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VISITS CORSICA

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FIELD HANDBOOK OF THE

U. S. S. SPRINGFIELD

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Introduction

Situated 100 miles to the South of Nice the island of Corsica is becoming an increasingly popular tourist resort for those who want to get away from the hustle of the big cities. Similar in beauty and atmosphere to Elba and Corfu, although considerably larger in area, (300 miles wide 135 miles long) it is still one place that is very much native and unspoiled.

Although one of France's departments (the equivalent of an American state), the Corsicans consider themselves a separate group and not really Frenchmen. Part of this attitude stems from the numerous invasions which they have suffered since 500 B.C. and the treatment by the captors who have used the island without regard for the feelings of the people. Because of the invasions the people are often mixtures of Italians and French.

Remote from many of the modern ideas of our society, Corsica is a prime example of a family oriented culture. The individual does not make his own decisions; they are made by a family council. Every family owns a house which somehow manages to find a place for all sons, daughters and eventually, children and grandchildren.

There is almost no industry on the island, and there is no school which goes beyond the tenth grade. Whereas this would have satisfied a Corsican of a decade ago, now many of the younger generation leave for the mainland or South American where opportunities are greater. However, in retirement many return with their monthly checks from the government for which many of them work in France.

Paris has exhibited some strange positions in regard to this enchanting island where the mountains rise up to 9000 feet above the nearby sandy beaches. In 1960 the government subsidized tourist trips to help Corsica's economy and at the same time announced underground atomic tests in one of her abandoned silver mines. Napoleon used to say during his final captivity on St. Helena that he could tell when he came within 5 miles of this island where he was born by the aromatic odors it emitted. The "maquis," or jungle thicket, covers many of the sloping hill sides, and the plants give off an aroma which is both pleasant and totally unique.

One of the high points of the island is found about an hour away from Ajaccio past

the Gulf of Sagone and the village of Piana. There the adventuring tourist will find "Les Calanches" the pink granite fjords that some have termed "breathtaking" especially insoullikely a place as this.

Corsica is still in the budding phase of tourism and hence all the conveniences may not always be present. But there can be no doubt about the splendor of the countryside or the sand of the beaches surrounded by the cities of Europe. Corsica is at the stage now that in twenty years one can look back and say, "Oh yes, I remember it when..."

History

In the early centuries of the Christian era Corsica formed one of the senatorial provinces of the Roman empire, and was used as a place of banishment for political offenders.

With the disintegration of the empire Corsica changed hands and was ravaged many times. Vandals, Goths, and Lombards came and went.

After the destruction of the Vandal power Corsica became part of the East Roman empire. This rule too, was unhappy. In 713 the Moslems from the northern coast of Africa made their first descent. Corsica remained nominally attached to the East Roman empire until Charlemagne conquered it. Moorish incursions from Spain soon followed, and in 810 the Moors gained temporary possession. Although repelled they returned again and again and in 828 the defense of Corsica was entrusted to Boniface II count of the Tuscan march. He built a fortress in the south of the island which formed the nucleus of the town (Bonifacio) that bears his name.

Later the period of feudal anarchy began, a general conflict of petty lords each eager to expand his domain. The counts of Cinarca (to the northeast of Ajaccio), especially aimed at establishing their supremacy over the whole island. To counteract this and similar ambitions, in the 11th century, a sort of national diet was held, and Sambucuccio, lord of Aiando, put himself at the head of a movement which resulted in confining the feudal lords to the southern part of the island and in establishing in the rest, henceforth known as the Terra di Comune, a republic composed of autonomous parishes.

Toward the end of the century the Popes laid claim to the island, the Corsican clergy supported the claim, and in 1077 the Corsicans declared themselves subjects of the Holy

See in the presence of the apostolic legate Landolfo, bishop of Pisa. Corsica valued by the Pisans as by the Vadals as an inexhaustible storehouse of materials for their fleet, flourished exceedingly under the enlightened rule of the great commercial republic. Causes of dissension, however, remained abundant. The Corsican bishops repented their reversal of the paper gift to the rivals with whom they were disputing the supremacy of the seas. In 1138 Innocent II divided the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the island between the archbishops of Pisa and Genoa. This gave the contest between the Pisans and Genoese great influence in Corsica, and the contest between the Pisans and Genoese began. It was not, however, until 1195 that the Genoese, by capturing Bonifacio, a nest of pirates preying on the commerce of both republics, actually gained a footing in the country.

Throughout the 13th century the struggle between Pisans and Genoese continued, reproducing in the island the feud of Ghibellines and Guelphs that was desolating Italy. Pope Boniface VIII added to the complication by investing King James of Aragon with the sovereignty of Corsica and of Sardinia. Pisa was shattered. Genoa and Aragon carried on the struggle, each taking advantage of the traditional dissensions. Finally the Bank of San Giorgio, the powerful commercial corporation established at Genoa in the 14th century took over the administration of the island; by 1511, the bank had driven the Spaniards from Corsica and gained the secure possession of the island.

The power which the bank had won by ruthless cruelty, it exercised in the spirit of the narrowest and most short-sighted selfishness. Only a shadow of the native institutions was suffered to survive, and no adequate system of administration was set up in the place of that which had been suppressed. In the absence of justice the blood feud of vendetta grew and took root in Corsica just at the time when, elsewhere in Europe, the progress of civilization was putting an end to private war. Concerned only with squeezing taxes out of a recalcitrant population, the agents of the bank neglected the defense of the coast, along which the Barbary pirates harried and looted at will. To all these woes were added, in the 16th century, pestilences and disastrous floods, which tended still further to impoverish and barbarize the country.

In these circumstances King Henry II of France conceived the one project of conquering the island. Three years' confused fighting from 1553 to 1556 ended in the conclusion of a truce which left Corsica in the hands of the French, who proceeded to set up a tolera-

ble government. In 1559, however, the island was restored to the Bank of San Giorgio, from which it was at once taken over by the Genoese republic.

Corsica remained under the government of Genoa until 1729, in a peace due to lassitude and despair rather than contentment.



From 1729 to 1755, the history of Corsica was again turbulent. The Corsicans revolted against the Genoese, and the struggle eventually became part of the great rivalry between France and Great Britain. About the most colorful event of the period was the "rule" of the German adventurer Baron Theodor Van Neuhop who arrived on March 12, 1736. The Baron's rule lasted only to the following November.

In 1755, the Corsican hero Pasquale Paoli was invited to come from Naples and assume command of the island to fill the power vacuum left by the decline of Genoa. The struggle between Britain and France continued to play its part in Corsican events, but Paoli's rule was a great success.

After five years of bitter fighting, Genoa recognized that it had been worsted in the long contest, and on May 15, 1768, signed a treaty selling the sovereignty of the island to France.

For 20 years Corsica, while preserving many of its old institutions, remained a dependency of the French crown. Then came the Revolution, and the island was incorporated in France as a separate department. Paoli, recalled from exile by the national assembly returned in 1790 to Corsica, where he was received with immense enthusiasm as "father of the country."

Paoli had already made up his mind to raise the standard of revolt against France. But although the consulat at Corte elected him President, Corsican opinion was by no means united. Napoleon Bonaparte indignantly rejected the idea of a breach with France, and the Bonapartes were henceforth ranked with his enemies. Paoli then appealed for assistance to the British Government, which dispatched a considerable force headed by Horatio Nelson who lost his eye in the battle. By the summer of 1794, after hard fighting, the island was reduced, and in June the Corsican assembly formally offered the sovereignty

to King George III.

In 1796 Bonaparte, after his victorious Italian campaign, sent an expedition against Corsica. The British, weary of a somewhat thankless task, made no great resistance, and in October the island was once more in French hands. It was again occupied by Great Britain for a short time in 1814, but in the settlement of 1815 was restored to the French crown. Its history henceforth was part of that of France.

For France the 19th century was a period of prosperity and Corsicans who were unable to make their living on the island could easily emigrate to France or its colonies. Many did so, enlisting in the army, in the police and the customs. Corsica, called by the French, Ile de Beauté, gained also from the increasing tourist traffic, especially remained loyal to France in spite of a Corsican autonomist movement launched in the 1930's with the support from Fascist Italy. During WW II the Fascist claim that Corsica was Italian found no support on the island. In November 1942, after the Allied landings in North Africa, when the so-called free zone of France was occupied by the Germans. Soon after the Italian armistice, fighting started between the Italians and Germans. Free French units landed at Ajaccio in September 1943, and together with the Italians forced the Germans to retreat to the mainland. The Italians soon after left for Sardinia leaving the island to the French.

Ajaccio

Ajaccio, the capital of Corsica is located on the west coast of the island and has a population of 32,000 inhabitants. The city occupies a sheltered position at the foot of wooden hills on the north shore of the Gulf of Ajaccio. The harbor, to the east, is protected on the south by a peninsula which carries the citadel. To the southwest of the peninsula lies the Place Bonaparte, frequented by winter visitors attracted by the mild climate.

An old city, Ajaccio dates from the seventh century. It was first taken by Charles of Anjou in 1274. In 1492, after a long and troubled existence, the city was rebuilt by Genoese settlers approximately two miles from its original site. In 1768, Ajaccio came under French rule and in 1810, it was made the capital of the island department.

During WW I the port served as a naval base for Allied fleets. After the fall of France in WW II, it was occupied by Italian

troops and later German forces. The city was damaged during the fighting in the fall of 1943 when Corsican patriots, who had been carrying on a guerrilla war against enemy occupying forces, joined French regulars and United States units to force the enemy either to surrender or evacuate the island.

Ajaccio is the birthplace of Napoleon and his 3 younger brothers. The house in which he was born is still in a state of good pres-



ervation and has become the property of the Nation. The associations of Napoleon with the town are emphasized everywhere by street names and statues.

The city is the handsomest in Corsica. It contains a cathedral, a communal college, a public library and a botanical garden. In the commercial world it is famous for its coral and sardine fisheries and also has a trade in wine, grain, olive oil and fruits. The island is one of the few locations where "vendetta," or the taking of private vengeance for the blood of a relative, still exists although it is against the law. For the visitors own good remember the local custom which requires the Corsican women to remain aloof from strangers.

At present Ajaccio and the southern shore of the Gulf of Ajaccio are being developed as a summer colony and tourist area for wealthy visitors. There are some luxurious villas in the area, and first class motels, hotels and apartment houses are being built. The commercial airfield with frequent service to the continent is convenient to both Ajaccio and the southern shore of the Gulf. A large modern terminal building was dedicated in 1961.

Tours

Since Ajaccio is the birthplace of Napoleon, there are many monuments, several libraries and museums dedicated to the Napoleonic era. On the second floor of the City Hall there is a collection of Napoleon's do-

cuments and other articles of interest. The birthplace of Napoleon, last restored in 1827, is located on Napoleon Boulevard between Place Foch and Bouard. Sight-seeing tours in open, reclining-seat motor coaches may be organized to all parts of the island.

Clubs and Bars

During the summer months, the majority of the establishments along the seaside on the road to Parata Tower are open and have dancing on their terraces. Music is furnished by radio or phonographs. The social customs of the Corsicans are very rigid. The eligible young ladies are chaperoned, except for formal affairs where the Prefect or other high officials attend. There is a casino that has nightly dancing, where enlisted men may dance with local chaperoned girls. There is also some gaming at the casino, although uniformed personnel are not allowed to participate. The local drink, "Patis", is estimated to contain 45% alcohol. Rose wine is considered excellent for meals and is favored by most.

Beaches

Between the city and the Sanguanaire Islands are a number of small beaches. The nearest is the Plage de St. Francois in front of the Casino Municipal. A bus connects most of them with the city during the summer. Bi-



cycles may be rented and are a convenient mode of transportation to the beaches. There are also several beaches within walking distance of the piers. Swimming is considered very good.



Athletics

The sports pavilion along the waterfront is known as the Athletic Park or Ajaccio Park. Two softball games may be played at opposite ends of the field simultaneously. The French Navy has a number of "Sharpie" class sail boats which may be used for racing. Basketball games may be played at the French Naval Air Base. One tennis court is available. Arrangements are made through the French Naval Supply Officer or his assistant. Personnel interested in wild boar hunting should contact the French Naval officials. Local citizens act as guides and provide guns and ammunition. Good trout fishing is available within 15 miles of the city.



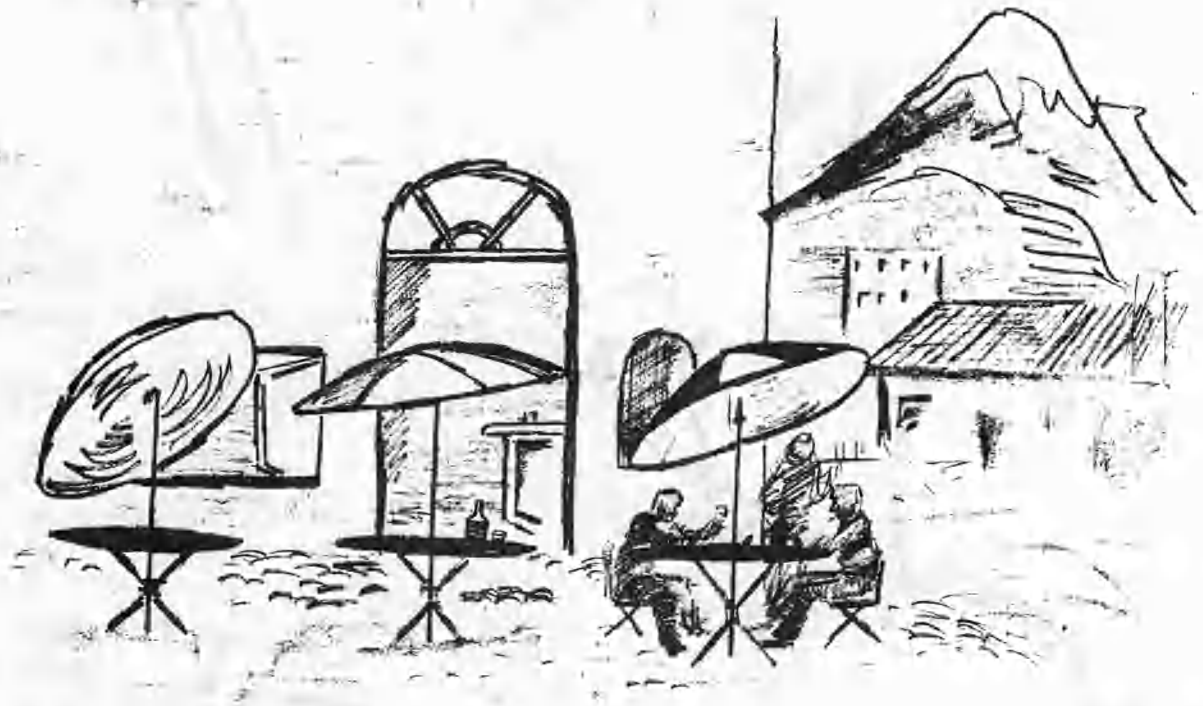
Shopping

Shopping is limited as there are no local products except for Napoleonic souvenirs. Although there are a good number of excellent shops, many even highly sophisticated, the prices are high due to the import of merchandise from Continental Europe.



Churches

The Grand Seminary usually has at least one English-speaking priest who may come aboard ship to conduct services and hear confessions. Personnel from Navy ships are cordially invited to attend any of the services at the Catholic churches in the city. Of special interest is the church in which Napoleon was christened. There is also one Protestant church in the city.



Restaurant

Much of the cooking is done with olive oil and pimentos, giving the foods a distinctly Italian flavor. Among the notable Corsican "charcuterie" products are figatelli (small dry sausages made of pork), salami sausage, pork lonzu (filet) or cappa (shoulder). Pork, lamb, even blackbird, stews and mushrooms will be found in great variety. Ham, leg of lamb with garlic and a brandy sauce and artichoke hearts stuffed with chopped meat and topped with Brocciu (a delicious native goat's milk cheese) are other island specialties. Delicious lobsters, crabs, oysters and sea urchins are available. Ziminu is a Corsican bouillabaisse made with an infinite variety of seafood. Fresh trout is also plentiful.

Recommended Restaurants are:

Au Plat d'Or - 1'Escale 5 Place Foch
 Cote d'Azur - 12 Cours Napoleon, inexpensive
 U Fucona - 1 Rue Campi, good regional dishes
 Chez Pietri - 59 Rue Fesch (closed on Sundays)
 Restaurant La Crem a' Illere and Restaurant de Gourmets serve continental style food.

Cinemas

There are four motion-picture theaters in Ajaccio (French films or translated texts).

Hotels

Hotels are open year round. Prices are rather high for food and drink as well as rooms. Bar service at the hotels is considerably more expensive than at the various restaurants, cafes and bars in the city. The following hotels are recommended:

Grand Hotel et Continental - 20 Bis Cours
 Solemare - 14 Blvd. Lantivy
 Etrangers - Rue Rossi
 Imperial - 6 Blvd. Albert I
 Belvedere - 16 Rue du Marechal Ornano
 Hotel des Golfe - behind Police Headquarters.

Transportation

Very few taxis are available, although there is a local bus going from Chappelle des Grecs to the French Naval Air Base every 15 minutes.

Ajaccio

