

trate Thunderbolts and Mustangs, but that was not enough. Pretending to be an officer of the 78th Infantry Division, one English-speaking German tried to vector some P-47's away from their targets. One Thunderbolt pilot, detecting something faintly guttural about the voice and desiring to check, asked him to sing "Mairzy Doats." That stopped the impostor cold.

Meanwhile XIX TAC aircraft were decisively beating the Luftwaffe in the air and on the ground. On 14 August, the Germans flew fewer than 100 single-engine fighter sorties, presumably because they were trying to evacuate the battered airfields around Paris. The next day they came back in patrols of 20 to 80 aircraft, piloted by aggressive but inadequately trained young men who could not even take proper evasive action. Even though our bases were all but closed in by low clouds, and even though Germans in some engagements outnumbered Mustangs by 10 to 1, the Luftwaffe took its customary lacing. Fifteen German planes were destroyed on the 15th and 13 more on the 16th.

So rapidly did the Germans evacuate some airfields that they had no time for demolition. On 17 August repairs were expedited at the big military and civilian airfield at Chateaudun, and 10 days later XIX TAC moved in and used it as a permanent base for a reconnaissance group and a refueling and rearming station for fighter-bombers.

By this time, with Allied air superiority everywhere obvious to the enemy frontline soldier, the GAF had to make a drastic and farfetched justification to keep the German infantry and armor from grumbling. A document captured at Angers, issued by the military governor of France for dissemination to troops, said, "The ground soldier in action on the invasion front feels himself depressed most of all by enemy air superiority. In spite of the numerical inferiority of our air force, there have been successes accomplished, however, which the single soldier, tied down to his narrow section of the front, cannot appreciate."

About the time this apologetic proclamation was issued, Mustangs and Thunderbolts were running into sharp combat every day. The veteran 354th Group, which had been worsting the Luftwaffe steadily over Germany and France since December 1943, always took a prominent part in air battles ranging from the front to miles behind it. The Germans tried everything—even fake dogfights, aerial equivalent of the football Statue of Liberty play. On one occasion two FW-190's with no markings and three ME-109's with faked United States markings chased each other around the sky, then all dived and strafed an American armored column.

On 25 August the GAF fighter force in France was broken. In combat over France and Germany, in strafing attacks on Luftwaffe airfields, fighter-bombers of the Eighth and Ninth Air Forces destroyed 178 German aircraft, probably destroyed 13 others, and damaged 63, making a total of 254 enemy planes permanently or temporarily put out of action. XIX TAC claimed more than one-quarter of the day's victories: 36-1-8 the air, 18 destroyed and 4 probably destroyed on the ground. All the victories in the air were won by the 354th which was active all day long in a series of single-squadron fighter sweeps against enemy airfields north and northeast of Paris. The Mustang pilots were always outnumbered, yet nearly always won. Late in the day 12 of them slashed into 45 FW's and ME's and destroyed 13 enemy fighters for a loss of 4. Another squadron blew up 13 single-engine enemy fighters on the ground at fields near Beauvais and Reims.

At dusk on 25 August, Thunderbolts and Mustangs saw enemy aircraft with belly gasoline tanks moving eastward, as their

complex of bases around Paris fell into the hands of Third Army spearheads. Within a few days the Luftwaffe was driven farther east as General Patton's advances made GAF bases along the Marne untenable. The remaining German fighter force in eastern France was compelled everywhere to decamp and to start operating from bases behind the Siegfried Line. As August ended, XIX TAC had to seek enemy aircraft on the ground, since they rarely took to the air. On 28 August, fighter bombers first destroyed 11 German aircraft by bombing and strafing a field near Neufchateau, then sighted a train carrying 113 Ju-88 fuselages and shot up every one of them.

Fifth Phase The end, when it came, was rapid. On 19 August, fighter pilots reported fires and explosions in Paris, and above and below the city, Third Army advance elements were striking out in a bold encircling move. South of Paris, the Germans tried to hold out in positions on high ground, but they were unable to check the relentless advance of the Patton eastward bound columns.

The next day pilots on armed reconnaissance saw the highways, the railway lines, and the marshaling yards behind Paris clogged with trucks, trains, and animal drawn vehicles, all hurrying toward the Reich. West of Paris, disorganized units were trying to get across the Seine any way they could. Aircraft of XIX TAC dropped delay fused bombs, set for detonation during the night, on south bank ferry slips. They exploded at the peak of the Seine crossings, in the night's darkest hours. Within Paris, the Germans announced that rioting had broken out and in a desperate order of the day they threatened to shoot any person participating in the disturbances.

The situation was extremely fluid. North of the capital, Thunderbolts gave armor and infantry the usual close cooperation against the few targets remaining. They demolished tanks, barges carrying tanks across the Seine, and isolated German machine-gun nests which sought to cover the river crossings. On 23 August, with Army spearheads more than 60 miles east of Paris, the French Second Armored Division and the First Army's Fourth Infantry Division rode into the capital to complete the official occupation.

In the east, new hunting grounds developed for the fighter-bombers, nearer and nearer the Siegfried Line. Firing rockets, dropping bombs, shooting machine guns, XIX TAC aircraft smashed cars in ammunition convoys, 105 millimeter big guns guarding the German retreat, still more motor vehicles, and every day, as enemy fuel and vehicle shortages decreased motor transport, more and more animal drawn carts and weapons. Combat operations planned a short range project in the Melun Provins area, designed to cut off the still open escape routes of Germans trapped south of the Loire. Everywhere they cut rails and blew up trains and in the south, as in the north, the enemy retreated with heavy losses and in great confusion.

Far to the west, General Weyland's aircraft helped the determined VIII Corps to smoke out the obstinate defenders of Brest. In 2 slashing days the fighter-bombers destroyed or damaged 14 enemy naval and merchant vessels in the Brest harbor, knocked out eight gun positions, and saturated a defended area that had been marked by the white smoke of fire bombs. Brest doggedly continued to hold out, but the fortress was to fall in September.

Toward the end of the month General Patton's army had crossed the Marne on a 90 mile front and was rolling toward the Aisne. Chateau-Thierry and other battlefields in the Marne-Aisne region, which had taken months to conquer in World War I, fell to the Third Army in a few hours. As August ended, 70,000 Germans had passed through Third Army prison cages, and the Patton forces had crossed