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Partial Translation of Clément Horvath's
Till Victory: Lettres du Jour J à la Victoire
(Éditions Ouest France, 2020)

By

David Bates

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Submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for
Honors in the Department of Modern Languages and Literatures

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ABSTRACT

BATES, DAVID Translation of *Till Victory: Lettres du Jour J à la Victoire*: Study of World War II through a collection of letters from soldiers. Department of Modern Languages and Literatures, March 2021.

ADVISOR: Michelle Chilcoat

This thesis includes translated sections of Clément Horvath's *Till Victory: Lettres du Jour J à la Victoire*. The book contains the letters of soldiers and their families from the time of D-Day until the end of the war. These soldiers came from all over including France, the United States, Canada, Great Britain, and Canada. The book covers historical events in chronological order incorporating testimonials of those who witnessed these events to paint a picture of what the war was really like. It is almost unbelievable to read about what these soldiers went through and the relentlessness that was required for the Allies to win the war. The stories also show the heroism and selflessness of these individuals as they answered the cries for help without asking any questions, many of whom were fighting for completely foreign lands. Given that World War II is falling further into our past, it is important to preserve these testimonials as it reminds us of the horror of war. This sentiment is clearly expressed in a quote from an American Soldier that Horvath used to open his book: "If only we could transcribe on paper what we see, I am sure that there wouldn't be another war for many years, and maybe never again."

The author, Clément Horvath, is a French historian who has spent the last 15 years researching World War II and collecting these testimonials. He released the first volume of *Till Victory* called *Till Victory: The Second World War by Those Who Were There* in 2018 and was praised by critics for the work winning a "2019 History" prize. Interestingly, he explains in the

introduction that he is neither a trained historian nor a professional writer. He simply wanted to share these recently released firsthand accounts of the war that would have otherwise gone unnoticed. Not only is he giving a voice to the heroic soldiers who risked their lives during World War II but he is also reminding us of the unimaginable horrors associated with war. Horvath has dedicated himself to interviewing the dwindling World War II veteran population in an attempt to collect any remaining testimonials. He reminds us that a brighter future depends on never forgetting the past.

My main motivation for studying these letters was to better understand the French's appreciation of the Allied forces. When my dad, an American born after the end of the war, first met my great grandmother, a French woman born in 1898, she thanked him for World War II. This story always stuck with me as I couldn't understand why she was thanking a man who clearly had no part in fighting for her freedom. Ultimately, these vivid descriptions of the war helped me understand her appreciation. The soldiers who came from abroad were willing to risk their lives and live through horrific conditions to free a land that wasn't their own. Although the war was devastating, the soldiers that were willing to fight were truly heroic.

[Author's Preface, pp. 3-4)

As I write these lines, we are celebrating the 75th anniversary of the allied invasion of Normandy, as the population of remaining survivors that witnessed this turning point in history continues to dwindle. How can their legacies be remembered, and the liberty they achieved, that today we take for granted? My generation, like my parents, have only known lasting peace. It is difficult to even imagine the extent of the tragedy that was World War 2, nor the hell

endured by the young civilians in uniform, a group mostly drafted, to save a broken world engulfed with hatred. A hatred that has yet to completely disappear 75 years later... The dusty history books are all that remain, full of overwhelming numbers that are difficult to comprehend. It feels, like always, that cinema has the power to bring color and emotion to a time so black and white. A time so distant, that it hardly touches our lives today. However, according to the veterans themselves, movies could never recount the terrible reality of the experiences they faced on the frontlines: "They could never show you the pure horror of seeing a friend cut in pieces, nor reproduce the odor." So how can we comprehend what our liberators endured to realize the importance of their heritage?

In my opinion, the answer can be found in their letters, in just a few lines that evoke hope for a peaceful future. A future that many will never enjoy. The beauty of these correspondences is that they are written from the mud of the battlefield and sent to a companion who only cares about the man behind the soldier with a sincerity that characterizes writings which are not intended to be published – In this book they are treated with the utmost respect and only included with the permission of the family. Beyond the Hollywood clichés, these letters reveal that nothing is simply black or white, and that war has nothing to do with a heroic and romantic adventure. Behind the envelope stamped with the dehumanizing registration number lies love and death intermingled in the simple words of a farmer from Kentucky who was simply "doing his part" – to fight for a cause is over his head, for people he does not understand, and for lands that are completely foreign to him. Hundreds of thousands like him would fill allied cemeteries

across Europe with their white crosses. Much more poignant than crude statistics, their last words give another dimension to history: a humane dimension that draws us in.

Other than the fact that the soldier does not want to further worry his family, he also must not risk saying too much in correspondence because of the tight censorship. The orders he receives are clear: "Censorship is a matter of common sense. Most of you do not need to be regulated. But you do need protection – protection against the few who are negligent and disloyal, the few who don't hesitate to give the enemy the information necessary to destroy you. Tokyo or Berlin would be just as happy to receive information addressed to your mom. Certain subjects not authorized to be included in private correspondence, telegrams, and phone calls include: location, identity, or movements of ships, aircraft and military personnel; defensive or offensive forces, weapons, installations or plans of the United States and its Allies; ammunition, location or evolution of war industries; routine or employment by the United or its Allies of any units, naval or military; consequences of enemy operations, or losses, until they are officially announced; critique of equipment, physical conditions, or morale of Americans and of Allies; detailed descriptions of meteorological conditions..." And so on. In fact, if all these rules had been followed with precision, news from the frontlines would have held little of interest. Furthermore, the mail was often censored by the same officers who led their men in combat – officers who were not enthusiastic about the idea of reading through large piles of letters after a long day of work. If "Joe" or "Tommy" wanted to talk about their extraordinary experiences they could, regardless of the risks involved, and as a result many incredible stories escaped a sometimes lax censorship.

The adoption of American V-mail (Victory Mail) and British Airgraph revolutionized sending letters during times of war: This specific and regulated sheet of paper 28 cm high by 21.5 cm wide photocopied and stored in 16mm microfilm reels, could hold as many as 1,700 letters! Sent by plane, they are then printed in the country of destination (on little 12.5 by 10.5 cm pieces of paper), put in envelopes and distributed. Hundreds of millions of V-mails were exchanged up until the end of the service in November of 1945. However, the small size of the printed letter considerably limited the number of words a soldier could write and made it impossible to send a picture, press clipping, or souvenir to go along with the message. Many of them preferred long letters in which they could express themselves more freely. Just as important as the food and ammunition, the letters represent the soldier's last link with the real world, his loved ones, his home; the ability to escape the nightmare if only for an instant.

I collected these rare letters for fifteen years and published a book of them in 2018, *Till Victory : lettres de soldats allies* (Éditions Ouest-France). Some fifty American, British, Canadian, and French soldiers are honored – each one of them subject to thorough research until their families were found across the world. It was the culmination of a colossal project that has taken up half of my life.... But it cannot stop here. I still have many stories to tell and new heroes to thank. If they couldn't do it in their letters, some feel the need to tell their story 75 years later – this is the case of Allen Greene, who I was surprised to receive an e-mail from shortly after the release of my first book. He told me that he was a former colleague and golf partner of Guenther Ahlf, the German GI honored in the first *Till Victory*, with whom he shares this

unbreakable bond: They both had traversed Europe during the war. His story is therefore included in this work, next to many other recent testimonials, which I decided to preserve alongside the others to give a voice to those who never made it home. Finally, I never repeat it enough: I am not a historian, nor a full time writer. This work is just my way of saying “thank you.”

Paul Castany (2ieme Régiment de Dragons), p.120

Paul Castany, of the 2nd Dragons Regiment, was in this 1st French Army [which had taken back Alsace and Lorraine, and Strasbourg from the Germans]. He recalled the long trek to the German border :

I was living in Alger. I was mobilized, I had completed my military training at age 17 when the Americans landed in North Africa, and when we were 18, they drafted us. We were willing and even happy; we had to go... At 18, you don't think things over much, it's just how it was. We had to choose our weapon, and because I had completed my military training, they told me “you have priority for the cavalry, the infantrymen...”, so I picked the cavalry (which no longer existed, we drove tanks). I had been with the 2nd Dragons in Mascara (Algeria) almost 6 months when we left for Mers-el-Kébir [from August 15 to 25 1944]. We spent a week on a Liberty Ship, below deck, lying in twos or threes one on top of the other, wherever we could on the boat. I disembarked with the second wave, and we did not have any weaponry except for a rifle. We were waiting for Marseille to be liberated so we could disembark on the Aubagne side of the city. We remained on reserve almost two weeks, then sent replacements for the mounting dead. I was a tank driver, but we didn't have any tanks at that time so they gave me an American

GMC truck so I could transport food supplies and ammunition from the port to Besançon, on the front line. The Germans were still holding on to the Vosges at that time. Upon arrival in Besançon, they told me “you must get back in, you are being redirected towards Thann.” I was entrusted with a six-wheeled automatic machine gun [A vehicle named “Concorde” by its crew]: We followed the captain in his Jeep with the radio and machine gun while the tanks followed behind us. Upon entering the Vosges, there was almost 50 centimeters of snow, when we advanced we could barely see the road! We continued slowly at first through the Cernay and Mulhouse plains as the Germans bombed us from above with mortars... There were only old men on the enemy side, camouflaged in ditches with bazookas. The tank in front of me was hit on its caterpillar track, causing a good bounce, but we continued to follow. From time to time there were skirmishers who helped us refuel using back up cars. Fortunately, when we arrived in Cernay, the snow began to thaw because of the land mines they had put everywhere, and we could finally see them.

Raymond Vignes, p.120-121

Raymond was born on January 29, 1910 in Vierzon, which is in the Cher department. At 18 years old he committed voluntarily to the special military school of Saint-Cyr on October 2, 1928 where he performed well. Promotions and assignments quickly followed one after another: He became a lieutenant and served in Madagascar with the mixed 1st regiment of Madagascar, then in Beirut with the 17th regiment of Senegalese infantrymen (where he became captain on Christmas 1938), and finally in Alger with the 13th regiment of Senegalese infantrymen (13th RTS). When the Torch operation began in North Africa on November 8, 1942,

Raymond's regiment is joined to the division of Alger, in the Army of African led by general Alphonse Juin. Raymond's conduct was particularly noticed by the commander of the 13th RTS: *He already was a brilliant commander of his unit and provided total satisfaction to the general staff in Levant. During the events of November 8, 1942 he proved that he had great composure and judgement. An energetic character, very frank – has a good sense of command.* For that matter Raymond was promoted to "Battalion Commander" on March 25, 1943, and took command of the 1st battalion.

His regiment was part of general Morlière's 9th Colonial Infantry Division, nicknamed "the black division" with two other regiments of Senegalese infantrymen. It is in formation with Army B in North Africa, under the orders of general de Lattre of Tassigny. During this time, the former Army of Africa under general Juin is now participating in some of the biggest battles in the Italian countryside (including the taking of Monte Cassino) under American command with the name "French expeditionary corps in Italy." It also reinforced the Army B during the summer of 1944 to form what would become the 1st French Army. This army had as many as 260,000 men, in which 50% were North African, 32% Pied Noir, 10% black Africans, and 8% Metropolitan French.

Raymond's 9th Colonial Infantry Division arrived in Ajaccio on April 16, 1944. Corsica was the first French department to be liberated on October 5, 1943, and then served as the point of departure for the invasion of Elba Island, in-between Corsica and Italy. On June 17, 1944, Raymond disembarked with the first wave onto the red beach of the Elba Island (Marina del

Campo Bay) while under fire from German canons (Operation Brassard, involved 12,000 men). The Island would be liberated after just two days of combat, despite the loss of 250 French men and 650 injured. General de Lattre de Tassigny's troops then had to land on the coast of the French Riviera. They followed close behind the first waves of Americans from D-Day in Provence, where Raymond returned to France on August 21, shortly after Operation Dragoon. His unit took part in the battle for Toulon, where violent street fights broke out, in particular near the forts occupied by the determined Germans. The divisional artillery, warships, and American bombers helped the French Army take back the town on August 26. Raymond then continued his march towards the north, going up the Rhone valley, along the Swiss border, before being stopped in Doubs on September 15, 1944.

La Blessure, p. 121

A routine of patrols and artillery duels is established, while the Senegalese suffer from the cold and the rain, who were "physically unsuited for the European winter climate" according to the military authorities. Shortly after receiving a memo from the American chief of staff, Walter Smith, who wished the French Army had the same separation of white and black troops as the segregated US Army, General de Gaulle called for the whitening of troops. This led to the replacement of an important portion of the African soldiers with volunteers from mainland France and former resistance fighters, attracted to the prestige of the colonial troops. The French Army also saw it as a way to control the ex-guerilla resistance fighters, and to parade white troops through the symbolic victories to come, like during the reconquering of Alsace-Lorraine and the march through Berlin. Yet, it was these 20,000 colonial soldiers, brutally

returned to the country in Autumn 1944, who were bravely defeated by chaining the victories from 1940 to 1943 and were able to bring the French 1st Army to the doors of Germany.

Within this framework, the name for the regiments of Senegalese infantrymen was changed on November 1, 1944. Raymond's 13th was redesignated the 23rd colonial infantry regiment. At the same time, the entire allied front is set in motion, looking for a way to push into the Vosges, where the Germans were benefiting from the natural barriers that offered heights covered in snow. The 9th Colonial Infantry Division got around the mountains by entering Alsace via the Belfort gap, reaching the Rhin and the outskirts of Mulhouse by the end of November. It is here that Raymond was put out of action on November 27, during cleaning operations in the woods of Oberwaldt. Raymond was made Knight of the Legion of Honor in April 1945 for his final actions during the war: *"Battalion commander of exceptional energy and drive. Stood out during all of the completed operations since arriving in France, and especially on November 26, 1944 when standing in place to block the enemy who had succeeded in progressing through a gap in our lines. Pursuing the defeated enemy, the next day, he was badly injured by a land mine explosion while leading his battalion. He showed on that occasion a great example of courage and composure."*

He was transported to Montbéliard hospital that same day and had his right foot amputated. He would spend multiple months in the hospital between Alger and France up until April 1945, where he rejoined a military stewardship unit. All of the letters that follow were written to him during his convalescence, by his fellow officers or ordinary soldiers expressing their gratitude.

Fifteen years later, the general Morlière (Military Governor of Paris and commander of the 9th Colonial Infantry Division from December 24, 1944 to March 11, 1945) wrote a personal card to Raymond: *“I have not forgotten you and I perfectly remember the circumstances in which you became seriously injured by the mine. It was the morning when we were close to Réchézy where we counterattacked to reestablish communications with Alsace, which were cut from the electric station by the Germans higher up. You commanded the battalion. I even think I saw you the next day or the day after that in the ambulance or hospital where you were transported. I also clearly remember your visit to Alger. I would be very happy to present you the tie [of the Legion of Honor] during the next ceremony at Les Invalides.”*

La Poche de Colmar, pp. 122-123

On December 10, 1944, the Kembs hydroelectric factory was taken by the 9th Colonial Infantry Division by destroying an entire enemy battalion. The front in Alsace is stabilized and now waiting for its orders to enter into Germany... The French troops cleared the north part of the Swiss border between Mulhouse and Bâle (Switzerland), while the 7th US Army (led by the 2nd French Armored Division) had penetrated the German defenses north of Vosges and liberated Strasbourg. But caught in the trap between the two allied movements was the 19th German Army, seven infantry divisions strong, a Panzer brigade, and a mountain division which formed around the town of the same name what would become “The Colmar Pocket.”

In front of them, the French troops suffer from logistical restrictions and the former French Forces of the Interior (FFI) were integrated quickly without any instruction. Paul Castany of the

2nd Dragons could testify: *“A guy from the FFI had arrived and had taken an American submachine gun. We were cleaning the guns and he did not even notice that there was a bullet in his. It went off and travelled around the shed, it went everywhere and no one was injured, we were lucky.”* The young recruits are trained on the job, and their lack of experience will be the main reason for the failed allied offensives at the Pocket of Colmar from December 15th to 22nd. As for the elders, they miss their commander.

A sub-officer of Raymond, who would soon be killed in combat, wrote to him on Christmas night in 1944: *“My commander, it is with pleasure to first send you my best wishes for Christmas (a little bit late admittedly) and for the year 1945. You know what my wishes are for you: A quick and full recovery. In writing this letter to you I am paying a bit of a debt of gratitude and also, quite simply, to apologize. I have to admit that I was not always as disciplined as I should have been and as you could have expected from me. And now there is a large group of us who have missed you since your departure.”*

Captain Escard adds two days later: *“Since the day I saw you leave us so abruptly lying on your stretcher, there has hardly been a meal at which we haven’t talked about you. Fortunately, 24 hours after your evacuation we were reassured of your condition. We celebrated Christmas day with the preparation and execution of a relief mission that ended up being frustrating because of the trucks not wanting to start. It is freezing cold, a pretty cold very dry that is promised to be about 20 degrees below zero according to the inhabitants. Thank god we have been at rest since yesterday, which means that very few men are outside – but there are still lots of constraints:*

Little posts here and there, guard close to the Mikado and especially the organization of the land. Naturally, nothing had been done before us and we must undertake the organization of a position for three sections – the resistance of the frozen ground will not allow for work to be done.” Worn out by fighting, the Captain Escard would be replaced by the Lieutenant Agostini at the end of January.

On the night of New Year’s Eve, the Germans launched operation Nordwind to the north of the Pocket of Colmar in an attempt to take back Strasbourg, but they clashed with the French forces determined to avoid surrendering this highly symbolic town. The enemy pulled back, and in accordance with the plans from General Dwight D. Eisenhower, the priority was now cleaning up the west bank of the Rhine before penetrating into the heart of Germany. The 1st French Army therefore received the mission to “reduce” the Pocket of Colmar. For the offensive expected on January 20, 1945, it would be composed of the following: On one side the 1st French Corps (General Béthouart) including the 9th Colonial Infantry Division, the 4th Moroccan Mountain Division, the 2nd Moroccan Infantry Division, and the 1st Armored Division, and on the other side the 2nd French Corps (General de Goislard de Monsabert) with the 3rd Algerian Infantry Division, the 2nd and 5th Armored Divisions as well as two American divisions, the 3rd and 28th Infantry Divisions.

L’Attaque, p.123-124

The 9th Colonial Infantry Division is still at Mulhouse, in the extreme south east of the military presence, and getting ready next to the tanks of the 1st French Armored Division to attack the 716 German Infantry Division in the north. On January 20, after attending father Laudrin's mass (who gives collective absolution, a bad sign for anxious men), Raymond's former unit gathers in a hanger apart of Mulhouse station. The group has to traverse the flooded Doller river and capture Pfastatt commune, consequently by storming through a meter of snow after a terrifying artillery preparation. Despite about sixty losses, ten of which were killed, the General de Lattre de Tassigny announces in a report that Pfastatt fell in the hands of the 1st battalion of the 23rd RIC at 4 o'clock. However, the battle was far from over, as until January 31st, the unit was only able to progress a few kilometers, taking Richwiller as the Germans counter-attacked in vain on the 24th. The conquest of working class cities and the woods to the north of Mulhouse comes at the cost of heavy losses: in the single month of January 1945, 121 men from the regiment were killed in the sector.

On February 1, 1945, Chief Warrant Officer Charles Peyen (who would be killed in Tonkin in February 1947) tells Raymond about the battles: *"My commander, we are still in the middle of the fight. We are back at it again today. For the past 11 days it's been hard. It is rather hard because after dealing with the good old German Infantry in front of us, we fell upon SS soldiers and mountain hunters who came from Norway (they don't get cold). Anyway, I think it's good, everyone is happy. After the forceful passage of the Doller (again a landing exercise), we took Pfastatt, Richwiller, Meyershof. In this last place, Captain Camors [Paul Camors, who would be killed in Indochina] made sparks. Early morning counterattack : The krauts found him alert*

because a prisoner of war captured at 2 o'clock in the morning told everything. The counterattack was led by 4 companies of mountain hunters, 4 Jagdpanzers [imposing armored tank destroyers] and 6 armored cars. Results : 2 Jagdpanzers engulfed in flames, 6 armored cars destroyed (in which one was taken by the driver of the Jeep called saying he had taken the entire crew prisoner alone and brought back the armored car – it is now the colonel's command post car), 99 prisoners (in which 1 commander), about 130 to 140 dead at the Fritz. On our side: 1 officer killed [Lieutenant Albert Leloup, 29 years old, died January 25 at Meyershof], 3 soldiers, and 5 or 6 injured. It would seem we have a lot of good luck because we had great results with the fewest losses: 130 from the battalion since the start, including many minor injuries” Charles then lists some of the “formers who are no longer”, as well as “about thirty others” : The sergeants Hippolyte Gueppe (32 years old), Pierre Marcel Chevrier (23 years old) and Albert Schneider (23 years old) killed on January 20th, and especially the sergeant Jacques Maurice Blot killed on the 30th. Jacques must have been one of the youngest French soldiers killed in 1945, as he was killed the day before he turned 16... A volunteer from the resistance, he joined the colonial regiment with the FFI coming from the Paris region. He is now buried at the Tiefengraben necropolis. Charles concludes however: “The moral is excellent. It was a shame that it was so cold, and that there was so much snow (about 50 cm). Captain Tesnieres had terrible luck. He rolled over an anti-tank mine in a Jeep and nobody was injured. We hope that The Pocket of Colmar will be cleared soon.”

The cost of battle rises (21,000 French and American losses) with the slowing of the Allied advance. Because of this, the General de Lattre de Tassigny asks for reinforcement and gets the

75th Infantry and 12th American Armored Division. The latter splits the pocket from north to south and meets up with the Moroccan 4th mountain division in Rouffach on February 5th, precipitating the end of the battle. The 9th Colonial Infantry Division forks towards the east, ready to capture its objective Ensisheim, on the Rhone au Rhin canal which is reached on February 7th. One week later, the battalion doctor writes to Raymond: *“My commander and dear friend, I hope you can excuse the late response to your letter from January 20th. You will completely understand when I tell you that I received it while in the thick of it! And you know what it is, there is hardly any leisure time to write right now nor is the mind in a particularly good state... We have once again walked towards glory! And you better believe that we all have missed you during your absence. A lot of losses, but very good results. Captain Camors is again injured, but its minor – stationed at the 3rd! Feyler hurt too, moderately [at the beginning of the attack on the Doller heading for their objective “the green house”]. The brave Leloup killed very beautifully. Father Laudrin is still a lion, only wound was to his overcoat!”*

Du Rhin Au Danube, pp. 124-125

Chief warrant officer Peyen resumed his correspondence with Raymond on February 26th: *“It took 17 days for us to end the battle of Alsace after being the first to arrive in Chalampé [northeast of Mulhouse, on the Alsace grand canal and the Rhin, serving as a border with Germany]... Currently, and after enjoying a little break for five days in Mulhouse, we are in a pretty village near Strasbourg. The 3rd battalion is already lined up, but it’s much easier than on the Doubs. The instructions begins again, the gaps are filled except for the leaders, and the moral is greatly improved. I think it is unhealthy to go backwards, everyone comes back*

disgusted and maybe even a little soft. I think we shouldn't give permission. All in all, everything is going very well anyways. There is follow-through with the "Orders of the Day," and everyone shouts Down with the Krauts."

The colonel Jean Landouzy, commander of the 23rd Colonial Infantry Regiment, writes to Raymond on March 6th: *"You have undoubtedly heard talk of the recent battle of Alsace. The 9th Colonial Infantry Division returned with a citation in the order of the army. Only that. As for 23, it was marvelous. Your battalion in particular had a good go, unbridled for 21 consecutive days of fast-paced combat. The little guys have been splendid – As for the officers, you know them."*

This colonel will end up being decorated with the Distinguished Service Cross (the second highest American military honor after the Medal of Honor), for his heroism throughout the battle of Alsace and with the Karlsruhe prize on April 4, 1945.

The division goes back up to Alsace, and on April 2, 1945, entering Germany from Leimersheim after crossing the Rhine with force. They then run along the border to the south, capturing Karlsruhe two days later, and then the slopes of the Black Forest and Baden-Baden. The progression is difficult, the enemy digging in behind a fortified Siegfried line and neighboring villages transformed into bastions held the Volksturm, a jumble of old men and fanatic teenagers armed with "panzerfaust" (anti-tank weapons). At Wolfartsweier, a company of the second battalion of the Colonial Infantry Regiment even loses all of its officers.

In Raymond's former battalion, the situation is not any better, as the captain Thiers describes to him on April 18th: *"Constantly in the thick of it. We have been in the land of the Krauts since April 4th and we go full force nonstop. What a shame that you are not with us... We miss you more and more. Luckily, I learned a lot from the time with you. I assure you that I use all this knowledge! Courrois is back with us but has been reassigned to the 2nd battalion. Poor Corvez was killed yesterday afternoon [Paul Jean Maurice Corvez, 34 years old, killed in Oberkirch]. The blacklist is growing and despite our rapid advancements there have been some hard hits. Agostini has been shrouded in glory twice and nominated for the Legion of Honor! Not so for L.! Yesterday, before the attack, he was injured in the foot while handling his submachine gun... He was evacuated!"*

Other French units are experiencing particularly bloody fighting in the surroundings of the Black-Forest, like Paul Castany's 2nd Dragons. He recounts this terrible experience: *"To the south of Spire, we traversed the Rhin on April 1, 1945. The Genius was able to install boats so the tanks would have a floating bridge to cross. It was bombarding from all sides, but we were the first to make it over with commanding officers. We traversed the Rhin and we went back down the length of the Black Forest, close to Baden-Baden, to hem in the Germans that were in the forest. The Germans that were blocked in tried to get past us, doing anything and everything to get out of there: there were massacres and we lost people. We were attacked from all sides. I got lucky, because once we're off to war, it all comes down to chance. The friend next to us was killed, we wonder when it will be our turn and that's it. When we are young we follow, we follow the movement, but we can't say that we weren't afraid. When we see the dead, it puts us on*

guard so to speak. We live one day at a time. We didn't talk to civilians, we didn't see any. We slept wherever we could, in the truck or an empty house, you figure it out and that's it. We ate American rations for a week... Ah, the cans of what were called "beans," with "beef" or canned meat, we were fed up, eh! When we entered a house in Germany and found a ham or something, that was a treat! Finally, we made the slow descent to Constance Lake and reached the Swiss border on May 8th." Paul will participate in the occupation of Austria at Innsbruck. He will die in 2019, just two months after giving his first public and only testimony to the author.

Elements of Raymond's 9th Colonial Infantry Division will soon reach Donaueschingen, the source of the Danube river, which will give the 1st French Army its future nickname "Rhine and Danube". The regiment, meanwhile, will continue its progression towards the south along the Rhin until reaching the Swiss border. On April 24th, the enemy will block the Haut-Rhine valley in Lörrach (just north of Bâle), and Raymond's former battalion will lead the attack. Over the course of the last month of the war, the 9th Colonial Infantry Division will have wiped out four German divisions, taken 25,000 prisoners, and captured or destroyed 200 canons. But Raymond's men will not profit from the peace for very long... In fact, at the end of World War II, many French colonies will reclaim their impence: France will lose Indochina after nine long years of war, which the 23rd Colonial Infantry Regiment will engage in starting October, 1945.

Raymond, meanwhile, will be promoted to Officer of the Legion of Honor in 1950 and then Commander of the Legion of Honor (1957) as a disabled veteran: honors in addition to his many medals (war cross with distinction, combatant cross, medal of the French expeditionary corps in

Italy, of Victory 1939-1945, colonial medal "Levant", injured medal...). Raymond died in April 2001 in Saint-Palais-sur-Mer (Charente-Maritime). The town, of which he was mayor, paid homage to him by christening a park in his name.