

**CHAPTER IX**  
***The V Corps Lodgment***  
***(7-18 June)***

***Securing the Beachheads***

Supreme in the air, the Allies began on D Day to build up a similarly crushing superiority on the ground. By the end of 6 June 1944 First Army had succeeded in landing most of eight and a third infantry regiments-only a little less than planned. For operations on 7 June five divisions were ashore and operational (although one, the 29th, lacked one of its regiments until later in the day). All of these divisions were seriously deficient in transport, tank support, artillery, and above all supplies. The worst situation was in the V Corps zone where, of 2,400 tons of supplies planned to be unloaded during D Day, only about 100 tons actually came in. Ammunition shortage was grave. Both beaches on D plus 1 were still under enemy artillery fire. On OMAHA pockets of enemy riflemen still held out at various points along the coast; beach obstacles, even after work by the engineers during low tide of the afternoon of D Day, were still only about a third cleared; beach exits had not been opened as scheduled nor vehicle parks established inland on the scale contemplated.

Nowhere in First Army zone had initial objectives been fully achieved. In the V Corps zone not only had the two assault regiments stopped far short of their objectives along the beachhead maintenance line, but they were so badly chewed up and disorganized by the hard fighting that they were scarcely capable of continuing the attack as planned. Units of VII Corps had been more successful in staking out a beachhead large enough to remove the beaches from direct enemy fire and to provide sufficient space for maneuver and build-up. The 4th Division had taken only light casualties and was in relatively good condition for subsequent attacks. Nevertheless the area was considerably smaller than desired and the initial efforts to push it out westward across the Merderet and southward toward a junction with V Corps were barred by the hard-fighting 91st Division.

The operations in the two days following the landings were a continuation of the assault phase as all units sought to reach their D-Day objectives. The exhaustion of the 16th and 116th Infantry Regiments in the V Corps zone required some reshuffling of regimental and battalion missions, and, in the VII Corps zone, missions of the 4th Division had to be tempered to conform to the realities of enemy opposition.

In effect, the V Corps attack continued on 7 June with two divisions abreast although the regiments of the 29th Division did not formally come under command of Maj. Gen. Charles H. Gerhardt, the division commander, until

1700. Gerhardt had landed on the evening of D Day and with General Cota planned and directed the operations of the 115th and 116th Infantry Regiments during D plus 1. The third regiment of the division, the 175th Infantry, began landing at 1230 on 7 June, two hours later than scheduled, and was ashore by 1630. The 29th Division operated generally west of a line through St. Laurent and Formigny; the 1st Division, with all three of its regiments in line, operated generally to the east.

The principal 1st Division attack on 7 June was the 18th Infantry's drive southward toward its D-Day objectives: the high ground north of Trevieres and the Mandeville-Mosles area south of the Aure River. For this attack the 3d Battalion, 26th Infantry, was attached. The other tasks confronting the 1st Division were to make contact with the British and to clean out the Colleville area. To accomplish the first, two battalions (the 1st of the 26th Infantry and the 3d of the 16th Infantry) under control of the 16th attacked southeastward with the mission of taking the high ground west and southwest of Port-en-Bessin, including Mt. Cauvin. The clean-up job was assigned to the 1st and 2d Battalions of the 16th Infantry. The 2d Battalion, 26th Infantry, was held in division reserve.

Despite wide dispersion of the attacking battalions and scanty artillery and tank support, all units made good progress against slight and sporadic resistance. A marked degree of enemy disorganization had been observed beginning on the afternoon of D Day. Expected counter-attacks had not materialized and the enemy's morale seemed low. The 1st Division realized that it was through the coastal crust and at the moment had to deal only with remnants of the 352d Division. It was thought, however, that an armored counterattack might be in the making.

On the right, Huppain and the forward slopes of the ridge line 1,000 yards north of Mt. Cauvin were occupied. But the enemy, strongly opposing simultaneous British attacks from the east, continued to hold a narrow wedge between American and British beachheads through Port-en-Bessin and south along the valley of the Drome River. In the center the 18th Infantry made two crossings of the Aure, the 2d Battalion occupying Mosles and the 3d, Mandeville. The 1st Battalion, effectively supported by five tanks of the 741st Tank Battalion, captured the high ground at Engranville after a fight with something less than a company of German infantry which lasted most of the afternoon.

The success of the 18th Infantry attack was somewhat qualified by the inability of the 3d Battalion, 26th Infantry, on the division's right to take Formigny. Although opposition by exhausted elements of the 916th Regiment was not heavy. the battalion was unable to get moving.

It was not until the next morning that the enemy was driven out of

**Formigny by a company of 18th Infantry and some tanks attacking from the Engranville position.**

**On the German side the 352d Division at the end of D Day had been chiefly concerned with its open flank where the British were driving into the hole opened by the collapse of the left wing of the 716th Division. Throughout 7 June there was little General Kraiss could do to repair the damage, for his last organic reserves had had to be committed in the center where the 916th Regiment was strained to the breaking point. At noon he requested and secured the attachment of the 30th Mobile Brigade. The brigade, which came up from Coutances on bicycles, arrived only late in the afternoon, its young, inexperienced recruits tired in body and spirit from constant attacks by low-flying planes along the route. One battalion (the 513th) was committed in the vicinity of Formigny to strengthen the 916th Regiment.**

**The brigade, less this battalion, assembled northwest of Bayeux and was attached to the 726th Regiment with orders to attack the flank of British forces advancing on Bayeux. Action of German units in the Bayeux area during 7 June was so confused that no coherent story can be told in detail. The whole flank of the 352d Division from the Drome River to the division boundary east of St. Leger was falling apart. The disintegration, furthermore, was so rapid that reports reaching division headquarters were late and scattered. As evidence of the confusion, it is worth contrasting the German command picture of the action with what actually happened.**

**In the early afternoon following the commitment of the 30th Mobile Brigade, General Kraiss's headquarters believed that the 352d Division held a thin defensive arc north and northeast of Bayeux from about Vaux-sur-Aure to Sommervieu. From left to right the units engaged were the 30th Mobile Brigade (-), elements of the 2d Battalion, 916th Regiment, and elements of the 3d Battalion, 1352d Artillery Regiment. Having expended their last rounds, these units had destroyed their guns and fought as infantry. South of this line there were only scratch forces, the most important of which were remnants of Kampfgruppe Meyer (2d Battalion, 915th Regiment and the Fuesilier Battalion, 352d Division), thought to be defending weakly northeast and north of Tilly-sur-Seulles. The Bayeux defense was believed to have held during the day, despite penetrations by British armor and a British thrust through Sommervieu which was reported to have split the 2d Battalion, 916th, from the artillery unit. At midnight, the 352d Division and Seventh Army supposed that the main British advance had been checked short of Bayeux and that countermeasures were in process to avert the fall of the city. While the 352d Division commander, General Kraiss, seriously doubted that those measures would succeed in view of the depletion of his own forces and their exhaustion after constant pounding by Allied aircraft and naval artillery, he still did not know the true extent of the collapse on his right.**

The collapse was, in fact, almost complete. In the morning of 7 June, before the arrival of the 30th Mobile Brigade on the Drome River, two battalions of the British 56th Infantry Brigade (50th Division) entered Bayeux and by noon had cleared the city. The British then pushed out along the southwest road to occupy the high ground at Monunirel. The third battalion of the brigade in the meantime advanced about two miles southwest from Vaux-sur-Aure. On the coast, the 47th Royal Marine Commando captured Port-en-Bessin in a stiff fight beginning about 1600, 7 June, and not ending until the early morning hours of 8 June. East of Bayeux, if there were still German forces at nightfall on 7 June, they were no more than remnants with insufficient coherence even to form a resistance pocket within British lines. Two brigades of the 50th Division were south of the Bayeux-Caen highway. On their left and astride that highway was one brigade of the 3d Canadian Division.

The converging moves of the British 50th Division and the U.S. 1st Division on 7 June had squeezed the German 30th Mobile Brigade and elements of the 726th Regiment into a narrow corridor along the Drome River north to its junction with the Aure. On 8 June the Allied vise was tightened in an effort to destroy the enemy forces separating the British and American beachheads. On the American side, the mission of attacking to effect a junction with the British was assigned to the 26th Infantry. The attack, however, never gathered momentum, partly because of the difficulty of assembling the widely dispersed battalions, and partly because of heavy enemy resistance.

The 2d Battalion, 26th Infantry, released from division reserve at 1745, 7 June, had moved during the night from the vicinity of Etreham to the crossroads between Mosles and Tour-en-Bessin which they occupied about dawn. There they awaited the rest of the regiment throughout 8 June. The 1st Battalion, meanwhile, bogged down on 8 June at the Aure River crossing at Etreham, where the enemy fought stubbornly to hold one side of the Drome corridor. The 3d Battalion remained at Formigny during the morning until it could be relieved by a battalion of the 115th Infantry. In the early afternoon it began a march down the Bayeux highway. At 1800 it attacked through the 2d Battalion positions, and through Tour-en-Bessin to Ste. Anne which it reached shortly after midnight. During the night a violent and confused action took place at Ste. Anne as the Germans, now in process of withdrawing from the corridor, fought to keep the escape route open.

The 1st Division thus failed to trap the enemy. The British were similarly checked east of the Drome. Elements of the 50th Division attacked and cleared Sully during 8 June but were unable to hold a bridgehead over the Drome. Other elements of the division pressed in the northern end of the

enemy corridor by clearing the chateau at Fosse Soucy. But, in the face of threatened enemy counterattacks, the British withdrew to high ground near Escures.

Thanks to these actions, the German 726th Regiment during the night of 8-9 June was able to extricate the bulk of its forces. This was perhaps the first German withdrawal from coastal positions accomplished on orders from division and corps. In direct disobedience of Hitler's command to hold every inch of ground to the last bullet, the decision reflected the seriousness of the German position. During the morning of 8 June the 352d Division was out of touch with the 726th Regiment. At about 1500, however, contact was established with the regimental commander (possibly just west of Sully). He was ordered to resist stubbornly with all available forces until nightfall and then break out to the southwest and form a defensive line from Blay east to Haley and thence south to Agy. Shortly after General Kraiss had given this order, the corps commander, General Marcks, came into the 352d Division command post. Marcks was asked to approve the decision on the grounds that, if the troops in the Bayeux salient were sacrificed, the division would have nothing with which to repair the rip in its right flank and the way would be open for unopposed Allied marches to the south. "After a long pause, the Commanding General [Marcks] agreed...."

While the U.S. 1st Division and the British converged on Bayeux the 29th Division on D plus 1 still found itself entangled in the enemy's coastal defenses and spent most of the day cleaning up the fragments of enemy units that were shattered but not destroyed by the initial shock of the landings. In some areas small arms fire from groups of enemy riflemen or isolated strong points was almost continuous; American troops gradually became used to moving under the constant crack of bullets.

D Day had left the units of the 115th and 116th Infantry Regiments and a large part of the two Ranger battalions in the sliver of coast between Vierville and St. Laurent, where they were still meeting scattered opposition. The 175th Infantry was still afloat. A precondition for the division's pursuit of D-Day objectives was to expand this toehold and clear room for maneuver. The 115th Infantry, after mopping up around St. Laurent, attacked generally southwest toward Louvieres and Montigny, while the 116th Infantry with Ranger units undertook to clear the bluffs and go to the relief of the three Ranger companies isolated on Pointe du Hoe.

The 115th Infantry made slow progress. Moving on a broad front, the regiment found communication difficult. Furthermore, since the regiment still had no transport, ammunition and heavy weapons had to be hand-carried. Near the end of the day Col. Eugene N. Slappey requested the immediate establishment of army supply points as an urgent prerequisite

for further advance.

Colonel Canham's 116th Infantry, on the other hand, advanced rapidly. The regiment moved in column down the coastal road with ten tanks rolling between files of infantry. Tank fire was employed to neutralize small enemy positions and the main body of the regiment pushed on past them. Before noon Canham was only 1,000 yards from Pointe du Hoe. The Rangers awaiting relief there then numbered less than 100 effectives. Their position had seriously deteriorated during the night of 6-7 June as a result of a counterattack by the 914th Regiment which overran their outpost line and pinned the force to a strip of the headland only about 200 yards deep. While destroyer fire and the Rangers' two mortars kept the enemy at bay, the situation remained desperate until the afternoon when two LCVP's landed water, food, and ammunition and about thirty reinforcements. At the same time a series of attacks by the relieving force from the vicinity of St. Pierre-du-Mont, although frustrated by well-placed enemy artillery fire, at least eased the pressure.

By 1630 on 7 June the 175th Infantry (Col. Paul R. Goode) had come ashore and was placed in the line in the vicinity of Gruchy. Additional landings of artillery units swelled the 29th Division's artillery support to a total of twenty-nine guns belonging to five battalions. Although the achievements of the division on D plus 1 seemed slight measured in yards or vital objectives taken, in reality the crust of enemy defenses was broken and the division was set for a full-scale attack on the morrow.

The fighting in the VII Corps zone on D plus 1, like that in V Corps, aimed first at clearing the beachhead already staked out and second at pushing on toward D-Day objectives.

The only substantial advances of 7 June were made on the north flank where the two regiments of the 4th Division pushed the enemy back two miles to his strongly fortified positions at Azeville and Crisbecq. The 12th Infantry, attacking on the left from the vicinity of Beuzeville-au-Plain, reached the forward slope of hills between Azeville and le Bisson where, faced with stiffened resistance, it halted for the night to reorganize. The 2d Infantry on the right advanced directly on Crisbecq. It moved rapidly to a point between Azeville and de Dodainville where it began getting fire from the forts.

Both the Crisbecq and Azeville fortifications were permanent coastal artillery positions thoroughly organized for defense from land attack. Crisbecq was a naval battery with 210-mm. guns. Azeville contained the four French 105-mm. guns of the 2d Battery of the 1261st Artillery Regiment (army coastal artillery). At both positions massive concrete blockhouses with underground ammunition storage and interconnecting

trenches constituted the core of the fortifications and were ringed with barbed wire and defended by automatic weapons. At Azeville the main positions were outposted with concrete sentry boxes.

Attacks were launched on both forts in battalion strength and were driven back. The task at Crisbecq was especially difficult because approach to the fort was canalized along a narrow hedged trail. Open fields lay on the west, and on the east were either swamplands or steep slopes. The battalion advancing along this trail was counterattacked on the left flank and fell back in considerable confusion to re-establish a line 300 yards south of Bas Village de Dodainville. The Germans, trying to press their advantage with renewed attacks after dark, were routed by naval fire.

In the meantime, along the beach, the 3d Battalion of the 22d Infantry had been advancing northward with the mission of reducing the beach fortifications. Progress was slow and costly as troops came under small arms fire from the beach resistance points as well as artillery fire from inland batteries. About 2,000 yards were made during the day and two enemy resistance nests cleared. In the evening the battalion was brought inland as regimental reserve to guard against further counterattacks from the Azeville-Crisbecq positions. During the night the bulk of the battalion returned to the beach to receive the surrender of the enemy at Taret de Ravenoville who had been discouraged from continued resistance chiefly by naval shelling.

In the center of the VII Corps beachhead the day was occupied chiefly with eliminating the enemy forces south of Ste. Mere-Eglise who on D Day had prevented firm junction between the 8th Infantry on the south and the 82d Airborne Division. A patrol of the 82d Airborne Division got through to General Barton during the night and plans were then coordinated for the next day's operations. In the morning the 8th Infantry, on General Barton's order, attacked the Turqueville salient. Turqueville itself, held by the 795th Georgian Battalion, was hit by the 1st Battalion from the east. After a hard fight the Russian unit was talked into surrender by a Russian-speaking American captive. At the same time the 2d and 3d Battalions struck north from their positions near les Forges. The 1st and 2d Battalions were supported by two companies of the 70th Tank Battalion. The 3d Battalion on the left, advancing astride the main highway, was stopped hard at the Fauville-Ecoqueneauville ridge by machine gun and artillery fire. These troops were shaken loose, however, by the 2d Battalion's capture of Ecoqueneauville, and both units continued the advance. When they reached Ste. Mere-Eglise they found a German counterattack in progress, although they apparently did not recognize it as such.

This counterattack, which lasted most of the day, actually represented General von Schlieben's supreme effort to drive in the Cotentin beachhead

from the north. It will be recalled that the 1058th Regiment (less one battalion) had been ordered to attack Ste. Mere-Eglise on D Day. Lacking artillery, it had spent all day working through the hedgerows against spasmodic paratroop opposition and only reached Neuville by nightfall. At dawn on D plus 1 the attack was resumed. For it the 1058th now received attachments of the 456th and 457th Artillery Battalions, the 3d Battalion of the 243d Artillery Regiment (less one battery), the Seventh Army Sturm Battalion, and one company of the 709th Antitank Battalion with ten self-propelled 75-mm. guns.

After preparatory fire the Sturm Battalion began the attack astride the main highway, initially to make contact with elements of the 1058th Regiment which had been cut off in action during D Day. When contact was made, the attack was reorganized and the Sturm Battalion struck down the west side of the highway, with the 1058th on the east. It is apparent that the 1058th Regiment, demoralized in the fighting of the day before, made little progress. The Sturm Battalion, however, supported by the 709th Division assault guns, which the Americans mistook for tanks, carried the attack to the outskirts of Ste. Mere-Eglise.

To the American command the situation looked gravely threatening. Ste. Mere-Eglise, besides being important as a communications hub, was the core of the 82d Airborne Division's position, which elsewhere was still tenuous. General Ridgway, thinking that a German armored thrust was building up, called for assistance. A staff officer met Maj. Gen. J. Lawton Collins, VII Corps commander, at the 4th Division command post near Audouville-la-Hubert. Collins ordered a task force of the 746th Tank Battalion, which had been in 4th Division reserve near Reuville, to proceed at once to Ste. Mere-Eglise. The task force, commanded by Lt. Col. C. G. Hupfer and consisting of Company B, the assault gun platoon, and three headquarters tanks, drove into Ste. Mere-Eglise in the early afternoon and turned north along the Montebourg highway. A few hundred yards out of town the leading tanks came under heavy enemy artillery fire and about the same time spotted the German assault guns in column along the road. A fire fight began which, because of the column formation on each side, was inconclusive. Colonel Hupfer in the meantime reconnoitered a trail east of the main highway leading north into Neuville. Some of the 746th Battalion tanks took this route, entered Neuville, destroyed two enemy assault guns, occupied the town, and took about sixty prisoners as well as releasing nineteen captured U.S. paratroopers.

More significantly this armored slice northward cut the German forces attacking Ste. Mere-Eglise and began a panic on the German side. For the first time in the early beachhead battles the Americans were confronting the Germans with something like massed armor in a relatively small sector. When the 8th Infantry (Ñ) arrived north of Ste. Mere-Eglise with two

companies of the 70th Tank Battalion in support, about sixty American tanks were deployed in the area. While some of the tanks of the 746th Tank Battalion were moving on Neuville, Colonel MacNeely's 2d Battalion, 8th Infantry, joined Colonel Vandervoort's 2d Battalion, 505th Parachute Infantry, in an infantry-tank attack to clear the enemy in the vicinity of Sigeville. Vandervoort, with the commander of the 70th Tank Battalion, Lt. Col. John C. Welborn, directing tank operations from a jeep, advanced up the highway north of Ste. Mere-Eglise, while MacNeely swept in from the west. In the envelopment 300 of the enemy were captured or killed.

The 1058th Regiment, thus splintered by two separate American attacks and demoralized by the presence of so many American tanks, broke and pulled out in disorder. The Sturm Battalion west of the highway and out of contact with the main force also withdrew. The retreat was checked only late in the day by intervention of General Schlieben. The division commander rallied his panicky troops and began putting them into a defensive line about 1,300 yards north of Neuville. Convinced after the failure of the Ste. Mere attack that he no longer had the strength needed for a successful counterattack to reduce the American bridgehead, Schlieben determined that his policy must be simply to contain it and prevent a breakthrough to Cherbourg. He concentrated therefore on building a strong defensive line. He brought into the line a battalion of the 919th Regiment as well as the 922d Regiment (243d Division), which had arrived during the morning of 7 June. All these elements were formed into Kampfgruppe under command of Oberst Helmuth Rohrbach, commander of the 729th Regiment. Further to concentrate his strength, Schlieben ordered the withdrawal of the bulk of the troops from defenses along the east coast which were not under attack. In succeeding days this defense was to be still further reinforced until it constituted a strong barrier to the attempts of the 4th Division to push north.

After the 8th Infantry had pushed north from les Forges, the 325th Glider Infantry began landing in the area in two serials as scheduled. Although somewhat scattered and hit by ground fire, the majority of the gliders came in where planned and rapid assembly was effected. The regiment originally intended as 82d Airborne Division reserve was actually split: one battalion was committed in the re area to strengthen attacks to force a crossing there; and one battalion was attached to the 505th Parachute Infantry for operations to the north of Ste. Mere-Eglise.

While the 82d Airborne Division had thus consolidated its base, its principal D-Day assignment-the establishing of bridgeheads across the Merderet-came no nearer accomplishment. On the contrary, during the morning of 7 June it was touch and go whether a determined enemy counterattack might not break the division's hold on the east bank of the river. At about 0800 the attack of elements of the enemy 1057th Regiment

began to form against the American la Fiere position. Mortar and machine gun fire ranged in, chiefly on Company A, 505th Parachute Infantry, which was dug in to the right of the bridge. An hour or so later four Renault tanks led a German infantry advance across the bridge. The lead tank was disabled by either bazooka fire or a shell from a 57-mm. antitank gun that was supporting Company A. Although this checked the advance, the German infantry took advantage of the cover furnished by the knocked-out tank and some burned-out vehicles, which the American defenders had pulled onto the causeway during the night, to open a critical fire fight at close range. At the same time German mortar shells fell in increasing numbers among Company A's foxholes. The American platoon immediately to the right of the bridge was especially hard hit and eventually reduced to but fifteen men. These men, however, encouraged by the heroic leadership of Sgt. William D. Owens and by the presence in the thick of the fighting of division officers, including General Ridgway, held their line. The fight was halted at last by a German request for a half-hour's truce to remove the wounded. When the half hour expired, the enemy did not return to the attack. A count of Company A revealed that almost half of its combat effectives had fallen in the defense, either killed or seriously wounded.

South of the 82d Division the 101st Division with small forces of the 3d Battalion, 506th Parachute Infantry, and the 501st Parachute Infantry still held precarious positions on the north bank of the Douve. Isolated and short of ammunition, these troops were unable to go on the offensive on 7 June. They nevertheless scored a notable success during the day when together they killed or captured the whole 1st Battalion of the 6th Parachute Regiment. This battalion had advanced on regimental order to Ste. Marie-du-Mont on D Day and then had been cut off. Patrols sent out by von der Heydte on 7 June from St. Come-du-Mont became involved in fighting a few hundred yards east of the town and could not get through. The isolated battalion in the meantime was already moving south. About the middle of the afternoon paratroopers at le Port and la Barquette observed the Germans (about 800 in all) advancing through the open fields and marshes north of the river and east of the Carentan highway. In independent actions the men under Captain Shettle and those under Colonel Johnson opened fire. Caught by surprise and bluffed by demonstrations designed to impress them with overwhelming American strength, the majority of the Germans surrendered. About 250 were taken by Captain Shettle's men at le Port, about 350 by Colonel Johnson at la Barquette. More than half the remainder were killed in the fire fight preceding surrender. Only twenty-five men escaped to Carentan.

During D Day no news of the actions along the Douve had reached the 101st Division headquarters. Since capture of the Douve bridges was one of the most important of the division's missions, on which depended the immediate security of VII Corps on the south and ultimate junction with V

**Corps, General Taylor decided on the afternoon of D Day to send the 506th Parachute Infantry (less the 3d Battalion) south on a reconnaissance in force. The reconnaissance, which in fact became an attack, led off on the morning of 7 June in column down the road from Culoville. Though harassed by scattered rifle fire, the 506th reached Vierville without undue delay, cleared the town, and then split, with the 1st Battalion heading down the highway to Beaumont and the 2d diverging cross country to the left toward Angoville-au-Plain. Halted just beyond Vierville by heavy small arms fire, the attacks broke loose only after a platoon of medium tanks had been brought up and attached to the 2d Battalion. The 1st Battalion fought its way down astride the highway to Beaumont where it was stopped by two enemy counterattacks. The 2d Battalion medium tanks together with a platoon of light tanks were then sent to its support and they advanced another 1,000 yards to just east of St. Come-du-Mont.**

**At the same time that the 506th Infantry was attacking south, the 2d Battalion of the 501st Infantry, which on D Day had fought an isolated and inconclusive action around les Droueries, continued its attempt to push westward into St. Come-du-Mont, still held in some force by two battalions under von der Heydte's command. This attack, coordinated in early afternoon with Colonel Sink, commanding the 506th Infantry, and supported by six medium tanks of the 746th Tank Battalion and the guns of the 65th Armored Field Artillery Battalion, made substantial headway. But it was a typical Normandy battle-cleaning out dug-in enemy riflemen and machine gun positions from the hedgerows field by field. The battalion did not get far enough west to tie in with the 1st Battalion, 506th Infantry. The latter was therefore ordered to withdraw to Beaumont and all units held during the night, reorganizing for resumption of the attack the next day.**

**The small American gains of 7 June encouraged the Germans to feel that they had at least frustrated the Allied time schedule. On the other hand, their own countermeasures planned for the day had also been checked, and, in general, it was clear that the invasion had succeeded in gaining a foothold. The build-up race was on.**

**On the Caen front the 21st Panzer Division had called off its counterattack on the evening of D Day short of its objectives. Throughout 7 June the division remained on the defensive except for small unsuccessful attacks east of the Orne against the British airborne forces. The 12th SS Panzer Division began arriving in assembly areas between Caen and Bronay during the day and Panzer Lehr Division formed to its left rear, north and northeast of Tilly-sur-Seulles. In the afternoon the reconnaissance battalion of the 12th SS Panzer Division was committed to reconnoiter the wide gap between the 21st Panzer and the 352d Divisions. But air attacks had so delayed the assembly of I SS Panzer Corps and caused such heavy casualties that the corps postponed until the morning of 8 June the**

scheduled two-division counterattack to recapture Courseulles. Rundstedt on 7 June had decided to put his own armored staff, Panzer Group West under General Geyr, in charge of the attack. Geyr was attached to Seventh Army and ordered to take over the sector on both sides of the Orne River and west as far as Tilly-sur-Seulles, seal off the penetrations at Caen and in the 352d Division sector, and counterattack the Allies who had broken through southeast of Bayeux. But Geyr did not arrive to take over until the night of 8-9 June. In the meantime I SS Panzer Corps had decided to make only a limited-objective attack with the 12th SS and 21st Panzer Divisions and a Kampfgruppe of Panzer Lehr Division, pending the arrival of the tanks of the latter division. The attack of 8 June to gain a line of departure for the later planned three-division attack made little progress and before evening both divisions had gone over to the defensive. The 12th SS was holding positions astride the Caen-Bayeux road between Authie and Carpiquet. The 21st Panzer Division, also on the defensive, was split on either side of the Orne. Panzer Lehr remained in assembly areas near Thury-Harcourt, southwest of Caen. As the attack failed to materialize on 8 June and Allied pressure continued to build up, the plan for a bold strike to the coast with two armored divisions abreast was abandoned. Seventh Army, concerned over the loss of Bayeux, decided to maneuver to recapture it. I SS Panzer Corps intended, therefore, to hold north and west of Caen while directing Panzer Lehr and portions of the 12th SS Panzer Division on Bayeux. Thus, as General Geyr commented later, the fist was unclenched just as it was ready to strike.

While Seventh Army indulged fatal second thoughts concerning its critical right flank, Field Marshal Rommel began to focus attention on the threat to Cherbourg. Reports of large-scale Allied airborne and glider landings in the Coutances-Lessay area caused him on the morning of 7 June to order the immediate move of both the 17th SS Panzer Grenadier Division and the 77th Division to meet the threat. He believed that the Coutances landings were part of an Allied move to cut off Cherbourg and the whole Cotentin Peninsula and that it was therefore an "unconditional necessity" to counter with all available forces. The risk of weakening Brittany by the transfer of the 77th Division could be accepted, he thought, since it looked as though the Allies were fully committed in Normandy. Later in the morning Seventh Army assigned the task of cleaning up the west coast of the Cotentin to the II Parachute Corps then in Brittany. In addition to the 77th Division and the 17th SS Panzer Grenadier Division, already under orders to move, the corps was to command the 3d Parachute Division. The latter received marching orders to move by motor to assembly areas near those planned for the 17th SS northeast of Avranches. The 77th Division, which received orders to move by foot at 1015, actually began moving out at 1000. By 2000, advance elements of the 17th SS Panzer Grenadier Division had crossed the Loire. But traffic thereafter was interrupted by Allied air attacks on the Loire bridges which lasted for an hour and a half and scored twenty-four

hits on a railroad bridge that the division had been using. With requisitioned vehicles the 3d Parachute Division formed an advanced motorized group consisting of one battalion from each of the regiments, two engineer companies, two artillery batteries, and the antiaircraft and signal battalions. This group moved out, surprisingly, without opposition from the air. But Seventh Army reported that movement of the remainder of the division was dependent on motor transport space from the two corps remaining in Brittany and requested an additional 2,000 tons from OB WEST and other reserves. On the morning of 8 June after General der Fallschirmtruppen Eugen Meindl, commanding II Parachute Corps, had personally confirmed that the reports of airborne landings in the Coutances area were without foundation, the II Parachute Corps with two divisions was diverted to St. Lo.

Concern over the defense of Cherbourg again faded before the greater urgency of holding at Caen. This reaction was not due to ignorance of the true situation. On the contrary, on the evening of 6 June a copy of the VII Corps field order had been picked up by the 914th Regiment from a boat that drifted ashore in the mouth of the Vire River. The next evening a copy of the V Corps order was taken from the body of an American officer killed at Vierville-sur-Mer. The Germans thus had in their hands the entire scheme of maneuver and order of battle for American units in the first phase of the invasion.

The fact that possession of these plans had no effect on the German conduct of operations throws considerable light on the tactical and strategic problems facing the enemy command. From the plans, Seventh Army and OB WEST learned that the major immediate objectives of Bradley's forces were Cherbourg and St. Lo. But this news, after the first day, was hardly a revelation. The plans were confined to outlines of the initial phase and did not reveal American intentions beyond the establishment of a lodgment including Cherbourg and St. Lo. Even if they had revealed the planned American push into Brittany, however, the Germans could not have profited materially from the knowledge. Rommel was not free to shift the weight of his defense to the American flank to block either the assault on Cherbourg or Bradley's planned move southward toward Brittany. The major operational threat, from his point of view, remained the possibility of a British breakout at Caen and a sweep to Paris. Without British plans, the Germans could not be sure that such a move had not been calculated. Even if it had not, a German collapse on that sector would undoubtedly be exploited to turn the flank of Seventh Army. In short, complete knowledge of American intentions could not have altered the logic of the battle dictated by terrain, the disposition of forces, and the location of the strategic objectives.

One fact might have been deduced from the plans: that they envisaged

such a large commitment of force as to rule out a second major landing attempt. General Dollmann drew this conclusion. Field Marshal Rundstedt was inclined to agree. But OKW and Hitler figured the evidence was inconclusive. Again the fact that British plans were missing left a large realm for speculation and, according to German intelligence estimates, a large uncommitted military force.

As of 1 June, the Germans had estimated that the Allies had combat forces in the United Kingdom equivalent to eighty-five divisions including eight airborne divisions. The Allied high command, aware that the enemy was overestimating British and American strength, made every effort to sustain the illusion. In addition, the Allies made use of the high regard in which General Patton was held by the Germans to persuade them that an army group under his command still remained in England after 6 June. The existence of this large reserve force was easy for the Germans to believe since it fitted with their preconceptions that a second major landing would strike the Kanalkueste. The Allies fostered this belief by various ruses so successfully that not until July did OKW finally appreciate that no second landing would take place. In the meantime the Fifteenth Army remained tied to the Kanalkueste.

Tactically, German knowledge of American plans might have made some difference by enabling the Germans to mass reserves and stage counterattacks at points along the planned axes of the American advance. Such a concentration of reserves was actually carried out by Seventh Army in and around St. Lo, but even without knowledge of American intentions the Germans would probably still have chosen to defend St. Lo because of its importance as a road junction and the terrain configurations that made it defensively strong. For the rest, the Germans could never maneuver with enough freedom to exploit any tactical situation. Instead of being able to mass reserves in accordance with plan, General Dollmann picked up the reserve companies and battalions as they straggled in, delayed and decimated by air attacks, and put them in to plug gaps in his lines wherever the immediate danger seemed gravest. The policy of maintaining an intact defense, whether wise or not, meant that German tactical commanders in disposing their reserves were continually confronted with emergencies and never with tactical choices. Absorbed, therefore, in sealing off today's penetrations, they had no resources with which to face tomorrow's threat.

### **Junction between V and II Corps**

The failure of both V and VII Corps to make any substantial progress toward the vital joining of the beachheads, together with the general slowness of the advances on D-Day objectives, had become a matter of concern to General Eisenhower, General Montgomery, General Bradley,

and both corps commanders. The American build-up was far behind schedule, particularly in the landing of supplies. At the end of D plus 1 not more than a quarter of the planned 14,500 tons were ashore. The troop build-up, planned at about 107,000 for the first two days, was 20,000 short. Scarcely more than half the 14,000 vehicles had been disembarked. Delayed build-up was in part due to technical difficulties of unloading and in part to the slow advance inland. Rapid expansion of the beachhead was vital to permit the massing of supplies and reinforcements. Both expansion and reinforcement were necessary to defend the lodgment against the expected full-scale enemy counterattacks which, it was thought, might come any time after D plus 3 and would almost certainly come during the first week.

General Eisenhower toured the assault area by mine layer with Admiral Ramsay on 7 June and ordered that the immediate tactical plan be altered to give priority to a concerted drive by both corps to link up through Isigny and Carentan. General Bradley gave orders accordingly during the afternoon of 7 June. For VII Corps the changed priority resulted in assigning to the 101st Airborne Division the sole task of capturing Carentan with reinforcements to be provided if necessary. V Corps gave the 9th Division the primary mission of seizing Isigny while the 1st Division continued the push east to join with the British and south to expand the beachhead.

Plans for the employment of the 29th Division were discussed that evening at General Gerhardt's command post in a rock quarry just off OMAHA Beach. The mission of taking Isigny was given to the 175th Infantry; it was to drive between the 116th and the 115th straight for its objective while the other two regiments cleared either flank of the advance. The 747th Tank Battalion (less Company B) was attached to the 175th Infantry and the attack jumped off that night. Advancing along the Longueville-Isigny road with tanks leading the columns of infantry, the regiment captured la Cambe before daylight and met its first real resistance about three miles west of that town. Antitank guns knocked out one tank in front of the town and artillery P fire disabled six more to the west. However, isolated enemy resistance, here and

in other villages north and south of the Isigny road, was overrun, in some cases with the aid of naval fire. There was no organized resistance in Isigny itself, and it was entered and cleaned out during the night of 8-9 June. The town was partially gutted and burning from heavy naval bombardment.

The speed of the 175th Infantry's advance collapsed the left flank of the 352d Division and opened a hole in German lines comparable to the disintegration at Bayeux. The sector overrun was the responsibility of the

914th Regiment and had contained, in addition to the remnants of that regiment, a battalion of the 352d Artillery Regiment and the 439th Ost Battalion. In the Grandcamp area, where the 116th Infantry was attacking, were additional units of the 914th Regiment and the 3d Battalion of the 1716th Artillery Regiment which manned fixed coastal artillery positions there. General Kraiss recognized that in view of the increasing pressure on his center and right he could not expect to hold with his left. At about the same time that he ordered the 30th Mobile Brigade and 726th Regiment to pull out of the Drome corridor, he gave similar orders to the 914th Regiment. They were to fight to hold all positions during the day but withdraw the bulk of their forces at night south of the Aure. A small bridgehead was to be held at all cost northeast of Isigny. The isolation of the various units in the Grandcamp-Isigny area as well as the presence of valuable artillery pieces there complicated the problem of withdrawal. It required time to organize and carry out. No time was granted. The 914th Regiment found itself unable to offer effective resistance on the road to Isigny. The battalion of the 352d Artillery Regiment had to pull out in such a hurry that its guns were abandoned, thus reducing division artillery for the fighting on 9 June to fourteen guns. The 0st battalion which was supposed to blow the bridge at Isigny across the Aure retreated without doing so.

The fall of Isigny meant that the 352d Division could no longer block the corridor between the American bridgeheads. The 914th Regiment was ordered to organize a defense south of the Aure in the vicinity of Hill 35 near la Madeleine to prevent the division's left flank from being rolled up. Kraiss counted on the Aure inundations to cover the gap in his lines between Isigny and Trevieres.

While the main 29th Division attack gathered momentum that carried it without pause to its objective, both the 115th and 116th Infantry Regiments had cracked resistance in the coastal area, and virtually completed the seizure of the whole of the high ground north of the Aure River by the end of the day. The troops of the 115th met almost no resistance, although lack of transport brought them tired and without rations to their objectives overlooking the river. The 116th Infantry, reinforced with Rangers and two companies of tanks, and supported by destroyer fire, achieved the relief of the Rangers on Pointe du Hoe before noon and then proceeded to Grandcamp where, because of a canalized approach over a flooded area, it ran into a nasty fight lasting until dark. One battalion of the 116th had been detached to sweep south of the main regimental advance toward Maisy. The Maisy position was taken on 9 June and the rest of the area mopped up to the Vire River.

With dispatch V Corps had completed its part of the drive to join the American beachheads. The 101st Airborne Division had a much harder time. After the failure of the 506th Parachute Infantry (Colonel Sink) on 7

June to wrest St. Come-du-Mont from the 6th Parachute Regiment, a much larger attack was mounted the following day. The 1st and 2d Battalions of the 506th were reinforced with the 3d Battalion, 327th Glider Infantry, the 3d Battalion, 501st Parachute Infantry, eight light tanks, and the 65th Armored Field Artillery Battalion. The glider battalion, commanded by Lt. Col. Ray C. Allen, on the left wing of the attack was to pass to the east of St. Come-du-Mont, proceed down the main highway, and blow the bridges on the Carentan causeway. Colonel Ewell's battalion of the 501st was to attack to the south of St. Come to cut the highway there while Colonel Sink's two battalions (506th) drove in column directly into the town. Behind effective artillery preparatory fire followed by a rolling barrage, the attack jumped off at about 0500. The glider battalion bogged down in the hedgerows. But Colonel Ewell's men, despite considerable confusion and intermingling of units, reached their objectives south of St. Come within three hours. In the meantime the battalions of the 506th pressed against the town from the east and artillery continued to fall heavily on the German defenders. In the first hour and a half, the 65th Armored Field Artillery Battalion fired about 2,500 rounds of 105-mm. high explosive.

The brunt of the U.S. attack was borne by the 3d Battalion, 1058th Regiment, which on 7 June had been reinforced by two companies of the 3d Battalion, 6th Parachute Regiment, from Carentan. Early in the morning, the 1058th men under heavy artillery fire began to show signs of cracking. Von der Heydte, still in charge of the defense, had no more reserves to bring up. Observing that men of the 1058th were beginning to straggle in retreat westward and having lost contact with the 1058th battalion headquarters, von der Heydte decided to pull out his own units and such troops of the 1058th as he could contact. The withdrawal involved some severe fighting with Ewell's battalion posted south of the town, but eventually the majority of the Germans got out to the west and retreated on Carentan follow generally the axis of railroad embankment.

This route was also taken during the day by the 2d Battalion, 6th Parachute Regiment, pulling back from north of St. Come. With surprising ease the 2d Battalion disengaged and streamed southward. Most of the men swam the Douve and arrived in Carentan with few losses. There von der Heydte with the bulk of two battalions plus elements of the 105th Regiment organized his defense. Late on 8 June he had learned that Isigny had fallen and, primarily concerned with possible attack against Carentan from the east, he at first placed the whole 2d Battalion on that side of the city.

The U.S. 101st Airborne Division, meanwhile, with the occupation of St. Come-du-Mont, completed the clearing of the enemy north of the Douve and east of the Merderet. Preparations began at once for an all-out attack on Carentan from the north. In preparation for that attack, the 101st Airborne Division, by the night of 8 June, had grouped three regiments along the

**Douve with a fourth regiment assembled in reserve near Vierville. The 502d Parachute Infantry was placed in line on the right flank from the junction of the Douve and Merderet Rivers to Houesville. The 506th Parachute Infantry was assembled astride the Carentan highway, and the 327th Glider Infantry, which had come in by sea, relieved elements of the 506th and 501st Parachute Infantry Regiments at la Barquette and le Port. The 501st Parachute Infantry was in reserve.**

**The scheme of this attack had been worked out by the division in England. It appeared then that the only feasible route of attack was across the river flats in the vicinity of Brevands. Accordingly VII Corps on 8 June ordered attack in this zone. On 9 June, however, Colonel Sink led a patrol across the causeway toward Carentan. He was fired on and returned before reaching the city. The reports he sent back were apparently misinterpreted to indicate that Carentan was only lightly held. It was therefore considered possible to make a two-pronged attack across the causeway and through Brevands to envelop the city.**

**The final plan was for the 327th Glider Infantry to make the main effort on the left, crossing the Douve near Brevands to clear the area between Carentan and Isigny and join with V Corps near the highway bridge over the Vire. Since the key to possession of this objective area was Carentan, the 327th planned to use the bulk of its force in an attack on the city from the east. At the same time the 502d Parachute Infantry, relieved of its defensive mission on the right flank by the 501st, would cross the causeway over the Douve River northwest of Carentan, bypass the city on the west, and seize Hill 30. To secure Carentan after its capture, the 101st Airborne Division had the additional mission of occupying the high ground along the railway west of the city as far as the Prairies Marecageuses.**

**The causeway over which the 502d Parachute Infantry was to attack was banked six to nine feet above the marshlands of the Douve and crossed four bridges over branches of the river and canals. One of the bridges was destroyed by the Germans. Difficulties in repairing this under fire forced postponement of the right wing of the division attack, first scheduled for the night of 9-10 June. It was the middle of the afternoon of 10 June before the 3d Battalion, 502d Parachute Infantry (Lt. Col. Robert G. Cole) advanced over the causeway single file. The men moved in a low crouch or crawled, and it took three hours for the point to cross three of the bridges. Then the enemy opened fire from a farmhouse and hedgerows, methodically searching the ditches with machine guns. At the fourth bridge a Belgian Gate had been drawn so far across the road that only one man at a time could squeeze by it. Under cover of artillery fire, which all afternoon worked on enemy positions, this maneuver was tried. Six men made it; the seventh was hit, and the attempt was abandoned in favor of building up additional fire. Mortars were brought forward. The stalemate, however,**

lasted until midnight while enemy fire and a bombing and strafing attack after dark took heavy toll of the thin battalion line stretched across the causeway. After midnight, resistance slackened and three companies were able to filter men through the bottleneck and across the last bridge where they could deploy on either side of the highway.

The nub of the opposition seemed to be a large farmhouse to the west of the road on ground that rose sharply from the marshes. In the morning of 11 June after attempts to knock this out with artillery had failed, Colonel Cole, battalion commander, ordered a charge which he and his executive officer, Lt. Col. John P. Stopka, led. Followed at first by only a quarter of their 250 men, Cole and Stopka ran through enemy fire. The charge gathered momentum as more men got up and ran forward. The farmhouse was not occupied but the Germans had rifle pits and machine gun emplacements in hedgerows to the west. These were overrun and the Germans killed with grenades and bayonets.

The heavy casualties and disorganization of the battalion prevented Cole from following up his advantage. Instead he sent word back to have the 1st Battalion of the regiment pass through and continue the attack south. The 1st Battalion, which was near the fourth causeway bridge when request came to move forward, reached Colonel Cole's position through heavy fire. But since it was as hard hit and disorganized as the 3d Battalion it was in no better condition to move on. Both battalions set up a defensive line and held on during 11 June against determined German counterattacks, which on one occasion threatened to break through. The 2d Battalion took over the line during the night, but the 502d Parachute Infantry was too exhausted to renew the attack and the 506th Parachute Infantry was sent to its relief.

While the bitter battle of the Carentan causeway was being fought, the left wing of the 101st Airborne Division attack had carried south and made tenuous contact with V Corps units east of Carentan. In the early morning hours of 10 June all three battalions of the 327th Glider Infantry were across the Douve near Brevands. One company, reconnoitering to Auville-sur-le Vey, met the 29th Reconnaissance Troop and Company K of the 175th Infantry. The 175th Infantry (9th Division) had followed up the capture of Isigny by sending Company K to take the Vire bridge at Auville-sur-le Vey while the main body of the regiment moved toward objectives in the Lison-la Fotelaie area to the south. The bridge was found to have been destroyed and the company, reinforced with the reconnaissance troop and a platoon of tanks, fought most of the day of 9 June to force a crossing. They forded the river late in the afternoon, seized Auville-sur-le Vey, and held it during the night while engineers built the bridge behind them. Contact with the airborne unit the next day was only the beginning of the link between the corps. A savage fight remained for the possession of

**Carentan as well as some confused and costly maneuvering to clear the ground to the east.**

**The Germans meanwhile made plans to reinforce the city, whose defense Field Marshal Rommel considered vital not only to prevent the junction of the American beachheads but to forestall any attempt by General Bradley to cut the Cotentin by a drive southwest across the Vire toward Lessay and Periers. As immediate stopgap measures LXXXIV Corps sent von der Heydte two 0st battalions and remnants of the defenders of Isigny. He placed these troops, of limited combat value, on the east side of the city and concentrated the two battalions of his own regiment on the north. But this was still admittedly a weak defense for such a critical objective. Late on 9 June Rommel decided to commit the II Parachute Corps (Meindl), which was on its way up from Brittany, to counter this threat. Under Meindl's corps, the 17th SS Panzer Grenadier Division (Generalmajor der Waffen-SS Werner Ostendorff) was assigned the primary mission of blocking an Allied westward thrust. Ostendorff's orders were to move to positions southwest of Carentan prepared to counterattack south of the city.**

**These plans were frustrated by the difficulty of getting the units into position. On 8 June the move of Meindl's troops was reported greatly delayed by air attack and sabotage. Ostendorff's division had been forced by continued severe air attacks on the railroads to make most of its march northward by road. Shortage of gasoline then further delayed the move. By the end of 11 June only Ostendorff's forward elements had reached their assembly areas southwest of Carentan.**

**While awaiting reinforcements and holding off the concentric attacks of the 101st Airborne Division, von der Heydte in Carentan was running desperately short of ammunition. It was impossible to bring up resupplies by truck in view of the shortage of motor transport and gas and Allied air interdiction of the roads. OB WEST at last considered the need so critical that an air supply mission was flown during the night of 11-12 June and eighteen tons of infantry ammunition and 88-mm. shells were dropped to von der Heydte on a field south of Raids, some seven miles southwest of Carentan. This, the first air supply mission attempted by the Germans in Normandy, came too late to save Carentan.**

**On 10 June the bulk of the 327th Glider Infantry pressed in on Carentan from the northeast. Its initial objective was to seize the highway and railroad bridges over the Vire-Taute Canal and so seal off the city from the east. The regiment advanced rapidly until at 1800 it came within five hundred yards of its objective. Stopped by enemy fire from the east bank, it reorganized and resumed the drive with two battalions abreast on either side of the Carentan-Isigny highway. The men fought until midnight**

through those last five hundred yards and succeeded at last in clearing the enemy from the east bank and digging in along the hedgerows beside the canal.

Col. Joseph H. Harper, who had taken command of the 327th Glider Infantry that afternoon, now decided against any attempt to rush the bridge in favor of moving a portion of his force north to cross on a partly demolished footbridge and approach Carentan through the wooded area along the Bassin a Flot. Most of the regiment would hold positions along the canal and support the attack by firing into the city. After a patrol had repaired the footbridge, three companies crossed under enemy mortar fire during the morning of 11 June, but were unable to advance more than a few hundred yards before they were stopped by enemy fire from the outskirts of Carentan.

In the evening of 11 June, First Army decided to commit another regiment and coordinate the two wings of the attack by forming all units into a single task force under command of Brig. Gen. Anthony McAuliffe, artillery commander of the 101st Airborne Division. The 506th Parachute Infantry was to take over from the 502d the attack on the west toward Hill 30. Colonel Harper would continue to hold east of Carentan while attacking with a battalion plus one company along the Bassin a Flot. The 501st Parachute Infantry was to be taken from defensive positions north of the Douve and committed through the Brevands bridgehead. It was to drive east of the 327th Glider Infantry in a wider envelopment of Carentan designed to link with the 506th Infantry south of the city at Hill 30.

Gerow's corps was drawn only slightly into this new effort. The bulk of V Corps continued the drive south to expand the beachhead. But inasmuch as the 101st Airborne Division task force was now wholly absorbed with the envelopment of Carentan it became necessary to use V Corps units to protect the east flank in the area between the Douve and Vire Rivers. The bridgehead at Auville-sur-le Vey was reinforced on 11 June by the 3d Battalion, 41st Armored Infantry Regiment of the 2d Armored Division, which had begun landing on 9 June. In addition, on 12 June, the 175th Infantry was ordered to reconnoiter in force in the region of Montmartin-en-Graignes and seize two bridges over the Vire-Taute Canal, to secure the still insubstantial link between the corps from German counterattack from the south.

The city of Carentan blazed during the night under concentrations of naval fire, artillery, mortars, and tank destroyer guns. The attack of the 506th Parachute Infantry got started at 0200, 12 June, and advanced rapidly against slight resistance. On his objective, Hill 30, Colonel Sink at 0500 ordered the 2d Battalion to attack into Carentan. Despite interdiction artillery fire and some spasmodic machine gun fire the battalion entered

the city within a few hours. At the same time the 327th Glider Infantry on the northwest attacked out of the woods at Bassin a Flot and drove rapidly into the center of town. The two units met at about 0730. Only enemy stragglers remained to contest possession of the city. While the concentric attack squeezed into the city, the wider envelopment made equally rapid progress as the 501st Parachute Infantry swept down east of Carentan and made contact with the 506th half an hour after the entry into the city.

The closing of the trap had captured the objective, but few enemy prisoners were caught. The fact is that von der Heydte had pulled out of the city before dark on 11 June without being observed and had set up a defense line to the southwest. This new resistance line was discovered in the afternoon (12 June) when General Taylor attempted to push the attack to the southwest. His objective was to establish a deep defense of Carentan hooked up on the right with the 82d Airborne Division, which was driving south across the Merderet in the direction of Baupte. The 506th Parachute Regiment thrust out on the axis of the Baupte road while the 501st attacked along the Periers road. But both bogged down and by the end of the day had reached out only a few hundred yards from the line of departure near Hill 30.

The simultaneous effort to secure the ground east of Carentan on 12 June proved just as inconclusive as the push westward. In the morning a task force consisting of two companies of the 175th Infantry, reinforced by mortars and heavy machine guns, crossed the Vire. Enemy outposts of the newly arrived mobile Kampfgruppe of the 275th Division observed the crossings but made no serious attempts to interfere with them. Not far from Montmartin, however, the Germans ambushed and badly cut up one company on a hedgerow-lined road. Remnants of the company withdrew north of Montmartin to re-form and there joined with the remainder of the task force. Into this position in the afternoon came the 1st Battalion, 327th Glider Infantry, which with the 2d Battalion had attacked south early in the afternoon after the capture of Carentan. The combined force then secured high ground south of Montmartin. The 2d Battalion in the meantime had been checked at Deville to the northeast. During the night Colonel Goode, 175th commander, took a company across the Vire to attempt to reinforce General Cota but stumbled into a German bivouac. Colonel Goode was captured. Remnants of his force straggled back across the Vire.

The fighting southeast of Carentan had been on a very small scale and was not in itself important, but, in the course of it, reports came in to General Bradley's headquarters of a strong concentration of German forces in the area, including the 17th SS Panzer Grenadier Division. Signs pointed to a possible enemy build-up of three divisions with the probable mission of counterattacking in force between Carentan and Isigny where, General Bradley pointed out, "we are very weak." As communications were

temporarily out between First Army and V Corps, Bradley sent a letter by courier to Gerow ordering him to move a battalion of tanks and a battalion of armored infantry from the 2d Armored Division into the Montmartin-en-Graignes area "prepared for action to the south." The movement was to be completed by daylight and coordinated with the 327th Glider Infantry. In addition Bradley ordered that the 116th Infantry be held in reserve for possible commitment on the right of the 175th. By 0630 of 13 June the 2d Battalion, 66th Armored Regiment, in accordance with these orders had joined the 3d Battalion, 41st Armored Infantry, already west of the Vire, and the task force was ready to move south. The move, however, did not take place, for by morning Carentan was being threatened from the southwest rather than the southeast and the armored task force was diverted to go to the support of the 506th Parachute Infantry.

After the fall of Carentan, the Germans planned to counterattack with the 17th SS Panzer Grenadier Division to retake it. But the attack was delayed on 12 June because the battalion of assault guns, which moved north by train, was held up in the assembly areas by air attacks. With the guns in position on the morning of 13 June, Ostendorff attacked. The attack hit both the 506th and 501st Parachute Infantry Regiments at about 0630 and during the morning drove them back to within 500 yards of Carentan. The 502d Parachute Infantry was brought down to Carentan to reinforce the defense of the 506th. At 1030 the armored task force arrived and in the early afternoon the 101st Airborne Division resumed the initiative. The 502d drove through the 506th, and the 501st continued on its mission of the day before. With close support from the 14th Armored Field Artillery Battalion the enemy was thrown back with estimated losses of 500 men. A defensive position was secured along the road from Baupre to the Carentan-Periers highway.

On the east the company of the 175th Infantry beleaguered at Montmartin was pulled out and Colonel Harper established a line north of the main railroad linked with the 29th Division to the east. Now V and VII Corps were securely joined, although the strip between them still lacked depth for adequate communications and defense. First Army, however, now had resources to deepen it and on 13 June the mission was assigned to XIX Corps, which became operational the next day.

Operations to fuse the two First Army beachheads have been traced through to their conclusion because they form a single story with few direct contacts with what was going on elsewhere in Normandy. The actions described were considered by the high command as of first importance. They did not, however, constitute a main effort by the First Army. Larger forces were being used simultaneously to expand the beachhead westward and southward. Virtually the whole of V Corps during the week of 8-14 June was pushing south through the bocage country

**making rapid progress against a disintegrated German defense.**

### **The Caumont Gap**

**From its D-Day objectives reached on 8 June, V Corps ordered a three-division attack designed simply to push out the lodgment area in conformity with the advance of the British on the left. The 2d Division (Maj. Gen. Walter M. Robertson), which had begun landing the evening of 7 June, had enough units ashore by midday of the 9th to be operational and it took over 5,000 yards of the 1st Division front north of Trevieres. Here the main effort of the corps was to be made with the final objective of seizing the Foret de Cerisy, high ground which always figured prominently in V Corps plans as a possible assembly area for enemy counterattack forces and as ground dominating the whole corps beachhead. The 1st Division on the east was to put its main effort on its right and advance to seize three towns: Agy, la Commune, and Vaubadon, on high ground along the St. Lo-Bayeux highway. The 29th Division, on the other flank, would seize the north bank of the Elle River from la Communette west to the Vire. A portion of its forces, as already noted, would operate west of the Vire to establish contact with VII Corps. Each division was to attack with two regiments abreast and each was to leave all or part of the third regiment prepared to defend the D-Day positions. Positions gained by the attack would be organized for defense in depth. Both latter measures were insurance against enemy counterattack in strength, a contingency that continued to figure prominently in Allied calculations.**

**Enemy resistance broke first on either flank of the attack and then disintegrated all through the corps zone. Despite this collapse, however, certain units had hard fighting on 9 June. The 29th Division, after clearing Isigny in the morning, pushed south with the 175th Infantry on the right, the 115th on the left. The 175th Infantry, having smashed the 914th Regiment in its rapid seizure of Isigny, advanced southward against only scattered opposition. Near la Foret, 352d Division stragglers defending a supply dump held off the American advance long enough to permit the evacuation of the bulk of the supplies. This action cost the Germans an estimated 125 killed. The 175th Infantry then moved on down to its objectives in the Lison-la Fotellaie area before nightfall.**

**The 115th Infantry, during the night preceding the attack, reconnoitered crossings of the Aure River. The crossing promised to be difficult since the river flats were flooded to a width of half a mile to two miles. Although nowhere deep under water they were marshy and crisscrossed by drainage ditches. During the night 2d Lt. Kermit C. Miller of Company E took a platoon across south of Canchy. Entering Colombieres on the south bank, which had been hard hit by American artillery, Miller's patrol caught a considerable force of Germans by surprise, cut down about forty of them,**

and took a dozen prisoners. Thanks to this action the regiment's crossing the next day was unopposed, for Colombieres turned out to have been the only defended locality on the south bank of the river within range of the Canchy crossing. The lack of opposition was extremely fortunate, for the physical difficulties of crossing the swampy flats made progress very slow and exposed the troops for several hours as they struggled through the mud and waited for improvised bridges to span the few impassable streams. Two battalions were across by 1100. The third followed after enemy fire frustrated an attempt to cross a narrower portion of the river valley farther east. Once across, the 1st Battalion moved to Bricqueville and the 3d Battalion farther south to la Folie. Neither had met serious opposition. But the 2d Battalion ran into trouble from the start. Turning west to clean out the Bois de Calette, from which enemy riflemen were harassing bridging operations at the la Cambe-Douet causeway, the battalion brushed with enemy bicycle troops near Vouilly. Although the wood was not occupied in force the battalion took three hours to flush snipers from the thick brush. Then heading south for le Carrefour it took a wrong turning that added three miles to the six-mile march to its objective. Thoroughly exhausted the troops reached their initial objective at 0230, 10 June. Leading units moved off the road. Reconnaissance to establish a temporary defensive position was difficult in view of the condition of the men and the dark night. Most of the men simply dropped to the ground and were almost at once asleep.

While the rear of the column still waited on the road to move into the bivouac area, an enemy infantry and armored vehicle column blundered down the road in retreat from the Aure valley fighting. A machine pistol was fired. American rifle shots replied. The enemy swung into action, sprayed the road with machine gun fire, and sent armored vehicles (probably self-propelled 88-mm. guns) down the road, firing into hedgerows and fields. The 2d Battalion men, scattered, confused, and disorganized, could offer no effective resistance. One man had presence of mind to take a bazooka and attack the enemy guns, knocking out two of them. But the greater part of the battalion-its commander, Lt. Col. William E. Warfield, killed-dispersed in small groups and retreated north and west during the night. In the melee 10 men were lost, including 11 officers. The next day the battalion was reorganized with 110 replacements, moved back into the line, and the 115th Infantry proceeded to its objectives on the Elle River without opposition.

On the opposite flank of the corps attack the left wing of the 1st Division drove forward against rapidly collapsing resistance. The 26th Infantry reached its objectives, Agy and Dodigny, at night. The 18th Infantry, held up initially by a single enemy strong point, at length bypassed it leaving it to be cleared by the reserve battalion. Thereafter moving rapidly, with strong artillery support on known enemy positions, possible assembly

areas, and roads, it continued to advance through the night. It met no enemy after midnight and arrived by morning abreast of the 26th Infantry. During 10 June it moved down to its objectives on the St. Lo-Bayeux highway. Only the 3d Battalion at the edge of the Foret de Cerisy met resistance.

In the center of the corps zone the newly landed 2d Division had a harder time, in part because it hit the center of the 352d Division, which despite the collapse of both wings continued to hold out during 9 June in strong defenses about Trevieres, and in part because it lacked most of its artillery, transportation, communications (wire and radios), machine guns and mortars, as well as a large part of its supporting troops. For the attack of 9 June, one company of tank destroyers and one company of tanks were attached.

While the 38th Infantry attacked Trevieres from the north, the 9th Infantry struck to the east to cut the Trevieres-Rubercy road. The 9th Infantry had relieved the 18th Infantry at Mandeville and Engranville. The line of departure for its attack was due east of Trevieres, but the 2d Battalion was at Engranville north of the Aure at 1100 when it received orders to jump off. It spent the whole day fighting to the line of departure, unable without heavy weapons to overcome enemy flanking fire from the direction of Trevieres. By midnight, however, it reached the initial objective, Rubercy. The 3d Battalion, starting from the Mandeville area, fought down the road toward Rubercy but made very slow progress and was still short of the objective by dark. A gap of at least 4,000 yards separated the battalion from the 1st Division on the left. This was covered only by patrols of the 18th Infantry.

The attack on Trevieres by the 38th Infantry ran into difficulties aggravated by its total lack of mortars and machine guns, the hedgerow terrain, and a stubborn though not numerous enemy. The Aure River had been selected as the line of departure, but both the 2d and 3d Battalions ran into opposition before reaching it. Progress was slow. The men were continually pinned down by enemy fire difficult to locate among the hedgerows and still more difficult to neutralize with only light infantry weapons. The attacking troops were given direct support by accurate fire from two batteries of the 38th Field Artillery Battalion. But the attack was kept moving chiefly by bold leadership. The success of the 3d Battalion in crossing the Aure under heavy German machine gun fire was due at least in part to the intrepidity of Capt. Omery C. Weathers of Company K who led his men through the fire at the cost of his own life. Col. Walter A. Elliott, the regimental commander, unable to depend on communications in the typically fragmental maneuver of groups of men through the fields and orchards, spent most of the day moving between his battalions pushing the attack forward. Late in the afternoon the regiment, still short of its

objective, was ordered by General Robertson to continue the attack to take Trevieres that night. By midnight the 2d Battalion had occupied the town except for a small strong point on the southern edge which was cleaned out the following morning.

The Germans' abandonment of Trevieres, however, was not due primarily to the efforts of the 38th Infantry. The 352d Division with both flanks torn open had at last decided to pull out of an untenable position. At about 1900, 9 June, General Kraiss reported his hopeless situation to General Marcks at LXXXIV Corps and received orders to withdraw far to the south to establish a defense along the Elle River from Berigny to Airel. The withdrawal was to take place during darkness and to be completed by 0600, 10 June. For the defense of this new line of about ten miles, General Kraiss had 2,500 men, 14 artillery pieces, 16 antiaircraft guns, and 5 tanks.

The withdrawal of the 352d Division allowed the 2d Division on 10 June to march to its objectives west and south of the Foret de Cerisy. About ninety enemy stragglers were rounded up during the advance. Both the 1st and 2d Divisions spent the day of 11 June virtually out of contact with the enemy, reorganizing the ground won and preparing for a new attack. The 1st Division units had made no advances since noon on 10 June. The only fighting on 11 June took place at the southern tip of the Foret de Cerisy where the 1st Battalion, 38th Infantry, fought to dislodge a stubborn group of enemy well dug in at the Haute-Littee crossroads. Even patrols probing far in the south met no large forces and on the entire 2d Division front during the day only twice was enemy artillery fire reported.

The 1st and 2d Divisions on 10 and 11 June were in fact facing a gaping hole in the German lines more than ten miles broad from Berigny due east to Longraye where the Panzer Lehr Division was attacking. This hole grew directly out of the D-Day collapse of the left wing of the 716th Division followed by the capture of Bayeux and the smashing of the 352d left flank. The ten-mile-wide corridor opened the way through Caumont to the high wooded terrain in the vicinity of the Bois du Homme and le Beny-Bocage. Occupation of that high ground would have placed V Corps in a deep southern wedge in Seventh Army lines which the Germans feared could be gradually reinforced and then exploited either to outflank Caen or more decisively to drive westward toward Avranches. General Dollmann foresaw this development on the morning of 9 June, but the LXXXIV Corps no longer had any troops to plug the gap. Dollmann therefore proposed that the II Parachute Corps be assembled south of Balleroy for attack northward in conjunction with the I SS Panzer Corps. Although the order for this maneuver was given to General Meindl, Dollmann was doubtful whether it could be accomplished since it was not known when the II Parachute Corps units would arrive. It was probable that they would straggle into the battle area and would not be available for a concerted counterattack.

Of the units originally attached to Meindl's corps, the 77th Division had already been diverted to the Cotentin. The increasing urgency of blocking a threatened penetration at Montebourg made it imperative that the 77th continue on that mission. Meindl was thus left with only two fresh divisions, the 17th SS Panzer Grenadier and the 3d Parachute. By the evening of 9 June the bulk of 3d Parachute Division had only reached Brecey, east of Avranches. The 37th SS Panzer Grenadier Regiment of the 17th SS Division was in the same general area; the 38th SS Panzer Grenadier Regiment was east of Laval. The tracked vehicles of Ostendorff's division were being transported by train and on 9 June were strung out between la Fleche and Saumur. Because of rail breaks due to air attack the last two trains had to be unloaded south of the Loire. Only advance elements of the division had reached Balleroy, including the reconnaissance battalion equipped with amphibious Volkswagen. Reconnaissance north and northeast of Balleroy was begun on 10 June preparatory to commitment of the division in that sector.

In the meantime, however, plans were changed. Rommel considered that German weakness in the Carentan area was more dangerous than the hole on the right of LXXXIV Corps. 11 Parachute Corps was diverted to block the sector between Carentan and St. Lo, and this task was given priority over support of the 352d Division despite the desperate condition of the latter. The 3d Parachute Division was still to come into the St. Lo area with the tentative mission of occupying the north edge of the Foret de Cerisy. The 353d Division, the last mobile unit in Brittany, was also ordered to St. Lo to come under Meindl's corps. But the chief concern was along the Vire. Most of the 17th SS Panzer Grenadier Division was sent southwest of Carentan. Kampfgruppe Heintz (mobile combat group of the 275th Division) was to move on arrival into the St. Jean-de-Daye area.

The only immediate step to plug the Caumont gap on 10 June was the decision to leave Ostendorff's reconnaissance battalion in the vicinity of Balleroy. Although the move does not seem to have been intended as deception, it had that effect. The 1st Division immediately took prisoners and located forward positions of elements of the 17th SS Panzer Grenadier Division south of Balleroy east to St. Paul-de-Verney. Unidentified medium tanks were also reported on the afternoon of 10 June in the vicinity of la Londe. The light mixed units actually in contact were recognized to be incapable of major counterattack, but from prisoner interrogations V Corps deduced that the 17th SS Panzer Grenadier Division might be in position to attack, probably from the direction of the Foret de Cerisy by daylight of 11 June. The G-2 further warned of a long-range contingency. The 11th Panzer and 1st SS Panzer Divisions were reported on the move from the south and northeast respectively. It was thought that one of them might be used against V Corps, although when either would arrive could not even be

guessed at.

The possibility of enemy armored counterattacks was in the forefront of most American commanders' minds. This was D plus 3, when according to all planning calculations the enemy could begin to exert heavy pressure against the beachheads. Signs that the Germans had actually succeeded in concentrating reserves for counterattack were, to be sure, scanty. They consisted chiefly in the identification of elements of Panzer Lehr Division in the British sector, of the 17th SS Panzer Grenadier Division in front of the 1st Division, and a curious multiplication of rumors from prisoners and civilians that there were large enemy concentrations in the Foret de Cerisy. First Army G-2 wrote at the end of 9 June: "No surprise should be occasioned should this cover produce an armored or motorized division." The whole tone of the intelligence estimates of this date was dominated by conviction that the enemy was preparing to strike a major blow. In summing up the fighting of 9 June, First Army reported: "Enemy forces pursued their delaying tactics pending the arrival of armored counterattack forces." There was no appreciation of the havoc that had been wrought in the German defenses by Allied success in smashing the coastal crust. On 10 June First Army observed that the 17th SS Panzer Grenadier Division had come into the area south of Carentan and that no new identifications had been made on V Corps front. The enemy units in contact were still only the 352d Division and elements of the 716th. First Army G-2 believed that in the fighting of 10 June German forces had withdrawn south along the Vire and their eastern flank had been forced back to the northern edge of the Foret de Cerisy. In reality, not only had the German forces been south of the forest for at least twelve hours, but at the time the intelligence report was issued troops of the U.S. 2d Division were also south of the forest.

The Caumont gap was literally held by the reconnaissance battalion of the 17<sup>th</sup> SS Panzer Grenadier Division during 10 June. Plans were made that day to bring the XLVII Panzer Corps (General Funck) into the gap with the 2d Panzer Division (Generalleutnant Heinrich Freiherr von Luetwitz). The 2d Panzer Division had in fact begun its move from Amiens to the battle area during the night of 9-10 June. Advance units had reached Paris, but the movements under air attack during the day were slow and costly. On the evening of 10 June while wheeled elements were near Alencon the tanks had just begun to move from Amiens by train. With the example of the ineffective piecemeal commitment of the 12th SS, 21st, and Panzer Lehr Divisions, Funck wanted to delay commitment of the 2d Panzer until it had completed assembly with its tanks. This was expected by 13 June. In the meantime, on the strong urging of General Luetwitz, the reconnaissance battalion was committed at Caumont with the mission of holding the high ground there.

During the day one reinforced regiment of the 3d Parachute Division

arrived in the vicinity of St. Georges-d'Elle. The division commander, Generalleutnant Richard Schimpf, wanted to take positions according to plan in the Foret de Cerisy area along with Ostendorff's reconnaissance units. But Meindl (II Parachute Corps), to whom the regiment was attached, believed that the more urgent need was to strengthen the 352d Division defenses along the Elle. The regiment therefore went into line from Berigny to St. Germain-d'Elle. II Parachute Corps thus refused its right flank at the gap to establish an arc defense north and northeast of St. Lo. The gap was slightly narrowed but it remained open.

While attempting to fill the gap, the Germans on 10 June had also made a final effort to mount a counterattack in the Caen sector against the British. Inasmuch as Panzer Lehr was fully engaged in defensive fighting south of Bayeux, General Geyr (Panzer Group West), who took over command in the Caen sector on 9 June, planned to use half of the 12th SS and half of the 21st Panzer Divisions in a limited-objective attack due north of Caen. The objective was the Anisy-Anguery area. Both Geyr and Rommel would have preferred to attack more to the northwest of Caen, but Geyr did not want to spend another twenty-four hours maneuvering into position. He felt that what was needed was aggressive action even if its immediate purposes were relatively inconsequential. Rommel agreed, and the attack was ordered for the evening.

Even this attack could not be carried out. In the afternoon British pressure mounted against the right of Panzer Lehr and the left of 12th SS Panzer Division where the British 30 Corps had committed the 7th Armoured Division to drive through Tilly-sur-Seulles, toward Villers-Bocage, knowing that Panzer Lehr was already dangerously weakened Geyr called off the attack.

Less than an hour later his headquarters was hit by fighter-bombers that wiped out his entire staff. All personnel in the operations section were killed, as well as most of the officers of the forward echelon. The bulk of the signal equipment was destroyed. With Geyr physically unable to exercise command, the sector reverted to the control of I SS Panzer Corps and Seventh Army. Seventh Army henceforth abandoned the idea of a decisive armored counterattack and bent all its efforts to solidifying its defense.

After the rest and reorganization of 11 June, V Corps mounted a new attack, this time with the deepest southward penetration planned on the left flank in the 1st Division zone. This was designed primarily to assist the British Second Army attempt to outflank Caen. The Panzer Lehr Division, despite heavy losses, had checked the British 7th Armoured Division on 10-11 June at Tilly-sur-Seulles. On the other hand the U.S. First Army advance had evidently struck a weak spot in the enemy lines. Although the

true extent and significance of the gap were unknown, it was planned to take advantage of obvious German weakness in the area to thrust the British 7th Armoured Division south close to the inter-army boundary and hook past the Panzer Lehr to capture Villers-Bocage on the Caen-Avranches highway. The 1st Division advance to the high ground at Caumont would protect the right flank of this maneuver. In conformity with the drive to Caumont the 2d and 29th Divisions would continue to push south, but with objectives echeloned to the right rear so that the advance called for on the Vire River flank was relatively small. Besides achieving specific tactical objectives, the renewed V Corps attack, it was hoped, would help take pressure off VII Corps, which was making the main army effort aimed at the capture of Cherbourg.

The 1st Division estimated that, although the enemy was capable of offering only scattered opposition to the advance, there was a chance that weak elements of Panzer Lehr might penetrate the division left boundary and that the 17th SS Panzer Grenadier Division might attack the right flank of the advance. General Huebner's plan provided strict control of the attack. Regiments were to move by bounds and prepare to defend successive phase lines. They would report arrival at the phase lines and, except for pushing out aggressive reconnaissance, would continue the advance only on division order.

The attacks of 12 June on either side of the army boundary at first seemed to promise rapid and spectacular success. The 1st Division, jumping off at 0800 with the 18th and 26th Infantry Regiments on a 3,000-yard front behind a screen of two troops of the 102d Cavalry Squadron, moved rapidly against light enemy forces which readily gave way. The 18th Infantry had reached the Caumont-St. Lo highway by evening and sent patrols into Caumont. The 26th Infantry at the same time got one battalion to the edge of Caumont but there ran into determined resistance from an estimated two companies of Germans who belonged to the reconnaissance battalion of the 2d Panzer Division. The town was not cleared until the following morning. On the 1st Division right the 9th Infantry of the 2d Division occupied the Litteau ridge south of the Foret de Cerisy. Not until it reached the objective did it make firm contact with the enemy.

The 7th Armoured Division in the British 30 Corps zone, starting its attack in the afternoon, at first made similarly rapid progress. By 1745 leading elements had passed through Livry three miles northeast of Caumont. At dark the point of the attack was south of the divisional objective and the armor began to wheel east. Villers-Bocage was entered the following morning. This initial success, however, was qualified by the failure of the British 50th Division on the northeast to make any progress in direct attacks against the Panzer Lehr Division west of Tilly-sur-Seulles. On 13 June the 2d Panzer Division (with two infantry regiments supported by two

battalions of artillery but no tanks) strongly counterattacked between Cahagnes and Villers-Bocage. The Germans drove up almost to the Caumont-Villers-Bocage road. The 7th Armoured Division, with its forward movement stopped, found itself in a dangerously exposed thin salient. In the afternoon it withdrew to high ground some two miles west of the town where it tied in with the 1st Division at Caumont. During the afternoon of 14 June, renewed enemy attacks induced a further withdrawal of about five miles north to the Parfouru-L'Eclin area on the Aure River and Caumont-Caen road. The 2d Panzer Division attacks were broken up in large measure by artillery concentrations in which batteries of the V Corps, which had observation of the enemy from the Caumont heights took an important part.

Positions on high ground covering Villers-Bocage remained for about six weeks in enemy hands. The Caumont gap remained open between the 2d Panzer and 3d Parachute Divisions, but in view of the strong enemy opposition to British advance the 1st Division was ordered to hold at Caumont while Gerow continued to push with his right against the 352d and 3d Parachute Divisions in front of St. Lo.

The push was to net few gains during the next week. Two regiments of the 2d Division and the whole of the 29th Division had run into a new kind of enemy resistance, based in part on stubborn defense of positions prepared in depth and in part on small counter-thrusts against the flanks of advancing American forces. The 3d Parachute Division, moreover, turned out to have some of the best and toughest infantrymen in Rundstedt's armies.

On 12 June the attacks of the 2d Division in the center of the corps zone were split by the Foret de Cerisy. While the 9th Infantry on the left advanced in conformity with the 1st Division and against only slight opposition, the 23d Infantry directed its attack southwest toward St. Lo in an operation linked with the advance of the 29th Division on its right. Principal objective of the 23d Infantry was Hill 192-a dominating hill mass north of the main Bayeux-St. Lo road-the key to St. Lo because it provided observation of all approaches to the city for miles to the north and east. The regiment, attacking with two battalions, was stopped at the Elle River. This stream, only ten feet wide and no military obstacle in itself, marked the enemy's main line of resistance. It was clear, too, that the enemy was making effective use of the observation afforded by Hill 192. But neither American fighter-bomber missions shortly before dark nor repeated artillery concentrations on enemy positions there achieved any effective results.

On 13 June the 2d Division renewed the attack and the 38th Infantry, with heavy artillery support (more than 6,500 rounds were fired), advanced

about two miles south of the Elle. As enemy resistance thickened, the American troops were stopped by division order and directed together with the 23d Infantry to organize their present positions for defense. The difference in enemy opposition east and west of the Foret de Cerisy can be seen from comparative casualties. While the 1st Division lost 92 men in the two-day attack, the 2d Division lost 540, most of them from the two regiments that had struggled toward Hill 192.

The 29th Division attacked on 12 June with one regiment, the 115th, while the 175th Infantry held north of the Elle protecting the corps west flank and the 11 6th remained in corps reserve as precaution against an enemy counterattack west of the Vire. The 747th Tank Battalion was held in division reserve also against the contingency of counterattack. The 115th Infantry, despite direct support by three battalions of artillery, had hard going. The 1st Battalion was stopped at the river bank mostly by small arms fire. The 3d Battalion succeeded in crossing and advanced south about 3,000 yards. Enemy forces built up in the hedgerows, and by the end of the morning the battalion was not only stopped but was fighting to avoid being cut off. After taking severe losses it withdrew to its original line of departure. In the afternoon two platoons of tanks were put in with the 1st Battalion to try to outflank the enemy holding the river crossing southeast of Ste. Marguerite-d'Elle. After three tanks were lost, the attempt was abandoned. In the evening the 116th Infantry was passed through the 11th and not only succeeded in crossing but by daylight had approached its objectives, against resistance reported to be light. Continuing under generous supporting artillery fires the regiment entered St. Clair-sur-Elle and Couvains. Casualties to the 29th Division for the two days were 547.

At the end of 13 June the V Corps attack toward St. Lo was halted by order of General Bradley. The Carentan-Isigny link between his two corps was still thin and weak, and despite success in beating off the attack of the 17th SS Panzer Grenadier Division it still seemed possible that the enemy might try again. Furthermore XIX Corps was just becoming operational in this area and it was necessary to adjust troop assignments between the corps. The 29th Division passed to the control of the new corps and the 30th Division was brought into the zone between the Vire and Taute Rivers. Supporting troops were reshuffled.

In calling off the southward push, General Bradley was also influenced by the desire to avoid a general engagement of V Corps which might absorb resources needed for First Army's main effort-the VII Corps attack to cut the peninsula and take Cherbourg. Finally, since the British seemed to be stopped north of Tilly-sur-Seulles, any advance by V Corps would expose both flanks to possible enemy armored attack. There seemed a real danger of that in the afternoon, when the 2d Panzer Division was identified on the left of the 1st Division, and the warning was issued to both 1st and 2d

**Divisions to dig in when they reached suitable defensive positions.**

**For the time being the mission of V Corps became to hold its present positions while First Army devoted its main effort to the capture of Cherbourg and, as a precondition for that, strengthened the Vire-Taute corridor. The corps' divisions, however, were given a certain latitude to improve their defensive positions and were ordered to conduct aggressive patrolling "so as to deny the enemy any opportunity to abandon this front with impunity" and to give the impression of continued major offensive action.**

**Toward St. Lo**

**When V Corps halted on 13 June, the whole First Army line on the south was echeloned to the right from Caumont held by the 1st Division to the Carentan area in the zone of the 101st Airborne Division. The 1st Division held a salient in the Caumont area substantially in advance of the 2d Division on its right. The 2d and 29th Divisions were deployed on a northwest-southeast line generally from Cormolain to Airel on the Vire River. They confronted the right wing of II Parachute Corps, temporarily subordinated to LXXXIV Corps, which defended St. Lo on an arc along the high ground north and northeast of the city. The 1st and 2d Divisions remained under V Corps, which had also the 2d Armored Division (less Combat Command A) in reserve. The XIX Corps (Maj. Gen. Charles H. Corlett) became operational on 13 June, with the 30th Division (Maj. Gen. Leland Hobbs) attached, and on the next day took over from V Corps control of the 29th Division.**

**In anticipation of renewing the drive south, both V and XIX Corps on 14 June issued warning orders marking out objectives and schemes of maneuver. Following the outlines of these orders all forward divisions except the 1st made limited-objective attacks during the next week primarily to secure better defensive positions, although commanders hoped that larger rewards might be reaped.**

**The series of limited-objective attacks began on 15 June with a thrust by XIX Corps aimed at securing the high ground on the line St. Georges de Bohon (three miles southwest of Carentan)le Hommet d'Arthenay (three miles northwest of Pont Hebert)-St. Lo-la Barre de Semilly. The 30th Division, which had not yet landed all its troops, attacked initially with only one regiment. The attack made very slow progress even though the estimated enemy opposition consisted of only one platoon of riflemen and a section of the machine guns. At the end of the day the 120th Infantry occupied Montmartin-en-Graignes and the high ground north of the Vire-Taute Canal. The day's operations cost it less than twenty casualties. Again the fighting between the Vire and Taute Rivers had proceeded on a**

very small scale, as the attitude on both sides remained defensive and the opposing forces almost equally weak. Curiously enough, each opponent viewing his own weakness expected the other to attack. Though the narrow zone between the rivers cut by the open muddy depression at the Vire-Taute Canal would have made any attack difficult, the rewards of success might have tempted either of the respective commanders to accept the risks. The Americans expected the Germans to strike for the sea and split the First Army; the Germans expected the Americans to drive for Periers and split the Seventh Army. The fact was that neither opponent had the strength to do anything but hold on.

Weakness on the German side resulted mainly from the nearly incredible difficulties of moving troops into the line—difficulties that had constantly disrupted Seventh Army offensive plans and jeopardized its defensive positions everywhere in Normandy. The story of how Kampfgruppe Heintz struggled up to Montmartin-en-Graignes where it fought against the 120th Infantry is worth the telling for it shows how completely the battlefield was sealed off by Allied air forces.

Kampfgruppe Heintz consisted of the 984th Regiment of the 275th Division, reinforced by the division Fuesilier battalion, a three-battery artillery battalion, the engineer battalion, and a Flak battery. It had been ordered on the morning of 6 June to begin immediate priority movement to the battle area. The division headquarters then at Redon in Brittany was less than 120 miles by rail from St. Lo. A day or two should have been ample for the movement. But Allied aircraft, sovereign in the skies, ruled otherwise.

The Kampfgruppe took only about ten hours to assemble but was delayed in entraining by air attacks which blocked tracks, damaged locomotives, and generally interfered with the assembling of cars. These delays continued through the night, and by 0800 the following morning only three sections of the Kampfgruppe had been loaded. In the afternoon five trains were under way; three were still being loaded. The lead train made good progress to Avranches, where at 1400 it was held up by undetermined trouble ahead. While this was being cleared up, the rails behind it were cut. Late in the afternoon the train passed through Avranches and reached Foligny a few miles to the north. At Foligny, however, air attack destroyed it with total loss of vehicles and equipment and very heavy casualties. The second train in the meantime reached Pontorson but was there halted by rail cuts to the east. Under heavy air attack which took severe toll of the men and equipment of the engineer unit aboard, the train was unloaded and the troops ordered to continue on foot.

All other trains en route on 7 June had been attacked and so delayed that at 1800 they were still all south of Rennes. At that time it was reported that bombs had cut the rails in three places between Rennes and Dol and the

whole movement was ordered rerouted via la Brohiniere-Dinan-Dol. Scarcely had this decision been made when it was discovered that between Dinan and Dol the tracks were broken in no fewer than nineteen places. All during 8 June seven trains languished on the rails south of Rennes. Two other trains meanwhile were struggling to load artillery units of the Kampfgruppe and were being continually interrupted by air attacks. It was 1915 on 8 June before the last train got under way. Since no progress had been made to clear the route beyond Rennes on 7 June, it had been decided to reroute the trains through Fougeres. On 9 June the Fougeres line was cut. The transportation officers then gave up. The troops of Kampfgruppe Heintz were all unloaded and ordered to proceed by truck or foot. The bulk of the unit had thus in two days and three nights traveled less than thirty miles. Three to five more days were consumed in the road march to the final assembly areas where the Kampfgruppe was attached to the 17th SS Panzer Grenadier Division and put at once into the line southeast of Carentan.

The experience of Kampfgruppe Heintz in trying to move under unrestricted Allied air attacks was by no means exceptional. On the contrary the difficulties of a unit of the 265th Division ordered out of Brittany at the same time were even worse. Original orders to move the whole 265th unit by train were canceled on 7 June in order to save trains for the use of Kampfgruppe Heintz. The bulk of the troops thus turned out on the road arrived in about five days in the battle area. But the so-called immobile portions deemed essential to move by rail entrained at Quimperle and took seven days to reach Rennes about one hundred miles away. From that point they had to walk.

Discouraged by these and similar experiences, on 13 June Seventh Army decided that rail movements between Brittany and Normandy were impossible and that there was little hope that the situation would improve. Dollmann therefore closed the branch rail office under LXXIV Corps which had been established on D Day.

By the attack of 1 June XIX Corps secured a defensive position fronting the depression of the Vire-Taute Canal. In this position the 30th Division continued to build up. It did not seem feasible to continue the push south through the bottleneck of the St. Lo highway across the lowlands. The decision was made to wait for additional troops with which to force a crossing of the river in attack westward. General Corlett therefore ordered the 30th Division to defend the line of the canal while the 29th Division and the 2d Division of V Corps renewed the attack toward St. Lo.

The critical objective of the new attack was again Hill 192. The hill itself was the assigned objective of the 38th Infantry on the right flank of the 2d Division. To assist in taking it the 29th Division, attacking with two

regiments abreast, was to put its main effort on the left. There the 116th Infantry, with the 3d Battalion of the 115th Infantry attached, was to drive for St. Andre-de-l'Epine and Hill 150 at the northeastern end of the Martinville ridge' (later one of the bloodiest of the St. Lo battlefields). The 175th Infantry, attacking with its right on the Vire River, would advance to Hills 90 and 97 northwest of St. Lo. The 2d Division, besides taking Hill 192 with the 38th Infantry, would seize the high ground astride the St. Lo highway near la Croix Rouge with the 23d Infantry and the heights west of St. Germain-d'Elle and northwest of Montrabot with the 9th Infantry. The 1st Division was alerted by V Corps to advance later to a line roughly from la Lande-sur-Drome to Cahagnes, but the attack would wait for the completion of the 2d Division advance.

Enemy positions had been discovered on 15 June, in and around St. Germain-d'Elle, by patrols of the 102d Cavalry Squadron which probed as far south as Vidouville. The cavalry also identified German paratroopers at Montrabot. Since the arrival on 10 June of advance elements of the 3d Parachute Division to take up defensive positions on the right flank of the 352d Division, other march groups of the division had straggled in to extend the line southeast and gradually fill the Caumont gap. Although the final assembly of all three regiments of the division was not complete until the night of 17 June, the line was already strong by the 16th. Unlike most German units moved to the front during June, the regiments of the 3d Parachute Division arrived almost intact. By marching only at night, avoiding the main roads, and maintaining strict march and camouflage discipline, they had almost wholly escaped air attack.

The U.S. 2d Division in the attack of 16 June, which began for all three regiments at 0800, pushed both wings forward slightly but was unable to advance in the center. All along the line, heavy fighting netted advances measured only in yards, as the enemy put up a skillful and stubborn defense in position that made maximum use of the tangled hedgerow country. The experience of one platoon of the 9th Infantry on the left was typical. The platoon advancing through open fields was hit by fire from eight machine guns emplaced in the network of hedgerows: its leader was lost as well as a third of its men. With observation from high ground west of St. Germain-d'Elle, the enemy repeatedly permitted the attackers to reach exposed positions and then opened withering fire. At the end of the day the 9th Infantry had lost 140 men-twenty of them killed-and had advanced only a few hundred yards. St. Germain-d'Elle remained in enemy hands.

The most important advance of the day occurred on the 2d Division right, where the 3d Battalion of the 38th Infantry pushed up Hill 192 to within 700 yards of the crest. The value of the success, however, was limited by the failure of units on the right and left to keep up. The 23d F Infantry in the

center of the division zone fought hard all day, losing 11 officers and 162 men. But the end of the day found it still virtually at the line of departure.

Despite the exposed position of the battalion on Hill 192, it was decided to leave it in place and the 2d Engineer Battalion was ordered up to double for infantry and reinforce its lines. The hill salient was held throughout the rest of June, as the 2d Division by corps order passed to the defensive.

The attack of the 29th Division on 16 June at first seemed to go well. Colonel Canham planned to advance his 11 6th Infantry by bounds. The 1st Battalion leading off at 0800 would pass through the 3d Battalion to take the plateau between the Bois du Bretel and la Blotrie. There it would reorganize and be prepared to advance to capture Hills 147 and 150 on the Martinville ridge. The 3d Battalion, 115th Infantry, attached for this operation, would advance southwest to cut the St. Lo-Isigny highway near la Fossardiere and organize the high ground there for all-around defense. The 2d Battalion, 116th Infantry, then in contact with the enemy at St. Clair-sur-l'Elle, would break contact and assemble in the vicinity of Couvains prepared to strike through the other two battalions to take Hill 115 and the stretch of highway near la Luzerne. The two battalions that led the attack (Canham's 1st and the 3d of the 115th) each had eight tanks attached. The order emphasized the organization of all objectives for defense against enemy counterattack. The 115th Infantry, less the 3d Battalion, was held in corps reserve near Ste. Marguerite-d'Elle.

All units got off on time and at 0930 the lead battalions were both making good progress against slight opposition. About noon, however, the 3d Battalion, 115th, reported meeting two companies of enemy infantry with two tanks. By midafternoon two of its own tanks were knocked out and forward progress was virtually halted east of les Foulons. At the same time the 1st Battalion, 116th Infantry, was far to the south, only about 1,000 yards short of St. Andre-de-l'Epine. Here it was stopped by artillery fire and an enemy counterattack. The 2d Battalion, committed about noon to attack toward la Luzerne, was held up just west of the highway near Villiers-Fossard where the enemy was dug in on a nose of high ground. Supporting artillery fire failed to shake the battalion loose. The 3d Battalion, 115th Infantry, in the meantime was withdrawn 1,000 yards to the rear. By 1800 General Corlett at corps had given up the idea of reaching final objectives before dark and all forward battalions dug in to hold for the night and resume the attack the next day.

Enemy resistance from commanding ground and hedgerows had been stubborn, but Colonel Canham was nevertheless not satisfied with the effort his regiment had made. He admonished his subordinate commanders that night to take up the attack the next day with new vigor. They should advance their units on a broad front, he said, and "get around

**the sniper and machine gunner and wipe him out.... If you allow your unit to bunch up behind a hedgerow and wait for hours you are only playing into Jerry's hand. He will move around where he can enfilade you or drop artillery or mortar fire on you.... It is time to get over the jitters and fight like hell."**

**The 175th Infantry (Lt. Col. Alexander George) during the day met much lighter resistance as it attacked with its right on the Vire River. The 1st and 3d Battalions, north of the Elle River, were relieved during the night of 15-16 June by elements of the 119th Infantry and crossed the river to gain a line of departure along the ridge line on the south bank. The move was made without opposition, but the next morning both battalions ran into some enemy machine gun, mortar, and artillery fire as they pushed south to reach Amy and les Buteaux. One company of the 119th Infantry followed the 3d Battalion, stationing patrols along the river to guard possible crossing sites against an eruption of the enemy into the regiment's open flank.**

**The comparatively rapid advance of the 175th Infantry led the 29th Division command to believe that enemy opposition in this zone had cracked. As late as 1400 on 17 June General Gerhardt told General Corlett, "I feel we'll be getting to St. Lo before long." But he added, "It's hard to tell."**

**Actually, in the fighting of 17 June there appeared indications of stalemate. The 116th Infantry, renewing the attack at 0400, ran into strong enemy machine gun and mortar fire. The worst spot was in the gap of about 1,000 yards developed in the previous day's attack between the 116th and 175th. There in the vicinity of Villiers-Fossard the enemy was strongly entrenched. General Gerhardt observed that it was "a devil of a place. Every time they go forward they are driven back." Attempts to smash through with artillery or 4.2-inch mortar support foundered on the difficulties of observation. Sources of enemy fire could be located generally but seldom pinpointed.**

**This was true everywhere on the front. It was also noted that preparatory artillery fire did little good since the Germans made a practice of thinly outposting their front lines and moving the bulk of their forces forward to meet the infantry attack after the artillery lifted. The attack of the 115th Infantry (less the 2d Battalion) got off at 1840, 17 June. Leading the attack, the 1st Battalion lost direction and was caught by machine gun fire in an orchard not far from the line of departure. The 3d Battalion remained in the assembly area and dug in for the night.**

**Under the attacks of the 29th Division on 16 and 17 June the German 352d Division, already only a Kampfgruppe of about regimental strength, lost about 500 men. On the other hand withdrawal southward coupled with the build-up of the 3d Parachute Division had resulted in a substantial**

shortening of Kraiss's lines. His right rested on high ground west of St. Andre-de-l'Epine, his left on the Vire. The division, furthermore, was strengthened on the evening of 16 June when Kampfgruppe Boehm of the 353d Division arrived from Brittany. Boehm, who was commander of the 943d Regiment, brought up two infantry battalions and a few supporting troops on bicycles. Pending the arrival of the rest of the division (still south of Avranches) he was attached to the 352d and ordered into the area of la Luzerne. It was chiefly Boehm's fresh infantry that fought in the Villiers-Fossard salient during 17 June.

In the 175th Infantry zone only the 1st Battalion attacked on 17 June. On Hill 108 it ran into heavy enemy artillery and machine gun fire and at 1440 reported that it was unable to advance. About the same time the 2d Battalion, which had held in position just northwest of the 1st, reported a counterattack that seemed designed by the Germans to cut off the 1st Battalion. Although the enemy made no significant penetrations of the 175th Infantry's lines, the advance southward was effectively halted.

For the third day's attack (on 18 June) General Gerhardt got eight battalions of artillery, six of which were to mass fires in front of the 115th and 116th Infantry Regiments. A seven-minute artillery concentration before the jump-off had little effect in softening enemy defenses. At noon the 115th reported that the general advance had been stopped. The troops were getting mortar, 88-mm., 105-mm., and 20-mm. explosive fire and found it impossible to determine the exact location of the enemy in the immediate area. As for the 116th, it was exhausted by the attacks of the first two days. The 1st Battalion commander reported that he could not attack as he had "hardly anyone left." His executive officer added that "everyone is done out physically. No leaders left. No reorganization possible."

A similar situation developed in the 175th zone. The 3d Battalion, after being relieved at Meauffe about midnight by the 119th Infantry, attacked south the morning of 18 June and reached le Carillon without meeting much opposition. But the 1st Battalion was getting badly battered on Hill 108. To relieve it, the 3d Battalion was first diverted at 1400 to attack southeast toward Hill 102; later it was ordered to disengage and go directly to the assistance of the 1st Battalion.

Positions occupied by V Corps units on 18 June were held for the next two weeks. Less than five miles from the key city of St. Lo, the 29th Division would not enter it for almost a month and then at the cost of some of the most difficult and expensive fighting of the war. A foretaste of the struggle had already come in the last three days of the June attacks as V Corps mired in the hedgerow country. One of the prime difficulties faced by the Americans in this terrain was in co-ordinating tanks and infantry. The enemy skillfully established defenses combining antitank guns and

automatic weapons well concealed in hedges. Tanks could not go forward to knock out the machine guns, nor could infantry spearhead the advance to take out the antitank guns. The effect was graphically described in the account by the 747th Tank Battalion of a limited-objective attack on 20 June to reduce the Villiers-Fossard salient:

At 0600 Company B moved forward, with the engineers blowing gaps in hedgerows and the infantry following. The infantry was pinned down and tanks could not move further forward. But they were on part of their objective. Tanks were forced to withdraw due to heavy antitank fire and bazooka fire. One tank was knocked out and the crew of five men were wounded. The tanks kept trying to move forward, but got stuck. And the infantry stayed pinned down. Another tank was hit. On order of the regimental commander four tanks forced their way through fire to the objective. No infantry followed. Two tanks returned; one was knocked out by antitank guns. The other was stuck so that [the] crew had to abandon [the] tanks as no help could reach them. The infantry withdrew 900 yards and took up defensive positions. The tanks covered the withdrawal....

One answer was the development of small infantry-tank teams which could advance together. To make this possible hedgerow cutters were devised and welded to the fronts of the tanks to allow them to bull through the earth banks. Technicians wrestled with difficult problems of direct communication between infantry and tanks. All during the rest of June training took place in the V Corps zone to perfect tank-infantry tactics which could set the attack rolling once more toward St. Lo when the time came.