church bells across the city.

General Choltitz and his staff were drinking champagne in his office at the time, because by now it was "use it or lose it." As they got drunk they reflected on the fact that today was the anniversary of the St. Bartholomew's Day massacre of Huguenots. They speculated about whether they might meet the same fate when they heard the church bells ring. Choltitz went to

his desk and telephoned Hans Speidel, Seventh Army chief of staff. Once he had Speidel on the line, he raised the receiver into the air so Speidel could hear the bells. Speidel understood their significance at once. Choltitz asked that Speidel take care of his family.

The next day, August 25, saw a change in the weather. Sunshine and clear skies greeted the 2nd Armored Division as they entered the city, only to be mobbed by ecstatic Parisians raising their hands in the V-for-victory sign. Young women climbed aboard moving tanks to kiss the drivers. For the French, the liberation of Paris was not an Allied accomplishment; it was a French one that expunged the disgrace of 1940.

To the south, the US 4th Infantry Division was also entering the city. The Parisians were wary of them at first, not entirely certain this was a friendly force. But they soon got over that and began greeting the Americans with the same kind of enthusiasm the Free French soldiers had seen. Crowds formed around the American vehicles, forcing frequent stops as they shouted *Merci! Vive l'Amérique!* Young women kissed the soldiers; old men saluted them.

Raoul Nordling visited General Choltitz at 11:00 AM to bring him an ultimatum demanding German forces in the city surrender by 12:15. Choltitz sent him back to say that honor prevented him from surrendering without a fight.

But the German defense was lackluster. A few exchanges of gunfire, a few tank shots. At 1:15, an hour after the expiration of the ultimatum, French soldiers and resistance fighters stormed the hotel Choltitz was using as his headquarters. When a Free French lieutenant burst into Choltitz's office, Choltitz offered the surrender of himself, his staff, and the entire German garrison in Paris.

Choltitz and his staff were led to the Prefecture of Police. Along the way, mobs on the streets spat on them, attacked them, even shot and killed one of them. Waiting at the Prefecture were General Leclerc and US General Raymond Barton, commander of the 4th Infantry Division. Barton chose to step aside and leave the surrender ceremony to Choltitz and Leclerc.

After the surrender formalities, Choltitz was questioned by the Americans. Choltitz boasted he had saved Paris by surrendering after mere token resistance. He was asked when the Germany would surrender. He replied that Americans had a place to go home to, while the Germans had nothing to look forward to.

Charles de Gaulle moved into the French War Ministry building that same day. In the evening he gave a speech that was broadcast over the radio, in which he declared Paris liberated by French soldiers. He closed with these words:

This duty of war, all the men who are here and all those who hear us in France know that it demands national unity. We, who have lived the greatest hours of our History, we have nothing else to wish than to show ourselves, up to the end, worthy of France. Long live France!

The following day, de Gaulle led the 2nd Armored Division as it marched down the Champs-Élysées. Pursuant to the condition imposed by the Americans and the British, the African soldiers in the unit were replaced by white Europeans. Even so, there weren't enough Free French who were actually French available to fill out the division, so some of them were exiled Spanish Republicans. Indeed, as I just told you, most of the soldiers in the first "French" unit to enter Paris were Spaniards. They didn't even have enough Spaniards to fill out the division, so some of the soldiers who paraded that day were Syrians or Lebanese or Tunisians who were sufficiently fair of face to pass for European.

We'll have to stop there for today. I thank you for listening, and I'd like to thank Ed for his kind donation, and thank you to Melissa for becoming a patron of the podcast. Donors and patrons like Ed and Melissa help cover the costs of making this show, which in turn keeps the podcast available free for everyone always, so my thanks to them and to all of you who have pitched in and helped out. If you'd like to become a patron or make a donation, you are most welcome; just visit the website, historyofthetwentiethcentury.com and click on the PayPal or Patreon buttons.

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Next week is a bye week for the podcast, but I hope you'll join me in two weeks' time, here on *The History of the Twentieth Century*; as we—well, I don't know about you, but I'm getting a little tired of talking about battles. Now that Paris has been liberated, we'll take a little breather. Nothing very interesting happened on the Western Front in Europe over the rest of 1944 anyway…ha, ha. That's a joke. But we'll take a break in any case and talk about some bigger picture aspects of the war, including life for the civilians back at home in some of the Allied countries. We'll begin with the United States. Don't you know there's a war on? in two weeks' time, here, on *The History of the Twentieth Century.*

Oh, and one more thing. Dietrich von Choltitz was held as a prisoner of war in England and later in the United States. He was never charged with a war crime and was released in 1947. In 1951, he published his memoir, in which he claimed credit for saving Paris. In 1956, he visited Paris, where he dropped by the hotel that had once been his headquarters and got together with Pierre Taittinger.

In 1964, American author Larry Collins and French author Dominique Lapierre published a history of the liberation of Paris in France. The following year, it was released in English translation under the title *Is Paris Burning?*

The book was adapted into a 1966 film with the same title, directed by René Clément and released through Paramount Pictures. The film was a Franco-American production, featuring an

ensemble cast of French, American, and German actors, including Jean-Pierre Cassel, Leslie Caron, Charles Boyer, Orson Welles, Kirk Douglas, Glenn Ford, and German character actor Gert Fröbe, who played Choltitz. Fröbe is likely best known to American filmgoers for playing the title role in the 1964 James Bond film *Goldfinger*.

Is Paris Burning? received generally positive reviews and two Academy Award nominations. Dietrich von Choltitz died on November 5, 1966, just ten days after the film's French premiere and five days before its American premiere. He was 71 years old.

[music: Closing War Theme]