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THE JULY OFFENSIVE

ST-LO, capital of the department of Manche, can be used as one symbol for First U. S. Army's victory in a most difficult and bloody phase of the Campaign of Normandy: the "Battle of the Hedgerows," during the first three weeks of July 1944. Other names figure in this battle. La Haye-du-Puits, Periers, Hill 192, like St-Lo, will be remembered by First Army soldiers from a background of stubborn struggle for gains too often measured in terms of a few hundred yards, or of two or three fields, conquered against a bitterly resisting enemy.

Much more was at stake in the Battle of the Hedgerows than possession of a communications center on the Vire River. In June, First Army and British Second Army had won their beachheads and had captured Cherbourg (26 June). Supplies and reinforcements were building up for a powerful offensive, designed to break out of the Normandy pocket and scheduled to be mounted in the First Army zone. But more room and better jump-off positions for the crucial offensive were needed before this blow could be delivered. The attack that began in early July was planned to gain this ground, on a front of 25 miles. Four corps, employing ultimately 12 divisions, were involved in the effort. All these units faced similar problems of advance, and all contributed to the measure of success achieved. Therefore, in the larger tactical sense it would be unfair to identify the Battle of the Hedgerows with St-Lo and later military studies, treating the Campaign of Normandy in different scope, will give the operation in truer proportions. Here, one phase of the hedgerow battle can be used to illustrate, in tactical detail, the character of the larger action.

The advance which reached St-Lo is the story of XIX Corps, aided by the action of the 2d Division of V Corps on its left flank.

First Army's Problem

During the period required for VII Corps to capture Cherbourg and clean up the Cotentin Peninsula, the Allied line to the south had remained relatively stable. To the east, British Second Army was still fighting toward Caen against heavy concentrations of enemy armor (seven divisions as of 30 June), employed in frequent counterattacks. From Caumont to Carentan, and west across the peninsula, First U. S. Army had been holding the positions gained by 20 June and regrouping forces as the build-up increased them. (See Map I at end of book. [1]) To critics who were ignorant of General Eisenhower's plans and the immense problems of supply and build-up, it appeared that the Allied attack had lost momentum and that Allied forces were becoming involved in the type of static warfare which they had sought to avoid. Such critics were hardly reassured by the progress of First Army's offensive after it opened on 3 July. The fact that this offensive had limited objectives, and was a preliminary for a definitive breakthrough effort, would only be shown by future developments.

The map of First Army's zone (Map II) shows clearly some of the considerations which dictated

[1] Maps numbered in Roman are found at the end, in sequence.

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this July attack for elbow-room. The ground just south of First Army's lines was divided by the Vire River into two relatively distinct areas. East of the Vire was broken, hilly country rising steadily toward the south and featured by east-west ridges that ran across the axis of Allied advance. West of the river, the area in which the major effort was to come in the ultimate larger offensive, advance toward the corner of Brittany would lead into terrain that was increasingly favorable for offensive maneuver; but before this suitable ground could be reached,

First Army had to penetrate a belt, six to ten miles deep, in which every feature of the terrain favored the German defense. Any major offensive effort, if it started here, might well be blunted and lose its momentum before it broke through this belt.

One aspect of the terrain problem was First Army's lack of room in the 2 July positions to use its power effectively. The sluggish streams that converge on Carentan flow from south or southwest in wide, marshy flood plains, cut by drainage ditches and otherwise devoid of cover. Any attack to the south would have to debouch from the Carentan area along two relatively narrow corridors between these water barriers: one, along the axis of the Carentan-St-Jean-de-Daye-St-Lo highway; the other, along the Carentan-Periers road. This limitation restricted maneuver and presented the Germans with every opportunity for concentrated defense against frontal attack. Farther west, beyond extensive marshes of the upper Seves (the Prairies Marecageuses) was a belt of hills, which, combined with the large Mont-Castre Forest, controlled the important road junction at la Haye-du-Puits. Here, the enemy had had time to organize a strong main line of resistance (MLR) to protect his flank on the sea. Nowhere on the front west of the Vire was the terrain suitable for an effort at rapid breakthrough, or for full exploitation of First Army's growing superiority in numbers and in materiel.

The road net presented a further complication. East of Carentan First Army had only one main lateral for communications, and this highway was still under enemy artillery fire from Carentan to the Vire. All land traffic from Cherbourg and the Cotentin to Isigny and Bayeux depended on this one route, with its bottleneck at Carentan. West of that town the only roads within ten miles of the front were three north-south axial routes; they would help when Cherbourg was opened, but that port required extensive repair and development. In the meantime the open beaches, Omaha and Utah, were still the only means of getting men and materiel for the build-up into the American zone. Thus First Army was seriously hampered in concentrating its supplies and in moving troops.

The attack in early July was designed to win ground which would solve these difficulties on First Army's right and center. The objective set was the general line Coutances-Marigny-St-Lo; on gaining this line, First Army would hold terrain satisfactory for launching an offensive of greater scope. The restricting corridors formed by the marshes and streams would be passed, and First Army would have the use of main laterals between Carentan and la Haye-du-Puits, and between St-Lo and Periers.

The attack plan called for an effort that would begin on the right, near the sea, then widen progressively eastward in a series of blows by three of the four corps in line, each corps attacking on Army order. To reach the ultimate objectives would involve the greatest advance (some 20 miles) on the right, while the whole front pivoted on V Corps, east of St-Lo. VIII Corps would open the offensive, aiming first at la Haye-du-Puits and the Mont-Castre hills with three divisions in line, the 79th, 90th, and 82d Airborne. The 82d Airborne, which had been in action since D Day, needed rest and was to be pinched out early in the advance; the 8th Division was in corps reserve. On Army order, the VII Corps would pick up the attack, striking with the 83d and 4th Divisions, while the 9th was to come in when maneuver room could be obtained. Finally, XIX Corps would join the battle, aided by the 2d Division of V Corps, in a zone that in-

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cluded the Vire River and aimed at the St-Lo area on both sides of that river. At the start XIX Corps had two divisions in line, the 29th and 30th; the 35th was on its way to France, scheduled to reinforce their attack. The 3d Armored Division was initially in army reserve, near Isigny.

German forces in the battle zone constituted the larger part of Seventh

Army, commanded by SS Lt. Gen. Hauser. [2] Two corps, the LXXXIV and the II Parachute, held the front from the Caumont sector west to the coast, the Vire River being the boundary. [3] Elements of no less than 12 divisions were under these 2 corps, including the 17th SS Panzer Grenadier and the 2d SS Panzer (Das Reich). Only the latter unit was believed to have tanks. Many German units were far below strength, both as a result of losses incurred in June and of enemy difficulties in getting men, supplies, and materiel to the front under the conditions imposed by Allied air supremacy. Of the divisions which had reinforced the front since D Day, few were at anything like full strength. Some elements of the 2d SS Panzer were still in southern France, near Toulouse. The available units of the 265th, 266th, and 275th Divisions were only battle groups, composed of mobile elements of these divisions; parts of the first two of these

[2] His predecessor, Lt. Gen. Dollmann, died of . heart attack on 28 June.

[3] Seventh Army responsibilities also included Brittany, held by elements of two corps which had been heavily "milked" for reinforcement of the Normandy battle. The east boundary of Seventh Army was the Drome River.

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divisions and the bulk of the 275th were still in Brittany or south of the Loire. [4] Nevertheless, the enemy forces included several crack units, such as the 2d Parachute and the two SS divisions, and Seventh Army had enjoyed sufficient time to prepare the ground thoroughly for a defensive battle. Also, in contrast to First Army's situation, the enemy had plenty of room for defensive maneuver and good communications for making a flexible defense.

But the Germans' greatest advantage lay in the hedgerows which crisscrossed the country everywhere, hampering offensive action and limiting the use of tanks. An aerial photograph of a typical section of Normandy shows more than 3,900 hedged enclosures in an area of less than eight square miles. Growing out of massive embankments that formed dikes up to ten feet high, often flanked by drainage ditches or sunken roads, the hedges lent themselves easily to skillful organization of dug-in emplacements and concealed strongpoints, difficult both to locate and to attack.

The uncertainty of weather conditions represented another hazard for First Army's effort. current (sic) one threatened to develop into the rainiest in many years, thereby accentuating the problems presented by marshy areas, slowing all movements on the hedge-bound narrow roads, and handicapping our ground attack. The extensive, marshy bottom lands south and southwest of Carentan had been partly flooded by the Germans as a feature of their defensive plans, and the rains helped to keep these areas a barrier. Most important, poor weather could minimize the Allies' advantage of overwhelming air power by canceling air strikes and preventing observation of enemy movements and dispositions. [5]

On 3 July, VIII Corps (Maj. Gen. Troy H. Middleton) opened the First Army offensive. Three divisions jumped off abreast in a downpour of rain that not only nullified air attacks but prevented artillery observation. Enemy resistance was heavy, and the only notable advance was scored by the 82d Airborne Division. During the next three days slow progress was made in hard fighting under adverse weather. The corps struck the enemy's MLR along the line le Plessis-Mont-Castre Forest-la Haye-du-Puits, and enemy counterattacks stiffened by armor helped to slow down the VIII Corps. Though la Haye-du-Puits was nearly surrounded, average gains for the three-day period were under 6,000 yards on the corps front, and, contrary to expectations, the enemy had clearly shown his intentions of defending in place whatever the cost.

On 4 July, VII Corps (Maj. Gen. J. Lawton Collins) entered the action

with the 83d Division, fighting its first battle. Crowded between the Taute River bottomlands and the swamps of the Seves (Prairies Marecageuses), VII Corps had to drive along an isthmus of dry land two to three

[4] These battle groups are not located on Map II. The 265th elements were attached to the remnants of the 91st Division; the 266th group was under the 352d Division; the 275th was holding the right wing of 17th SS Panzer Grenadier's sector, and will appear in later maps as Battle Group "Heintz."

[5] Between 25 June and 7 July not single photographic mission could be flown in XIX Corps' zone, as a result of rain or poor visibility.

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miles wide and badly needed more room. According to first plans, when the 90th Division (of VIII Corps) and the 83d Division, advancing on either side of the Prairies Marecageuses, had reached Gorges to the west of the swamps and Sainteny to the east, the 4th Division was to attack through them toward Periers, followed by the 3d Armored and 9th Divisions. But the enemy had organized the neck of dry land leading to Periers in great depth and was ready for his strongest defensive effort in VII Corps' zone. The 83d Division lost 300 men during the first day of attack and made only slight gains then and the next day. On 6 July, General Collins threw in the 4th Division, on a front mainly west of the Carentan-Periers highway. A 500-yard advance brought the 4th Division up to the first of three enemy MLR's along the isthmus. Three days of heavy fighting had netted little more than 2000 yards down the Carentan-Periers road.

On 7 July, XIX Corps opened its battle, with initial effort west of the Vire. The ultimate goal in this corps zone was the high ground east and west of St-Lo.

XIX Corps' Problem

The immediate area of St-Lo had limited tactical importance; that city, with a peacetime population of about 11,000 stands on low ground near a loop of the Vire River, ringed by hills. Its military significance derived from being a hub of main arteries that lead in every direction. From the north come highways connecting it with Carentan and Isigny; eastward, roads suitable for heavy traffic lead toward Caumont and Bayeux; to the west runs a road to Periers and Lessay that constituted the principal lateral behind the German west wing; southwest is the Coutances highway. (See Map III.) Holding St-Lo, the enemy had good connections near his front lines for shifting forces east or west of the Vire. To deny the Germans this advantage would be one gain in capture of the city. Much more important for First Army's larger aims was the prospect of capturing the hills that commanded the Vire Valley on both sides of St-Lo. If XIX Corps could win the objective set, along the line St-Gilles-St-Lo-Berigny, Lt. Gen. Omar N. Bradley would have terrain essential to an offensive such as the Allied high command was already planning. The ground west of St-Lo could be used for jump-off on attack into country where tanks could operate and tactical maneuver would be favored. But the terrain near St-Lo on the east was also suitable for mounting an attack, and this fact would both help First Army and embarrass the German command. If XIX Corps could get astride the Vire at St-Lo, thus threatening a drive either southeast toward Vire or southwest toward Coutances, this would increase the enemy's problem in disposing limited forces to guard against a breakthrough. The importance of the St-Lo area to the Germans is shown by the desperate defense they offered in June and were to repeat in July.

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Nearly 15 miles wide at the start, XIX Corps' zone ran north to south, straddling the winding Vire River. Though relatively small (40 to 60

feet wide), this deep and swift stream constituted a considerable military obstacle. It had three main crossings north of St-Lo, at Pont-Hebert, Aire, and Isigny (Auville-sur-le-Vey); only the northernmost was in American hands on 7 July. For tactical purposes, the Vire split the corps zone into two subzones, each presenting different problems in the attack.

The westernmost of these subzones lay between the Vire and the minor streams that come together to form the Taute River. The Taute is a sluggish creek that flows for miles in broad and swampy lowlands, cut up by drainage ditches and crossed by only one main highway, the road from le Port to Tribehou. South of that crossing, the Taute headwaters fan out in a number of tributary streams that dissect a broad area into little islands of dry ground. In wet seasons the Taute lowlands, almost as far south as the Perier-St-Lo highway, are unsuitable for maneuver and nearly impassable for ground forces except in restricted zones. As a result of the barrier thus presented, XIX Corps' zone of attack west of the Vire would at first be definitely separated from the action of VII Corps and would be forced to follow the axis of the watershed between the Vire and Taute stream systems. This restriction, limiting all but local maneuver and flanking efforts, would assist the enemy defense.

That defense rested 7 July on the Vire-Taute Canal, running southeast from Carentan to join the Vire near the crossing at Aire. Behind the canal, the ground rises gently to a height of 120 feet above the river valleys at St-Jean-de-Daye. South of this little village, along the line of the highway to St-Lo, there are no pronounced terrain features for several miles. Small, irregular dips and swells blur the line of the watershed and add to the difficulties of observation in typical hedgerow country, with few villages and only occasional scattered farms. A road net ample for rural purposes, and ranging from "improved" second- and third-class roads to sunken lanes and farm tracks, sprawls over the area. The roads of greatest military value were two: the north-south highway via Pont-Hebert to St-Lo, and the east-west route from Aire toward le Desert.

Near Pont-Hebert the general level rises above the 150-foot contour, and the axis of XIX Corps' attack would lead into more definitely hilly country. The Vire River, south of this crossing, loses its flood plain and is squeezed into a narrow corridor between steepening bluffs. Hauts-Vents, a crossroads hamlet, stands at an elevation of nearly 300 feet (Hill 91), enough to give it commanding observation over the plains west and toward Carentan. South of Hauts-Vents, the attack west of the Vire would necessarily follow a narrow ridge line toward St-Gilles, between the Vire and the small Terrette River, tributary of the Taute. Once near the St-Lo-Periers highway, tactical contact with VII Corps would no longer be interfered with by the marshy lowlands of the Taute plains.

On the right bank of the Vire, XIX Corps faced rather different country, except for the common factor of hedgerows. The first surge of V Corps from the initial beachhead in June had carried the First Army line into hills that constitute the strongest defenses of St-Lo on the east. To the northeast of St-Lo, the 29th Division was on these hills and only three miles away from the town. But due east of it, the Germans still held the highest ground, including Hill 192, about 300 feet higher than the surrounding area and affording the best observation post in the whole St-Lo sector.

As the map shows (Map III), at the start of the action the left wing of XIX Corps extended south in a considerable salient, flanked by the Vire River. West of that water barrier, the right wing of the corps was on a general line some ten miles farther from the objective area. Maj. Gen. Charles H. Corlett, commanding XIX Corps, aimed his first blow west of the Vire, to gain ground which would bring that wing up on line. Advance here would support the attack of VII Corps to the west, cover the flank of his own units on the right bank

of the Vire, and pave the way for a direct attack on St-Lo east of the river. He planned to clear the enemy from the corps zone west of the Vire as far as the high ground directly west of St-Lo, on which ran the highways toward Periers and Coutances; these roads were the final objective in his opening attack. While the 30th Division, supported by the 113th Cavalry Group, made this effort, the 29th Division would hold east of the Vire, ready to attack on Corps order directly at St-Lo. The 35th Division was scheduled to join XIX Corps for the drive on St-Lo, but had just landed in Normandy and would need some days to get into line on the right bank.

Enemy forces in front of XIX Corps belonged to both LXXXIV and II Parachute Corps. Interrogation of prisoners of war indicated that the divisions consisted partly of hastily improvised battle groups, but included also some crack regiments. Total strength was estimated to consist of ten infantry, three engineer, and two parachute battalions plus two companies of armor. West of the Vire, the sector facing XIX Corps' opening attack was part of the 20-mile front held by the 17th SS Panzer Grenadier Division. Its right wing consisted of Battle Group "Heintz," a unit typical of the composite formations which the Germans had thrown together in the early days of reinforcing their battle line. It included two rifle battalions of the 275th Division, the 275th Engineer Battalion, and the Engineer Battalion Angers; its artillery consisted of one battery from a regiment once part of the 352d Division, and one A Battery. West of St-Jean-de-Daye, elements of the 38th SS Armored Infantry Regiment faced the XIX Corps attack zone. The bulk of the 17th SS Panzer Grenadier Division was already heavily engaged by U. S. VII Corps.

The Enemy Side

After considering the Army High Command's estimate of the situation in Normandy, Hitler decided at the end of June (and the order duly came down to Seventh Army) that present positions were to be held and any breakthrough prevented by tenacious defense and local counterattacks. Allied attack along the whole front was expected.

On 2 July, Seventh Army's War Diary noted the Staff's conclusion that preparation for American attack was complete. Army's prediction was that the main effort would come from Carentan toward Periers.

When the attack started on 3 July toward la Haye-du-Puits, Seventh Army's first opinion was that this action represented only a major reconnaissance thrust. That view was abandoned at the end of the day, when three of the U. S. divisions were reported in line. One defending battalion, Ost-Battalion "Huber," lost 80 percent in casualties and was overrun; the bad conduct of this (non-German) unit was blamed for the day's loss in ground, described as a "deep penetration." "Ost" battalions, of which there were several in Normandy, had personnel formed mainly of "volunteers" from eastern (Slavic) Europe, officered largely by Germans. In fact, many of these units were made up of adventurers or of ex-prisoners, terrorized into service for the Nazi regime. German field commanders had legitimate doubts as to their value in combat.

Seventh Army at once began negotiations with higher echelons to obtain reinforcement, asking for permission to call up the 5th Parachute Division from Brittany and the larger part of the 275th Infantry Division, still south of the Loire. [6] Army had under discussion plans for relieving certain units which were particularly battleworn: the 17th SS Panzer Grenadier Division; the 352d Division, which had been roughly handled by V Corps in its drive from Omaha beachhead and was still in line northeast of St-Lo; and the 77th and 91st Divisions, which had lost heavily in the campaign that ended with the capture of

[6] A small battle group of this division had already come to Normandy in June and was with LXXXIV Corps in the Vire sector. (See above, p. 3).

One regiment (15th) of the 5th Parachute was also at hand, in reserve near Periers.

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Cherbourg. Whether relief of these units would be possible was now regarded as doubtful, in the face of the U. S. offensive getting under way. Seventh Army requested Army Group for two additional heavy artillery battalions, two artillery observation battalions, and a smoke brigade to help meet the coming offensive. Attention was also called to ammunition shortages, particularly west of the Vire.

The Commander and Chief of Staff of Seventh Army still believed at the end of 3 July that the attack toward la Haye-du-Puits was only a prelude to another and even greater U. S. effort south of Carentan. They informed Field Marshal Rommel, commanding Army Group, that they did not yet consider it necessary to ask for mobile forces from the eastern part of the Normandy front.

Hard fighting and further loss of ground on 4 July forced Seventh Army into plans for juggling units to strengthen the LXXXIV Corps, west of the Vire. The 2d SS Panzer Division (Army Reserve) was ordered to send a battle group to the Periers area, to guard against a possible airlanding attack on that communications center. The 30th Mobile Brigade, reduced now to about battalion strength, was pulled from the sector north of St Lo and then started across the Vire to LXXXIV Corps. The opening of the U. S. offensive on the Carentan-Periers highway put severe pressure on the 17th SS Panzer Grenadier Division. The situation near la Haye-du-Puits was now regarded as "tense."

The next day brought little relief, with further penetrations made by the American attack toward Periers. Army requested reinforcement for LXXXIV Corps by a mobile unit and an infantry division, but was told it would have to manage with its present reserves (2d SS Panzer Division and the 15th Parachute Regiment). Field Marshal Kluge, who had just relieved Field Marshal Rundstedt as commander of German forces in the west, visited the battle zone. Plans were discussed for committing the 2d SS Panzer in counterattack west of la Haye-du-Puits. But plans for relief of the 352d, 17th SS Panzer Grenadier, 77th, and 91st Divisions were now obviously impractical. The last three were all heavily involved.

In the western sector, 6 July saw the intended counterattack by the 2d SS Panzer units bog down as a result of air action. The Allied air force was also credited with hampering the German artillery in its work. The commanding general of LXXXIV Corps reported that the American artillery, guided by air observers and supported by air attacks, was not only silencing German batteries but destroying the infantry even in their dugouts. Army made strong representations for a shift of all available air and antiaircraft strength to the west wing; Army Group concurred. But the 2d German Air Corps reported that such a shift could not be effected quickly because of heavy losses in fighter units and the lack of replacements.

On 7 July, the Army command still hoped to restore the situation on the west front (la Haye-du-Puits) by counterattack of the task force sent by the 2d SS Panzer Division, and Army summarized the situation reached in the battle as follows:

Two infantry divisions (77th and 353d), one reinforced division (17th SS Panzer Grenadier), a combat group of the 243d Division, and the remnants of the 91st Division, had so far borne the brunt of the defense. The American forces committed were estimated at five infantry and possibly one or two armored divisions. The Seventh Army singled out for special mention the power of U. S. artillery support, which had expended ammunition at a rate five to ten times that of the German. In a brief analysis of the fighting, American commanders were credited with facility in tactical maneuver and with being quick to exploit favorable

situations. East of the present battle area, on both sides of the Vire, six U. S. infantry divisions and two armored divisions were believed ready to widen the zone of attack. German losses had been heavy; one battalion of the 353d, the only full-strength division in LXXXIV Corps, had lost half its men in three days. Renewed pleas were made to Kluge for immediate reinforcement by the 5th Parachute Division and the 275th Division.

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XIX CORPS ATTACKS WEST OF THE VIRE (7-11 JULY)

XIX CORPS' ATTACK was to be opened by the 30th Division, Maj. Gen. Leland S. Hobbs commanding. Immediate objective was the area of St-Jean-de-Daye, including the important crossroads just south of that village and the small elevation to the east. Possession of the road junction would open the approaches to south and west on the two principal highways north of the hills that begin at Hauts-Vents. (See Map I.)

In launching its attack, the 30th Division faced initial water obstacles along its whole front. Beyond the Vire-Taute Canal and the Vire River was a band of open country, mainly swamp or marshland, giving way toward the south to typical, lush hedgerow terrain. The Division's plan called for a two-pronged assault which entailed crossings of both the Vire River and the canal: the 117th Infantry was to spearhead the crossing of the Vire at 0430, while the 120th Infantry opened its drive across the canal at 1345. The 119th Infantry, with the exception of one battalion guarding the flank along the east bank of the Vire from Aire to la Meauffe, was to support the Vire crossing and then follow the 117th Infantry.

The Opening Assault (7 July)

Since the 117th Infantry's attack was the crux of the Division's effort, intensive groundwork was laid for it. The 117th Infantry's commander ordered every commissioned and noncommissioned officer of his regiment to study the details of the attack on a large sand table on which the plan through the first phases had been completely outlined. Two practice exercises in river crossings were also held.

The plan of the 117th Infantry provided for its 2d Battalion (Lt. Col. Arthur H. Fuller) to cross the Vire at 0430, 7 July, with Company E and Company F abreast. Company G was to support on the left and cross at a ten-minute interval after Company F. Engineer guides and 16 assault boats were provided by the 105th Engineer Combat Battalion for each of the leading companies. Scaling ladders, with hooks at the ends, were specially designed by the engineers as a means of getting from the river up the steep banks, which were about eight feet high on both sides of the Vire.

The day of the attack was foggy and overcast, with intermittent showers. (See Map 2.) At 0300 the leading companies of the 2d Battalion moved out from their assembly area, one mile east of the river. At 0330, XIX Corps Artillery (Brig. Gen. George D. Shea) opened up a heavy concentration on the enemy lines, nine artillery battalions searching out hostile gun positions which were known or suspected to be present. At 0415 both Corps and Division Artillery, together with the 92d Chemical Mortar Battalion, moved fires close to the front lines and pounded all known or suspected enemy installations.

By this time the infantry had reached the last hedgerow, 400 yards across open fields from the river bank. Here the leading companies met their engineer guides and picked up their assault boats. With each boatload of 12 carrying its own craft,

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the troops arrived at the river bank promptly at 0430. The crossing was

scheduled to take place just around the bend of the river north from St-Fromond, in order to shield the men from enemy machine guns at the bridge site above the bend. In accordance with the plan, the two leading companies crossed on a 400-yard front, 32 boats abreast, at a spot where the river was 60 feet wide.

Some trouble was experienced in launching the boats from the steep banks; the bows shipped water immediately because of the sharp angle from which they were launched. Some of the boats were so heavily weighted by equipment that the men found it necessary to paddle across the river beside the craft. As soon as the boats had crossed and discharged their loads, the engineer guides came back for the remainder of the troops. Enemy artillery fire, which until this time had been moderate, began to increase five minutes after the first crossing.

With the aid of the scaling ladders, the troops climbed the river banks without difficulty, and the leading companies deployed to left and right, each squad off to follow its route to the first phase line. Here, as on the other side of the river, the troops faced 400 yards of open fields before the first hedgerows began. The men got away from the river bank quickly, to make way for the next

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units and to close quickly with the enemy. The movement began exactly as scheduled and it continued in that manner. Ineffective small-arms and machine-gun fire was encountered as the leading elements of the 2d Battalion went forward, Company E deploying to the right, Company F to the left, two squad columns abreast on each company front. The flanks of the two companies were covered by two light machine-gun sections as E and F moved steadily over the open fields and across the hedgerows, one squad leapfrogging or bypassing another that might be momentarily held up by enemy resistance. For the first thousand yards the axis of advance was southwest. From the river onward, Division Artillery and the 92d Chemical Mortar Battalion started a rolling barrage which was maintained 300 yards in front of the infantry. This fire was delivered on a time schedule and lifted in 100-yard jumps every five minutes. Difficulties in the coordination of artillery fire with infantry advances came when it was found that hedgerow terrain prevented the troops from keeping up with their artillery support.

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Company G, crossing the river ten minutes after Company F, overtook the rear elements of the latter company. After crossing the river and clearing the bank, Company G pivoted sharply to the left and drove south against Pont de St-Fromond. Heavily equipped with rifle grenades and bazookas, Company G took that village and the important bridge crossing, after hard close-in fighting. It then pivoted again, this time to the west, advancing south of the highway and parallel to it so as to protect the battalion's left flank.

The best progress was being made on the 2d Battalion's right. Here, Company E reached the first phase line just north of the highway at 0800 and changed direction to drive west. This time was so good that Battalion demanded confirmation of E's report of reaching the phase line.

Company F, trying to get across the highway before turning west, was slowed by stubborn pockets of enemy resistance. Shortly after breaking across the open fields and pushing into the hedgerows, one of the platoons of Company F crossed too far to the left; Capt. George H. Sibbald, following this platoon with a command group of 14 men, came over a hedgerow and ran into a group of enemy that had been flushed from the west by the 3d Platoon. A stiff fight followed with an estimated 25 or 30 of the enemy. It was ended by the arrival of the 3d Platoon. Other element of Company F ran into enemy machine-gun fire and were held up after getting across the highway. Colonel Fuller led four volunteers

against the machine gun, killing one German and capturing four. This enabled the company to get going once more, and it reached the first phase line at 0830. Now astride the highway leading west toward the 117th's initial objectives, the battalion resumed its advance, Company G echeloned to the left rear in support of that flank. By now Company H had also crossed the Vire and split into two platoons, one following up Company E on the right flank, the other following Company F on the left.

During the infantry's advance the 105th Engineer Combat Battalion was feverishly at work on a footbridge over the Vire. Enemy artillery damaged this footbridge twice before the infantry could use it, but each time the engineers repaired it immediately, suffering 20 casualties in the course of the construction.

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(Photo)

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The road bridge across the Vire at St-Fromond had been only partially destroyed by the enemy artillery and, since it afforded the quickest means of transporting artillery and vehicles across to support the infantry advance, the engineers decided to span the gaps with treadway bridging. At 0830 one officer and six enlisted men of the 247th Engineer Combat Battalion, aided by two Brockway trucks, began this operation under enemy sniper, mortar, and artillery fire. Despite these harassing conditions, they made the bridge ready by 0930.

Additional bridges to speed the American buildup across the Vire in the wake of the assault waves were needed early in the attack. A floating treadway in the vicinity of St-Fromond, south of the existing bridge, was constructed by a company of the 247th Engineer Combat Battalion. The enemy did not put any fire upon this operation and the bridge was completed in four hours. An infantry support bridge to the north of the existing bridge was constructed by the equipage platoon of the 503d Light Pontoon Company and one platoon of the 247th Engineer Combat Battalion. Artillery fire was directed upon this construction, but no damage resulted and the work was completed in one hour. During these bridging operations, the Corps Engineer troops suffered 15 casualties.

Before noon all three battalions of the 117th Infantry were across the Vire, followed by the 2d Battalion of the 119th Infantry, and the front of the

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attack was being progressively broadened. (For remainder of action, use Map 3.) The 3d Battalion of the 117th Infantry, which had crossed the footbridge under fire, pushed toward Hill 30, the high ground 1500 yards east of St-Jean-de-Daye. The 1st Battalion advanced southwest and followed the 2d Battalion which was moving steadily along the Aire road toward the important crossroads below St-Jean-de-Daye, attacking in squad columns through the open fields between the hedgerows. Initial objectives, close to Phase Line 2, were reached by noon. The battalion of the 119th Infantry was moving into position to secure the left flank of the 117th Infantry. Also supporting the advance of the 117th Infantry was the 743d Tank Battalion, less one company. German resistance was spotty and seemed mainly a matter of scattered delaying actions; the enemy attempted to hold in the vicinity of Hill 30, but was forced to withdraw toward the south.

As the 117th Infantry widened its bridgehead, the 120th Infantry was readying for attack at 1345 across the Vire-Taute Canal. This blow had been so timed in the hope that the 117th Infantry's advance would loosen the enemy line immediately south of the canal by threatening its rear.

The 120th Infantry faced a difficult area. The Germans, with a canal and

swampland to the front and a river on each flank, occupied ground high enough to command these formidable natural barricades. The enemy was well aware of the only two feasible avenues of approach into his position. One was through a narrow corridor that included 200 yards of ground on either side of the Carentan-Pont-Hebert road at a point where it crossed the canal. The other approach, two and a half miles to the west, consisted of a narrow peninsula of dry ground that extended south through enemy territory in the vicinity of Graignes. Here the bridge over the canal had long since been blown, and the enemy had zeroed-in with artillery, mortar, and automatic weapons fire.

Colonel Birks, commanding the regiment, planned to force crossings of the canal on both sides of the north-south highway. At 1345 the 120th Infantry jumped off, with the 3d Battalion on the right of the highway and the 1st Battalion on the left. Both units ran into difficulty getting across, since there was only enough material to build three of the footbridges which had been planned. Under the attack plan the 2d Battalion was placed in corps reserve. Occupying the right flank of the 120th Infantry's MLR, it had the primary mission of checking any attempt which the Germans might make to cross the canal in the Graignes sector and, at the same time, of threatening a possible crossing of its own at this sector.

On the left, the 1st Battalion waded across a shallow part of the canal, following directly behind the artillery preparation. However, the hostile fire, small-arms and mortar, which it received was considerably greater than that which met the 3d Battalion, and only by stiff fighting was the 1st able to get across. Though the enemy forces were estimated at only 800-900 men, half the strength of the 120th Infantry, they had the advantages of higher ground and good observation. Once the bridgehead was established, the two battalions advanced south astride the Pont-Hebert road without meeting strong resistance. St-Jean-de-Daye was bypassed, to be occupied later with little difficulty. One company of medium tanks was attached, but crossed the canal too late to see much action.

The orders from Corps and Division to the six assault battalions were to maintain contact and keep pushing. But the afternoon advance was slowed by the tendency of green troops, when they met fire, to freeze in their positions instead of continuing their movement. Battlefield problems of contact and support also began to cause trouble. The enemy, thoroughly aware of the importance to the Americans of maintaining the assault bridges, shelled them heavily, making every effort to destroy them and hinder communications and supply. Concentrated in the general area of le Desert, the German artillery was estimated to consist of three battalions of 105-mm guns and one battalion of 150-mm, plus some additional roving guns. Corps and Division Artillery fought a steady counterbattery duel, many missions coming from air

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OP, but the enemy continued to lay heavy fire on the bridgeheads. The road net and the bridges were now heavily congested with traffic, a condition which added to the existing complications and slowed the build-up of the support.

The 2d Battalion of the 117th Infantry, which had spearheaded the advance from the Vire, ran into increasingly heavy artillery and mortar fire as it advanced. In addition, the battalion by afternoon was in an exposed position, with the enemy all around the leading companies. Company G in its advance up the left flank had pulled too far to the south and had to fight its way in to close the gap. Finally, the battalion dug in at 1600 at a point about 400 yards short of the crossroads. There it held so that the 3d Battalion could move down from the Hill 30 area, east of St-Jean-de-Daye, and cover the right flank. But the 3d Battalion was out of contact for a time, and it was apparent that it was not moving down very rapidly. The 1st Battalion, advancing south of the Aire road, was trying to get into the gap between the 2d

Battalion, 117th Infantry and the 2d of the 119th Infantry; the latter unit was experiencing considerable difficulty from 88-mm fire in its attempt to attack south in the vicinity of St-Fromond-Eglise.

In general, attacking units were finding what every division learned the hard way in its opening battle in Normandy: that hedgerow terrain demanded tactical skill and know-how which green units-and even those experienced in African or Sicilian fighting did not initially possess. The 30th Division was no exception. Com-

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ing into Normandy in mid-June, the division had had plenty of warning of trouble, and had trained to meet it. But there was no substitute for battle experience to bring out the concrete difficulties of action or test the methods for meeting them. Enemy fire positions were hard to locate and harder to attack in a way that used full fire-power of the ground units; artillery support was not easy to coordinate; communications within attacking forces larger than a platoon could be completely lost in the maze of hedgerows after a short advance; armor had to work blindly at ranges which meant dangerous exposure to bazookas and antitank guns; coordinated attacks were exceedingly difficult to manage, and a high premium was put on the individual leadership of a small unit. All this took time to learn and more time to digest; most units in the July battle were training as they fought.

Nevertheless, the 30th Division had made, for its initial effort, one of the best advances so far registered in First Army's battle, and on the afternoon of 7 July General Bradley made a decision which was designed to give the attack fresh impetus. The character of the resistance being offered and the progress of the infantry, although moderate, gave the army commander reason to believe there was a good chance for local breakthrough by an armored force in the 30th Division's zone. Accordingly the 3d Armored Division was ordered to make a "power drive" through the bridgehead and on to the high ground southwest of St-Lo. If, as thought possible, the enemy forces comprised only a light screen of troops and this could be pierced by a surprise armored attack, the American tanks would be able to drive quickly to the final corps objectives west of the Vire. The 3d Armored Division was ordered to cross the Vire at Aire on the night of 7/8 July, and begin its drive after advance to the crossroads south of St-Jean-de-Daye.

In preparation for the armored attack General Hobbs tried to get the main crossroads cleared. He ordered Colonel Kelly to keep the 117th Infantry moving and informed him of the impending drive. But late in the evening Colonel Kelly reported that the 2d Battalion, which had been fighting since early morning, would need help from Lt. Col. Robert E. Frankland's 1st Battalion. The 3d Battalion was still in the vicinity of St-Jean-de-Daye, and not as yet in contact with the 120th Infantry or with the other 117th units.

As the long summer evening wore along it was evident that the assault battalions would not be able to push the attack on into the hours of darkness. When elements of the 120th and 117th Infantry Regiments finally made contact below St-Jean-de-Daye at the close of the day, General Hobbs recommended to the corps commander that his men be permitted to reorganize where they were. He pointed to the need of preliminary planning for night operations and reported that his communications were in a bad state. At 2330, orders were given for the 30th Division to reorganize and resume attack early next morning. General Corlett insisted that pressure must be maintained against the Germans, a job which

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(Map No. 4)

General Hobbs believed could be achieved by patrols. The day's losses for the 30th Division were 281, not a high figure for an assault across water obstacles against prepared positions.

(The Enemy Side)

Seventh Army had expected an attack on the Vire sector and received the first news without undue surprise. Its information on the penetrations achieved was reasonably accurate and Army noted that these penetrations had been sealed off for the time being with weak local reserves. The situation was described as "critical." Nevertheless, more concern was felt over the situation west of the Taute River, where the main forces of the 17th SS Panzer Grenadier Division were being hard pressed by the attack of U. S. VII Corps and had to call on reserves from the 2d SS Armored Division. For 8 July, Seventh Army's intention was to hold the enemy penetration in the area St-Jean-de-Daye, using the 30th Mobile Brigade (on its way from St-Lo to the Lessay sector) and a last battalion from the reserve of the 2d Parachute Corps.

Concluding that the XIX Corps attack was just the prelude for even heavier American efforts along the Vire, the Germans felt that these forces would not be strong enough to withstand the U. S. attack for any length of time. Therefore, Seventh Army proposed to pull out the units of the 2d SS Armored Division from the la Haye-du-Puits sector, even though this would mean weakening that whole wing. Army Group decided finally to meet Seventh Army's requests for reinforcement. The 5th Parachute Division was to move up from Brittany, to the Lessay sector; more important, the Panzer Lehr Division was to assemble between Periers and St-Lo to bolster the front from the Vire westward.

The 113th Cavalry Group Enters the Bridgehead (7-8 July)

The 113th Cavalry Group (Col. William S. Biddle), which awaited the deepening of the bridgehead by the 30th Division and in particular the movement of the troops of the 120th Infantry, had been assigned a difficult task in the XIX Corps offensive. (See Map 4.) Moving to the right of the 30th Division, the Cavalry Group was to cover that flank of the bridgehead and operate offensively toward the west, endeavoring to cut off German forces in the peninsula-like salient of dry ground between the Taute River and the canal (Gaignes-Port-des-Planques). In this area they were to meet enemy forces which were believed to be a part of the 639th Infantry Battalion (Ostermark), composed of Russians and Poles, and possible elements of the 38th SS Panzer Grenadier Regiment.

The cavalry began to move at 2030 on 7 July and by 0200 the following morning had crossed the bridge across the Vire-Taute Canal, captured earlier by the 120th Infantry. Delays were suffered because of the bottleneck created by the single road and bridge, both under intermittent fire, and by the intermingling of 120th Infantry vehicles with cavalry. As soon as it had crossed the canal, Troop A, 113th Cavalry Squadron turned from the main highway and pushed southwest toward Goucherie. By midnight it had reached the road junction 700 yards southeast of that town, where the advance was stopped by an enemy strongpoint. This position consisted of a platoon or more of men armed with machine guns, machine pistols, and antitank guns.

A coordinated attack by Troops A and C was launched on Goucherie at 0300 on 8 July. Troop A advanced west and Troop C moved southwest with the mission of entering Goucherie from the south. With the aid of a ten-minute concentration on the German positions by the 230th Field Artillery Battalion, Troop A captured the village at 0730 with little difficulty. Troop C made its envelopment, but swung too wide to influence the action.

The 125th Cavalry Squadron (Lt. Col. Jeff F. Hollis) began its advance

at 0530, extending the advance to the south. Troop C captured le Mesnil-Veneron at 0700 with the cooperation of Troop C, 113th Cavalry Squadron, which was in the process of making the envelopment attack on

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Goucherie. But shortly afterwards, Troop C of the 125th ran into stiff opposition 1,500 yards to the southwest and withdrew to le Mesnil-Veneron where it held.

Troop A, 125th Squadron passed through Goucherie at 0900 and advanced southwest. About 1700 yards southwest of Goucherie it was hit by the same heavy opposition which had been met by Troop C, and was forced back to Goucherie. This withdrawal was covered by the 113th Cavalry Squadron based on Goucherie. At 1100 the cavalry again tried to attack from Goucherie. This time the 113th Cavalry Squadron (Lt. Col. Allen D. Hulse) initiated movement to the west, but encountered considerable enemy resistance a mile west of the town.

The nature of the opposition met west of Goucherie soon indicated that not only the troops of the 639th Ostermark Battalion, but also the tough young Nazis of the 38th SS Panzer Grenadier Regiment were in that sector. Hampered by hedgerow terrain, the 13th Cavalry Group attack, which had been conceived as a cavalry advance, developed into a series of infantry fights in which the units kept to the roads and ran the gauntlet of heavy flanking fire from the hedgerows. Many of the troops had to fight dismounted, and full use of vehicular weapons was impossible.

Colonel Biddle, at 1600 decided to take up a defensive position on a north-south line based on Goucherie-le Mesnil-Veneron. His decision was influenced both by heavy resistance in the le Mesnil-Veneron area, and by the knowledge that any advance due west from Goucherie would be exposed to a counterattack from the south which might result in uncovering the right rear of the 30th Division. The 113th Cavalry Squadron, with Troop A on the north and Troop B on the south of its zone, set up a defensive position a half mile west of Goucherie. Troop C established outposts in the town of Goucherie and secured the town proper. The 125th Cavalry Squadron organized defenses in the southern sector of the group zone with Troop A, reinforced, on the right, and Troop C, reinforced, on the left. A series of outposts was established, each consisting of two tanks and a squad of 12 men dug in about them for perimeter defense. Contact was made with Company I of the 120th Infantry on the southeast flank.

Coordination Troubles (8 July)

General Bradley's plan to push the 3d Armored Division into the zone of the 30th Division, in the hope of driving through to the south, was put into operation during the night of 7/8 July.

The 3d Armored Division, alerted at 1200 on 7 July, was coming into the bridgehead on the left with orders for an immediate attack in the direction of St-Gilles, west of St-Lo. (See Map 4.)

Divided into three task forces (X, Y, and Z), Combat Command B began to move at 1830 and by 2230 was crossing the bridge from Aire over the Vire at the rate of 45 vehicles an hour. Each task force was composed of a battalion of tanks, a battalion of armored infantry, and a platoon of engineers. Combat Command A, in division reserve, moved into an assembly area at Ste-Marguerite-d'Elle, ready to assist Combat Command B by passing through or bypassing to the northwest.

Shortly after the advance elements of Combat Command B crossed the Vire they encountered small-arms fire, and it became apparent that the 30th Division had made only a narrow penetration along the Aire road. The advance elements of Combat Command B moving south from that highway ran into resistance after about 600 yards, near St-Fromond-Eglise. Because

of blackout discipline and the congestion along the road, it was only after great difficulty that Task Force X succeeded in getting south of the east-west highway, while Task Force Y and some of Task Force Z bivouacked north of the road. Company D of the 83d Reconnaissance Battalion, scouting the area to the south during the night, was hit about 0300 by a counterattack, consisting of infantry supported by mortars and artillery. Company D was forced to withdraw from the area around St-Fromond-Eglise to the highway. Heavy enemy

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mortar fire fell in the assembly area that night.

By morning the appearance of Combat Command B in the 30th Division's zone was producing a welter of confusion. Lack of time for reconnaissance, the absence of a true bridgehead for the armored attack, and the failure of the armor and infantry to coordinate plans were responsible for some of the difficulties. Although the 30th Division had received a copy of the 3d Armored Division's field order, there had been no time to bring the two plans into accord, so that the two divisions were both trying to advance cross-country in the same zone. By Field Order 5 for 8 July, the 30th Division had indicated that Combat Commands A and B were to pass through the infantry; the advancing armor was given priority

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on the highways from Aire to the crossroads, and then south toward Pont-Hebert, and this route was to be cleared of all unnecessary traffic. This arrangement would have suited the original scheme of the 3d Armored, to use the main roads to insure rapid advance, but Maj. Gen. Leroy H. Watson had changed his plan. The crossroads of the main highways had not yet been secured, and General Watson did not wish to expose his flank by fighting to that junction and then turning at right angles to strike south. Though it meant using secondary roads and possibly field-to-field tactics, Brig. Gen. John J. Bohn was ordered to take Combat Command B southwest from the St-Fromond area, diagonally across the attack zones of two regiments of the 30th Division. Difficulties resulting from these arrangements were to hamper the advance during the next two days.

At 0642 on 8 July, Combat Command B began its attack southwest through the hedgerow country. A small enemy counterattack with tanks soon developed on the road near St-Fromond-Eglise, in which four Mark IV tanks, belonging to the 2d SS Armored and attached to the 275th Fusilier Battalion of Battle Group "Heintz," were knocked out. Combat Command B lost one tank. After dealing with this resistance, the task force continued to advance by field-to-field tactics. Progress was slow, and made slower by the presence of friendly infantry. Pursuant to orders of the 30th Division (Field Order 5, issued the previous night), the 3d Battalion of the 119th had crossed the Vire to join the 2d, now under regimental control. This addition spelled further congestion until the bridgehead could be expanded southward. The 2d Battalion, 119th Infantry, operating on the left wing of the 30th Division, did not know that the tanks were coming in, nor did the tanks know that the infantry would be there. To the infantry it appeared that all the fields and roads in the area were full of armor, and friendly tanks were accused of holding up the foot soldiers by wild fire to the flanks and even rear of the armored column.

To deal with the state of growing confusion in this zone, General Bohn of Combat Command B and Col. Alfred V. Ednie of the 119th Infantry met on the afternoon of 8 July. A plan was worked out between the representatives of Combat Command B and the 119th Infantry, and then discussed with the 117th Infantry commander. Afterwards an agreement for the coordination of artillery fire was made between Brig. Gen. Raymond S. McLain, commander of 30th Division Artillery, and Col. Frederic J. Brown of the 3d Armored Division.

The arrangement was that the rear elements of Combat Command B were to retire behind the Aire road, thus relieving some of the congestion near the St-Fromond crossing. Task Force X was to move southwest along the route St-Fromond-Eglise-Bordigny-la Bernardrie, wheel south along the Pont-Hebert road for 500 yards, then angle southwest again toward Hauts-Vents. This route still means cutting diagonally across the zone of advance of the 117th and 119th Infantry Regiments. The 119th Infantry (less the 1st Battalion, still east of the Vire) was to follow Combat Command B, mopping up en route. The precedence of units of the armored command or of the 117th Infantry on the north-south highway would be agreed upon by the respective commanders, armor to have precedence in case of serious conflict.

With the hope that all necessary coordination was secured, Task Force X resumed its advance southwest, meeting some fire from enemy mortars and machine guns dug in along hedgerows and from roving 88-mm guns. North of la Bernardrie, the task force stopped for the night to refuel and to repair the tanks. The 119th Infantry, attacking at 1800 with the 2d and 3d Battalions abreast, advanced to a point just short of Cavigny.

The employment of armor on this wing had, so far, not brought the hoped-for results. Elsewhere,

[7] This appears to be a case in point to illustrate the vital tactical importance of road junctions and road nets in the hedgerow fighting. There is much other evidence to support the opinions of the commander of 2d Panzer Division, found in a captured document: he warned his troops that in hedgerow country, with limited observation, "the possession of dominating height is often not as decisive as possession of traffic junctions."

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progress for the day was fair, averaging about a mile. The most important gain, securing the crossroads south of St-Jean-de-Daye, was accomplished by the advance of the 1st Battalion, 120th Infantry and the 3d Battalion, 117th Infantry. By 2100 the 3d Battalion, meeting light opposition, was astride the road junction at les Osmonds after an advance of 3,000 yards. At this point General Hobbs, anxious to prevent further mix-ups between the infantry and armor, notified General Watson that Combat Command B's tanks were again cutting in front of the infantry and declared, "We cannot move unless you do." At 2200, to secure the fullest measure of coordination between the armor and infantry, General Corlett attached Combat Command B to the 30th Division.

The right flank of the bridgehead was the object of some anxiety during the fighting of 8 July. The 113th Cavalry Group had run into strong resistance. To ease the situation, the 3d Battalion, 120th Infantry had attacked during the day toward the southwest from a position near St-Jean-de-Daye, attempting to gain the high ground north of le Desert. The objective was reached late in the afternoon after hard fighting. Shortly afterwards the enemy counterattacked from le Desert with two companies of infantry supported by three tanks, but was repulsed with the aid of Division Artillery and a company of 743d Tank Battalion. To aid the 120th Infantry, which had suffered rather heavily since crossing the canal, XIX Corps released to the regiment its 2d Battalion which had been held in corps reserve. At the close of the day's fighting the 2d Battalion was advancing through the 1st, ready to head the next day's attack. The 30th Division now had more solid protection on its western flank, astride the important highway through le Desert.

Increased signs of enemy activity were evident on this flank of XIX Corps. Some prisoners were identified during the day from the 2d SS Panzer Division, and reports came in of enemy armor at le Hommet-d'Arthenay. Furthermore, in a different quarter, aerial reconnaissance reported large enemy troop movements from the British zone toward the

Vire south of St-Lo and then northwest. It was believed that this might be the Panzer Lehr Division, which had been previously reported near St-Lo. Two squadrons of P-47's from IX Tactical Air Force were dispatched to hit the enemy columns. The possibility of an enemy counterattack from the south or west was taken very seriously; General Corlett warned that the important crossroads below St-Jean-de-Daye must not be lost.

To strengthen the corps' right flank and the defense of the bridgehead over the Vire-Taute Canal, the 113th Cavalry Group was attached to Combat Command A, 3d Armored Division near midnight of 8 July. Combat Command A had been moved across the Vire River late in the afternoon, taking the Aire road toward le Desert, increasing the heavy traffic burden on that main supply line and rendering it impassable for some time. Combat Command B, trying to move its CP south of the highway during this period, had to use "infiltration" methods to get across the road.

What might be called the "lesson of the day" is stated by an observer of the action who commented as follows:

The best way, even under favorable conditions, to completely immobilize troops in a small area is to put an armored outfit there too. People think of the infantry as a blue or red line on a map. Actually the infantry has all sorts of activities going on behind that line: supply, wire lines, mortar positions, vehicles, etc. Did you ever try to keep field telephone lines in operation with tanks all over the place?—Well, I don't recommend it. The resulting confusion made it extremely difficult for either the infantry or the armor to get any real effort started, and time which should have been spent by the commanders in working out their own problems frequently had to be spent in arguing with each other about who would do what, where and when, or why not, etc.

(The Enemy Side)

Seventh Army's daily summary devoted more attention than before to the battle between the Vire and Taute Rivers, where the situation was now "unquestionably critical." The small reinforcements that came from 2d Parachute Corps had been committed, consisting of the 30th Mobile Brigade and the Reconnaissance Battalion of the

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(Map No. 5)

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12th Parachute Regiment. German plans were to assign the Panzer Lehr Division to the St-Jean-de-Daye sector. Field Marshal Rommel (Army Group Commander) visited Seventh Army advanced CP and discussed plans for committing this division.

More Coordination Troubles (9 July)

The ground won by XIX Corps in its first two days of attack already gave more room for First Army to employ its strength. Plans were now under way to bring in the 9th Division (Maj. Gen. Manton S. Eddy) on the right of the 30th, west and southwest of St-Jean-de-Daye. The 9th, operating under VII Corps, was going to "borrow some dry ground" from the bridgehead won by XIX Corps and fight southwest into the main VII Corps' zone, along the axis of the le Desert-les Champs-de-Losque highway. XIX Corps would be repaid for its "loan" of ground by the greater security given its right flank. During 9 July, General Eddy's veteran unit was moving down from the Cotentin to assembly areas just north of the Vire-Taute Canal, which it reached by 1600. Pending its arrival in the bridgehead, Combat Command A of the 3d Armored, together with the 113th Cavalry Group, had the mission of holding a defensive line beyond Goucherie as far south as the highway to le Desert. (For the day's

action, see Map 5.)

With this greater assurance of protection for their flank and rear, the 30th Division and the attached armor of Combat Command B resumed their attack to the south. It was the third day of fighting and the third of intermittent rains; the tired troops were wet and muddy from their leggings to the top of their helmets.

The 9th of July was to go down in the 30th Division's books as one of their worst days in France: the troubles with respect to coordinating movement reached a climax just as the division met its first serious counterattack.

Field Order 4, issued at 0200, revised the pattern for attack south toward the original objectives. The immediate objective was now set as the high ground around Hauts-Vents, about 4,000 yards from forward positions of the 30th Division. At Hauts-Vents (Hill 91) there began a ridge, running south between the Vire and Terrette Rivers, which gave the Germans observation over a wide stretch of country toward St-Jean-de-Daye. The northern end of this ridge was the objective assigned to Combat Command B fighting in the division center, a zone that ran south-southwest. On its right, the 120th Infantry was ordered to attack in a zone west of the highway and flanked by the Terrette River; its 3d Battalion would continue to hold the nose of higher ground near le Desert, and protect that flank until the arrival of the 9th Division late in the day. East of the Pont-Hebert highway, two battalions of the 119th were to attack toward Pont-Hebert, while its 1st Battalion continued to hold positions east of the Vire until relieved by the 35th Division. The 117th Infantry was given a limited zone astride the Pont-Hebert highway; after an advance of 1000-2,000 yards, its 3d and 1st Battalions would be pinched out. The 743d Tank Battalion supported the 120th Infantry, while the 823d Tank Destroyer Battalion was ordered to protect the vital crossroads against any danger of counterattack from the south along the Pont-Hebert highway.

Every unit commander was "counterattack-conscious," and became more so during the morning. From Corps came further news of the enemy tanks that had been reported earlier as being on the move south of St-Lo. General Corlett telephoned General Hobbs during the morning that a lot of tanks were moving across the corps front toward the west bank of the Vire. They were going around the big bend in the Vire near St-Lo, and were thus in an area which threatened the 30th Division. Corps' information indicated a large-scale movement, with armor and motorized transport observed over an area with a five-mile radius. Aerial reconnaissance reported another 50 tanks further south. General Corlett suggested that bazookas and antitank guns be put well forward, and Division and Corps Artillery were alerted for

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action against a possible armored attack. The 30th Division started the day's attack acutely aware of enemy build-up to the south.

The jump-off was at 0700, and during the morning, though things were going slowly, there was little to suggest the troubles ahead. East of the highway, Combat Command B and the 119th were still tangled up, and the armor was still having trouble in getting started on movement that would shake it loose for the drive to Hauts-Vents. Task Force Y had passed through Task Force X with some difficulty, and now took over the lead. But they were still using field by-field tactics, requiring considerable use of dozers for opening lanes in the embankments, and progress was slow. There was some harassing fire from German artillery, but the main troubles came in operating heavy vehicles through muddy fields, slipper-trails, and hedgerows. The 119th Infantry felt it necessary to delay advance until the armor cleared the area, with the result that the left wing of the division hardly got started during the morning. With orders from General Hobbs to get the armor on the roads and start pushing, General Bohn went forward at 1120; he was so delayed

by traffic behind the front that it was I300 before he reached Col. Graeme G. Parks and began to straighten out the advance. Soon he had Task Force Y out of the fields and on their way, with infantry riding on the rear decks of the tanks; Task Force Z was on their right, paralleling their line of advance but still in the fields. Enemy

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fire was now considerable, but Task Force Y was pushing along a small road, sunk between hedgerows most of the way, and the effects of the German fire were negligible. The few enemy positions met by Task Force Y were lightly held, and only an occasional antitank gun emplacement was encountered as the task force angled southwest toward the big highway.

Not far north of the point where the armor was due to turn into the highway, the two battalions of the 117th had nearly reached their day's objectives by the end of the morning. The 1st Battalion, east of the highway, had met some opposition, but was within 200 yards of its objective line. At 1115 it was complaining of crossfire coming into its zone from the left, and blaming this on the armor of Combat Command B. On the other side of the highway, Lt. Col. Samuel T. McDowell's 3d Battalion had made rapid progress from the start; by 0930 it reported itself 400 yards beyond its objective and was halted there. At 1180 (sic), Colonel Kelly ordered the battalion to move back and mop up. The 3d Battalion had no contact on its right flank with the 120th, and this was causing some worry. The 117th expected to be pinched out, but saw no indications on either flank that friendly units were getting ahead of Colonel Kelly's two battalions.

In fact, the 120th Infantry was having some delay in getting started. The 2d Battalion was to lead the attack. During the early morning hours that battalion, holding a somewhat exposed position, was hit by enemy fire from both flanks and thought for a time that a counterattack was developing. But the Germans made no serious follow-up, and by I000 the 2d Battalion was taking

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off, the 1st Battalion following at some distance to give protection toward the exposed western flank. The 743d Tank Battalion moved ahead, with Company B on the right flanks of the infantry. Hill 32 was the first objective in the 120th's zone, and enemy resistance, stiffened by considerable artillery fire, slowed the 2d Battalion as it approached this high ground. Colonel Birks felt out of touch with the 117th on his left, and had the impression that that unit was lagging behind. At 1140 his OP reported that (enemy) tanks were heard moving up from the south. By I230 the 2d Battalion was fighting off a counterattack, though no German armor was yet involved. The situation seemed to be in hand at I300 when Colonel Birk's CP received a delegation of distinguished visitors including Lt. Gen. George S. Patton, Jr., General Eddy (9th Division), and General Watson (3d Armored). Enemy artillery began to register in the vicinity soon after their arrival.

About I430 the storm broke in the 120th's zone. Details that would fix the exact sequence of events are not available. (See Map 6.) At I425 the 120th CP received word that the 3d Battalion, 117th (neighboring unit on the 120th's left) had been counterattacked and driven back. When this was reported to Division, and checked with the 117th, that unit denied any such counterattack-but said information from the 3d Armored Division was to the effect that 50 enemy tanks were coming up the highway from the south. At 1500

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the 117th reported to Division that its right wing (3d Battalion) was being attacked by enemy forces employing self-propelled guns; at the same moment the 120th got a message from the 743d Tank Battalion asking if the 2d Battalion of the 120th had pulled out and reporting a loss of

three-fifths of the 743d tanks. At 1510 the 30th Division heard that German tanks were pressing the 2d Battalion, 120th, followed by enemy infantry.

The general gist of these scraps of information pointed to trouble in the area between the 3d Battalion, 117th and the 2d Battalion, 120th. And this seems, in effect, to have been the zone of the German's main effort in a localized counterattack that employed tanks. The 743d Tank Battalion, on the right of the 120th, was badly cut up in the first brush with enemy armor. Company B of the 743d was inveigled by two Mark IV's, which were used as decoys, into advancing down a minor farm road toward a fork. When the B tanks were within 200 yards, German armor struck, flanking the American force and racing down the roads from the fork with sirens screaming. The American tanks found themselves immediately involved with German tanks and supporting infantry. The enemy troops attacked boldly and with assurance; in a matter of 15 minutes (by 1509) Company B was shot up and forced to abandon its vehicles.

In the next half hour the attack swept past both flanks of the 2d Battalion, 120th, which found itself apparently cut off to the rear. The battalion commander was wounded. Some elements broke under the pressure, and the 2d battalion was pushed back some 400 yards. German troops also began to appear in the 1st Battalion's area, and enemy artillery put in the heaviest fire experienced by the 120th since the start of the offensive. An estimated four battalions were shelling the 120th's sector, and service company trains were experiencing great difficulty in reaching the forward elements.

Some officers who went through this battle regarded the next two hours as the most trying period experienced by the 120th Infantry in any part of the campaign in France (including Mortain); their impression was that the Germans here came nearest to a breakthrough of the 30th's lines. But this was a local impression, and there was no real chance of a breakthrough. Most of the 2d Battalion was well in hand; they tightened up their position, established a perimeter defense, and held on. The 1st Battalion moved up to a supporting position, and the 743d Tank Battalion stayed in the field with its remaining armor.

American artillery, working under peculiar difficulties, was called on for strong support and gave it. The 30th Division Artillery was in the midst of displacing its headquarters when the attack started; consequently, it had to operate between 1400 and 1500 from the old CP, with only three telephones and one map. Altogether 18 battalions, including all of Division and Corps Artillery, were employed in firing against the enemy thrust, but no coordinated fire was possible until the forward CP opened at about 1500. Officers at the old CP told the battalions to concentrate one round per minute for 30 minutes on various positions on or near the main highway to the south. The period for firing was later extended to 60 minutes by General McLain, Division Artillery chief, in order to prevent any German reserves from joining the tanks which had already broken through. As a result of reports of German armor coming directly up the highway, a considerable part of these fires, between 1500 and 1630 were placed along that route and even east of it. But shortly thereafter Artillery got news that our own tanks were on the highway and more fires were shifted to the west. The general uncertainty as to position of our own and enemy forces was troublesome for the artillery; yet though some of their target areas were close to friendly units (particularly the armor of Combat Command B), there were very few reports of trouble from short rounds. In fact, the artillery gets, and deserves, major credit for stopping the enemy effort. By 1830, the dangerous area west of the highway was under control, with indications of enemy withdrawal. Unable to exploit the

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(Photo)

breakthrough and beginning to be hard hit by the fires of artillery, infantry, and armor, the Germans pulled out after losing five tanks. From enemy prisoners the attacking unit was identified as the Engineer Battalion, 2d SS Panzer Division (Das Reich), supported by infantry. First reports claimed the enemy was using Mark V's (Panther tanks), but Division's G-2 reported the enemy armor as Mark IV's.

Just how far the attack carried into the 117th's zone cannot yet be definitely stated. Some enemy elements reached the area held by the 3d Battalion of the 117th, but that they got as far as the 1st Battalion is open to question. (See positions on Map 6.) Nevertheless, both battalions were under the impression that they received their share of the counterattack.

Whatever took place in their area reached its climax between 1600 and 1700. Up to 1600, the 3d Battalion was reporting some enemy tanks, but was "holding out." The 1st Battalion, east of the highway, began to report fire from enemy tanks to the south at 1537; then fire from friendly tank destroyers; then trouble with friendly artillery fire falling short. But at 1620 the 1st Battalion reported ten tanks coming in. During the next half hour, some elements of the battalion began to pull back along the highway, in a movement that threatened to uncover antitank guns and TD's. Vehicles joined the movement, and for a few minutes there was what looked to some observers like the beginning of a panic. Actually, the situation never got out of hand; officers stopped the withdrawal and restored order within 15 minutes.

The trouble on the highway was apparently the result of another incident in the two-day mix-up between our own infantry and the armor of Combat Command B. When the leading elements of Task Force Y, Company I of the 33d Armored Regiment, finally got to the highway about 1630 after their painful progress across country, they became confused and turned north up the main road, advancing straight toward the 117th's lines and toward the division's supporting guns, both tank destroyers and antiaircraft batteries. With a real and dangerous German armored attack in progress just to the west, there was every reason for the fully-alerted antitank crews to swing into action. A fight instantly developed, the armor coming in with its 75-mm guns and machine guns blazing. The two leading tanks were knocked out by friendly fire before Company I realized its mistake and turned south on a proper course.

The whole mix-up at the highway was "one of those things" that could happen to any unit, particularly troops that were still inexperienced. Perhaps the best commentary on the affair, and on the attitude of troops that went through it, is the report for 9 July of the 823d Tank Destroyer Battalion:

* * * There was lots of small-arms fire, shelling and mortar fire blanketed the area, everybody fired in every direction, rumors flooded the air, and when infantry units withdrew in disorder leaving some gun positions exposed, it became necessary to withdraw to successive positions. The exact movements of each platoon is at present obscured in the confusion of battle * * *.

Unit took two prisoners which were its first, suffered its first fatal casualties, was shot up by its own infantry and armored force and in turn shot up our own infantry and armored force, but under all circumstances came through their first critical engagement in fairly good shape * * *.

Combat efficiency satisfactory but mad as hell.

By nightfall the situation west of the highway was under control. The 2d Battalion of the 120th had recovered the ground lost, and the 1st was pushing past it; the 3d Battalion, under enemy pressure all morning near le Desert, was relieved at 1600 by elements of the 9th Division (the 2d Battalion, 39th Infantry) and moved down to strengthen the west flank defense. The 117th had maintained its ground. The most the enemy accomplished by his first serious counterattack was to limit the day's gains for the 30th Division along the Terrette flank.

Elsewhere, some considerable advances had been registered, notably by Combat Command B. Once Task Force Y got straightened out and headed south on the Pont-Hebert highway, it began to roll for the first time since entering the bridgehead. [8] Task Force Z, following minor roads a little to the right of Y's course, had also reached the highway and was pushing down toward Belle-Lande. [9] General Bohn was considering bringing Task Force X up, getting some infantry, and making Hauts-Vents that night, when orders came from Division to stop and organize a defensive position short of the objective on the higher ground. This was disappointing to the armored units: opposition was light, and the Task Force commanders thought it would be difficult to stop the advance elements, particularly when everything was "rolling fine." But General Bohn's request to be allowed to push on was denied, and a glance at the map will suggest the reason for Division's caution. They knew, as the armor could not, what a risk any further advance would entail. Even at the point where they were held by orders, Combat Command B's units were way out ahead of the 120th Infantry, and had no protection whatever on their right flank, the area where the German counterattack had shown enemy strength during the afternoon. On General Bohn's left, the 119th was closer up on the river flank, but still not in position to support advance as far as Hauts-Vents.

So the armor had to stop, on a line at about the start of the rise in ground toward Hauts-Vents, and 1000 yards north of that objective. Lt. Col. Samuel M. Hogan pulled back his advance forces, with the exception of seven tanks of Company I which had lost radio contact. These "sat out in front" the rest of the night and were subjected to some bombing and strafing by friendly planes before they got back next morning. They later reported that they had actually reached and sat on Hill 91 but this seems doubtful. So does Task Force Z's account of reaching Belle-Lande at 2300, before being recalled. In fact, there was considerable uncertainty that night over the exact position of Combat Command B, and the artillery lacked information on how to plan its fires. The position given the armor on Map 7 represents their lines as established by the next morning. They were not close to our infantry on either flank, though patrols were able to make contact. While tanks were sited on reverse slopes, over large fox holes, the infantry of Combat Command B dug in. The night passed without enemy attack.

The statistics for the day reflect only in part the severity of the action. Casualties for the 30th Division were 267, the largest number resulting from artillery fire, and were heaviest in the 120th Infantry and its attached tanks. Company B of the 743d Tank Battalion had lost nine tanks and one dozer destroyed, and three more tanks damaged and abandoned. Enemy casualties included 123 prisoners. American artillery, though hampered by poor visibility for its observers, had put in a busy and effective day. Given heavy support from Corps Artillery, the 30th's own seven battalions had expended nearly 5,000 rounds of 105-mm ammunition and 4,000 rounds of 155-mm. The 230th Field Artillery Battalion, working with the 120th Infantry, had fired 3,282 rounds.

[8] Combat Command B reported no contact with enemy tanks the whole day and no serious fighting once it got moving south. This is strong evidence for the view that the 2d SS Panzer battalion was operating in the 120th area, and that reports of enemy tanks coming up the highway from the south were erroneous (see earlier). These reports seem to have come from aerial reconnaissance by Ninth Air Force planes, and Combat

Command B believed its own tanks were mistaken for German armor.

[9] Its axis of advance cannot be determined from available records, and so is not located on Map 6.

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By evening the 9th Division was coming into its new zone, north of the highway to le Desert, and this promised improvement on General Hobbs' right flank, always a source of concern. Combat Command A of the 3d Armored, working with the 113th Cavalry Group, had made a limited advance in that zone during the afternoon and was attached to the 9th Division at 2230.

(The Enemy Side)

Seventh Army regarded 9 July as a day of attempted breakthrough on the whole front west of the Vire. In LXXXIV Corps' zone a German counterattack was attempted west of the Pont-Hebert highway, to reduce a new penetration south of le Desert. But this effort, made by elements of the Engineer Battalion of the 2d SS Armored Division, "disintegrated under heavy artillery fire." Battle Group "Heintz," which had taken 30 percent casualties, was still in line, assisted by weak elements of the 30th Mobile Brigade. The assembly of the Panzer Lehr Division was being delayed by continuous air attacks, and there was some discussion of using the division toward Sainteny, where the situation was still serious.

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Effort Toward Hauts-Vents (10 July)

The 9th Division had reached its battle positions by night of 9 July and was ready next morning to launch an attack toward the west and southwest, passing through the 113th Cavalry Group and elements of Combat Command A. Though the 9th was under VII Corps, its operations were in the same tactical zone as the 30th's, and the two divisions were to be closely associated in their work during the next ten days.

XIX Corps was left with a much reduced zone west of the Vire: south of le Desert, it became a three-mile-wide strip between the Vire and the small Terrette, tributary of the Taute River. XIX Corps was now nearly ready to open up its full-scale attack on both sides of the Vire. The 35th Division, landing 5-7 July in Normandy, was moving into line north of St-Lo to strengthen the effort. In order to give the newly arrived 35th a chance to familiarize itself with the terrain in its zone, the larger corps attack, scheduled first for 9 and then for 10 July, was postponed still another day. Meanwhile the 30th Division and its attached armor continued their effort toward Hauts-Vents and the important river crossing at Pont-Hebert. (For the day's action, see Map 7.)

Combat Command B attacked at 0600 on the morning of 10 July, Task Force X moving through Task Force Y toward Hauts-Vents. Intermittent rains, which had characterized the weather since First Army's attack began, continued to balk aerial reconnaissance and to make the roads slippery and muddy.

The axis of advance of the attacking task force was a sunken road, the only available route that led southwest from the highway toward Hill 91. As they progressed, the troops received intense small-arms and sniper fire on their flank and rear, as well as antitank fire from enemy guns sited along the road. Since there was room for only one tank at a time, congestion of vehicles on the road slowed the advance. Tank casualties which occurred on the road blocked the movement completely until the damaged vehicles could be cleared. Task Force X was finally forced to operate astride the road and began to receive heavy 88-mm fire. Artillery support was called for and delivered 400 yards to the front of

the task force. At a point still 700 yards from Hill 91 it came under a heavy artillery and mortar concentration and had to stop.

Task Force Z was then directed to pass through Task Force X to the objective, but unexpected enemy fire from Belle-Lande, which the armored units thought was clear of Germans, blocked the effort. Belle-Lande was in the zone of the 119th Infantry, but the 119th Infantry was also having trouble. The 3d Battalion was delayed two hours in jumping off because of a lack of ammunition, and the regiment was held up by the old traffic problems with the armor. To settle this a conference was held between General Hobbs, General Watson, Colonel Ednie, and Col. Dorrance S. Roysdon, who had relieved General Bohn in command of Combat Command B. At this meeting objectives were clarified, and the importance of taking Hauts-Vents was stressed. The respective commanders found themselves in agreement.

With the armor held up in the attempt toward Hauts-Vents, General Hobbs decided to assist it by increased effort in the 119th's zone, toward Belle-Lande. Late in the day, Colonel Ednie was ordered to press his 3d Battalion through that junction point. The battalion would then swing southwest and strike for la Foutelaie, on the ridge south of Hauts-Vents and Hill 91. If successful, this maneuver would break the enemy lines at the important crossing which linked his forces east and west of the Vire, and would outflank the German positions at Hauts-Vents. The 1st [10] and 2d Battalions were to cover the 119th's flank along the Vire and, also, to take La Bessiniere, important river crossing site directly east of la Foutelaie.

But this ambitious move stalled before it could develop any kind of momentum. The 2d Battalion was stopped by a strongly dug-in enemy line,

[10] Relieved by the 35th Division, the 1st Battalion was now available for action on the left bank of the Vire. It reached the 119th's battle zone by 1630.

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while the 3d Battalion was hit by a counterattack and became involved in a severe fire fight. Belle-Lande, reported unoccupied the night before, was now defended in strength by enemy forces which had brought four tanks into town. At 2000, two platoons of tanks from Company E, 32d Armored Regiment, part of Task Force Y, were ordered to proceed toward the town. As they moved forward, the enemy opened fire from Belle-Lande and knocked out one of the tank destroyers of Task Force X, covering the Pont-Hebert road from along the ridge. The Company E tanks returned the fire, hitting one enemy vehicle, and advanced to the edge of the village where troops of the 119th Infantry reported three dug-in tanks. Reconnaissance was attempted, but had to be abandoned because of darkness. With Belle-Lande firmly held by the enemy, the 119th Infantry called for artillery and pulled its leading elements back so that fire could be placed on the village and on the nearby bridge over the Vire. Despite these efforts, operations came to a close with both bridge and villages denied to the American infantry.

On the division right, the 120th Infantry made the major gain of the day, bringing it nearly up to Combat Command B. The 3d Battalion, coming in from the zone now taken over by the 9th Division, led the attack and was followed by the 1st while the battered 2d Battalion held its night position to protect the flank. The two attacking units were offered stubborn resistance, but nevertheless fought through the ground of the previous day's counterattack, past Hill 32, and made a mile gain to the south. By night the 3d Battalion was at the village of le Rocher, on a nose of the ridge toward which the 30th Division was inching its way.

This day marked the entry of the 9th Division into action on the right of the 30th. General Eddy ordered his infantry to press through the 113th Cavalry Group and Combat Command A of the 3d Armored and to attack south and southwest. The first task was to clear out the enemy salient

running north to Graignes, which had hampered the 83d Division's attacks farther west along the Taute. Final objective of the 9th Division was the high ground south of the St-Lo-Periers highway, west of the Terrette River.

The 60th Infantry, aided by the 113th Cavalry Group, struck west from Goucherie into the Graignes "peninsula" and by evening had completed its mission of clearing that area north to the canal. But German resistance was still strong in the vicinity of Tribehou. The 47th infantry encountered stubborn opposition west of la Charlemenerie, but reached the edges of the Bois du Hommet, another enemy strongpoint. The 39th Infantry had the hardest going and was only at le Desert, on the east-west highway, by nightfall. This left a gap of some 1,000 yards between the 47th and 39th Regiments.

The failure of the 39th Infantry to advance beyond le Desert also exposed the right flank of the 30th Division, which was already deeply echeloned. To increase the problems confronting General Hobbs, his left flank too was now becoming exposed, and the 119th Infantry was subject to enemy fire from east of the Vire. The 30th Division was in a salient, and any progress toward the south only increased its depth. The stiffened enemy resistance at Belle-Lande and Pont-Hebert and the indications of enemy tank activity south of the 30th Division front were reported to the corps commander by General Hobbs. "We are out in a breeze," declared the 30th Division commander, as he urged that his division halt its effort until the units on his right and left came down abreast. General Colett, however, insisted that continued pressure by the 30th Division was essential to the corps attack planned for 11 July. In view of the reports of enemy tank movements, he agreed to change his earlier plans for withdrawing Combat Command B.

XIX Corps was well aware by 10 July of the movement of Panzer Lehr Division into its zone. The Corps had been informed on the night of 9/10 July that the 902 Panzer Grenadier Regiment had arrived. Corps believed it likely that the Germans would continue a delaying action, ac-

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panied by local counterattacks to cover a withdrawal to south and southwest, but recognized the possibility of a counterattack in strength estimated at a maximum of two battalions of tanks and two regiments of infantry.

(The Enemy Side)

Seventh Army's journal made no note of the American attacks toward Hauts-Vents and Pont Hebert during 10 July. [11] It was chiefly concerned over the progress of the American troops against the Graignes-St-Andre salient, where a German company had been cut off north of Graignes.

Seventh Army's hopes were now centered on the forthcoming attack of Panzer Lehr. Aided by the cover given by bad weather, that unit was able to reach its final assembly area. The commanding general of Seventh Army visited the battle zone on an inspection tour and discussed in detail the employment of Panzer Lehr. Its primary objective was to restore the situation along the Vire by annihilating the American forces in the "bridgehead" south of the Vire-Taute Canal. After this, the division would be recalled, to remain as reserve for LXXXIV Corps. The possibility was discussed that, in case of maximum success, the attack might be pressed toward Carentan. But no provision was made for following up the armor with infantry on the scale necessary to effect a major breakthrough. Gen. Fritz Bayerlein, commanding the division, apparently was unaware that a fresh American division had come into line north of le Desert.

Panzer Lehr was one of the best German units in action on the western front. It had been activated early in 1944, with completely new

equipment, and, as Bayerlein afterwards stated, was the "best panzer division the Germans ever had." It was completely armored, and personnel included teachers and demonstrators of armored tactics. But by 10 July the division had been through a month of hard fighting on the British front and had suffered 5,000 casualties. Strength was down to 10,000 men, and of these 2,200 (or more, according to Bayerlein's later report) were still back at Tilly-sur-Seulles. The movement west beyond St-Lo had been hard hit by Allied air attacks, and General Bayerlein regarded his men as not in condition for the mission imposed.

The division's available strength included troops of the 901st and 902d Panzer Grenadier Regiments, three battalions of 105-mm howitzers, and a battalion of the 36th Panzer Regiment. Bayerlein planned his attack in three formations: I and II Battalions of 902d Panzer Grenadier Regiment and a battalion of 20 tanks north from Pont-Hebert; the I Battalion of the 901st Panzer Grenadiers and two companies of antitank guns (20 pieces) through le Desert; and the II Battalion of the 901st with 11 tanks from Bois du Hommet, driving east and northeast. The initial objectives of the three attacks were, respectively, Cavigny, St-Jean-de-Daye, and le Mesnil-Veneron. The three columns were supposed to meet around St-Jean-de-Daye to organize for further advance.

The Counterattack of Panzer Lehr (11 July)

Thus far in its battle, XIX Corps had been dealing with enemy forces that put up a stubborn defense, but were evidently lacking in means to mount more than small and localized counterattacks. On 11 July, the very day when XIX Corps was scheduled to extend its attacking zone eastward of the Vire, the corps right flank was threatened by armored counterattack on a serious scale. The Germans, in their greatest effort during the Battle of the Hedgerows to knock First Army off balance by an offensive thrust, threw Panzer Lehr into action west of the Vire. The timing of this blow worked out fortunately for First Army. Had it come a day or two earlier (as scheduled), Panzer Lehr would have hit XIX Corps' flank when it was defended by the relatively thin screen of the 113th Cavalry Group. Now, the 9th Division (VII Corps) had taken over the sector, with Combat Command A of the 3d Armored close at hand.

The impact of Panzer Lehr's attack was to cause more trouble in the 9th Division's lines, on which

[11]They may have been reported too late in the day. The entries in Seventh Army War Diary for 11 July (p. 109) probably include reference to late actions in this sector for the previous day.

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the main enemy strength hit, than it did farther south and east. The initial success of the enemy penetration in the 9th Division sector was also due to a gap which had developed between the 39th Infantry which was pushing southwest along the corps boundary, and the 47th Infantry, which was moving more nearly west with the objective of clearing the Hommet woods. (See Map 7.)

Beginning at midnight, the 39th Infantry reported several times that the enemy was in movement on its front, just southwest of le Desert, and that tracked vehicles could be heard on the east-west highway. In the early morning hours of 11 July, the threat materialized. Enemy columns struck into the gap between the 47th Infantry and the 39th and overran the CP of the 3d Battalion, 47th Infantry; they pushed the 1st Battalion of the 39th Infantry back 600 yards along the le Desert highway. The impetus of the enemy attack carried some German elements as much as 2,000 yards behind the American front-line positions.

The enemy drive destroyed communications between the 39th and 47th Infantry Regiments and Division Headquarters, but through the 9th Reconnaissance Troop, Division learned of the withdrawal of the 1st Battalion and of the enemy penetration between the two regiments. As

soon as the extent of penetration was known, the 9th Division took prompt and effective steps to seal off enemy forces already hotly engaged by the 899th Tank Destroyer Battalion and units of the 39th and 47th Infantry. The 1st Battalion, 47th Infantry and four tank destroyers were ordered at 0850 to move down the road south of le Mesnil-Veneron; the mission of this force was to contact the 3d Battalion, 47th Infantry, cut the enemy escape route, and mop up isolated spots of enemy resistance within the regimental area. The 3d Battalion, 39th Infantry was sent to stop German infantry in the la Scellerie-la Buhotrie area. Dive bombers, scheduled for an 0900 mission, were diverted to meet the tank threat, hitting enemy armor along the road near le Desert and in the vicinity of la Scellerie. At 1230, the 2d Battalion, 60th Infantry was attached to the 47th Infantry to assist in covering its north flank and rear. The personnel of the CP of the 3d Battalion, 47th Infantry reorganized their forces and successfully attacked to recover their CP, which was found to be practically intact.

The heaviest fighting of the day fell on Companies A and C, 899th Tank Destroyer Battalion (Maj. Hoyt K. Lorance), which had been alerted at 0300 to aid in halting the enemy drive. Three penetrations of the American infantry lines were wiped out by Company A between 0300 and 0600. Before daylight, a platoon of Company A attached to the 39th Infantry, in position about 300 yards east of le Desert on the road to la Perrine, attacked three tanks which had penetrated the American lines for 500 yards. During a fight in which one American TD was knocked out, one of the enemy tanks was destroyed and the other two were forced to withdraw after being set afire.

To the west of le Desert, approximately ten German tanks drove north on the unimproved road leading from the le Hommet-d'Arthenay crossroads to la Charlemenerie and succeeded in reaching a point just south of la Scellerie. Here the column was stopped when the 3d Platoon, Company A destroyed the leading German tank after losing one of its own M-10's. To deal with the German threat in this area, the Company A commander reorganized his tank destroyers and requested a company of infantry as reinforcements. While awaiting the arrival of these troops, the TD's spotted three Mark V tanks on the road west of la Scellerie and opened fire, destroying with 12 rounds the tanks and one half-track.

Later in the morning, Company C, 899th Tank Destroyer Battalion, holding positions near la Charlemenerie, knocked out its first German tank of the campaign. A well-camouflaged Mark V, carrying several soldiers and accompanied by others on foot, rounded the west corner of the crossroads below la Charlemenerie in front of an American tank destroyer. The M-10 opened fire and with two shots destroyed the German tank, killing and wounding several crew members and scattering the rest.

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Another Panther thrust in the early afternoon toward la Charlemenerie, near the la Caplainerie road junction, was stopped by two of Company C's tank destroyers with the aid of Company F, 32d Armored Regiment (Combat Command A). The Company F tanks were located in orchards on either side of the road waiting to take part in a 47th Infantry mission, while the two M-10's were holding positions on the road about 200 yards from the American armor. As the Mark V's appeared, Company F opened fire with HE at a range of 400 yards. The Panthers continued to roll, however, and the leading tank broke through to fight a duel with an M-10 at a range of 120 yards. The Mark V was damaged by TD fire, but it returned a shot, hitting the TD and wounding or killing three members of the crew. The other M-10 then opened fire, finishing the Panther with two shots. Then, spotting another Mark V, the TD fired ten rounds into the suspension system of the Panther, which sideslipped helplessly against the bank on the east side of the road and hung there in a tangle of matted hedgerow and churned mud. The crews, who had left their tanks when they were hit, were tracked down by infantry and captured in a farmhouse in the vicinity.

The slaughter of the German armor continued. As the 1st Battalion, 47th Infantry moved down the road west of la Charlemenerie to contact the 3d Battalion, the first two M-10's in the column

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spotted two Panther tanks approaching from a lightly wooded area to the left front. Before these tanks could get into action, the TD's opened fire with their 3-inch guns at a range of 170 yards, knocking out both Panthers. A few moments later a third Mark V was discovered on a farm road to the east. Both M-10's fired on it, and ten minutes later this third tank was found pitched inert against a hedgerow. None of the enemy tanks had been able to fire on the 1st Battalion before being hit.

In sum the enemy armor had floundered helplessly after its breakthrough. The 899th Tank Destroyer Battalion destroyed 1 Mark IV and 12 Mark V tanks, while the American infantry hunted down the remnants of enemy foot troops which had accompanied the armor. Artillery and air activity had prevented the Germans from sending additional tanks and infantry to support the initial breakthrough. Aerial reconnaissance at 0900 had reported 40 enemy tanks, parked under trees, along the paved highway west of le Desert. The 9th Division Artillery covered the road with such heavy fire that it became a death trap for anyone trying to use it. American P-47's and P-51's flew three missions against tanks on the XIX and VII Corps fronts during the day, claiming a total of 22 tanks destroyed. Of this

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number, the planes claimed to have destroyed 13 out of 14 tanks sighted near le Hommet-de'Arthenay in the attack at 0900.

Joint efforts of air and ground forces had neutralized the Panzer Lehr Division breakthrough by 1600. The 39th and 47th Infantry Regiments were then ordered to advance and reoccupy their positions of the morning. By 2100 their mission was completed against light opposition, and the regiments were instructed to dig in for the night in preparation for an attack the following day. The net effect of the German counterattack had thus been little more than to cause a day's loss in the 9th Division's schedule of advance.

The effects on the 30th Division's front were even less; here, 11 July saw notable gains by the division in one part of its zone, in addition to complete defensive success against Panzer Lehr's right wing column.

West of the Pont-Hebert-St-Jean-de-Daye highway, the 3d Battalion of the 120th Infantry had organized positions for night defense around the village of le Rocher, on the higher ground that marked the north end of the ridge on which lay Hauts-Vents. Warned of the presence of enemy armor to south and west, Lt. Col. Paul W. McCullum established roadblocks on the approaches most likely to be used by the Germans, and placed tanks and TD's south of the village toward Hill 91.

Warnings had come in about midnight from 9th Division, noting enemy activity south of le Desert and on the 120th's flank. This alert was repeated two hours later. At 0130 prior to the second warning, the 3d Battalion had been informed that an enemy armored vehicle, discovered on the road near Company E, had opened fire. Almost simultaneously, a message sent by runner from the roadblock toward Hill 91 announced that enemy tanks, each followed by about 20 infantry and armored vehicles, were moving toward the 3d Battalion CP. The battalion instantly alerted its companies and began to prepare countermeasures. Before these preparations were completed, two enemy vehicles slipped by the outposts and opened fire on Company K. The Americans returned the fire as the Germans approached, knocking out one tank with bazooka and rifle grenade fire, killing a member of the tank crew and wounding several others.

During this fight another tank, with two more and an armored car

following close behind, had approached within a few yards of the 3d Battalion CP. An American officer opened fire with a machine gun mounted on a jeep just inside the CP area, precipitating a fight in which 3d Battalion personnel made use of bazookas, grenades, pistols, and machine guns to rout the enemy. The armored car and one tank became immobilized in mud and were destroyed by the Americans. During the fight two officers and three enlisted men

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of the 3d Battalion were ambushed and taken prisoners by a party of approximately 50 Germans. All but one of the prisoners later got away when the armored car behind which they were forced to march was fired on by an American bazooka and machine gun in the battalion area. One of the American officers was killed, the Germans scattered, and the prisoners escaped.

In other parts of the 3d Battalion area, in a series of isolated actions, bazooka and small-arms fire succeeded in driving away or damaging enemy tanks. When the battalion area was cleared near midmorning, the enemy had lost 5 Mark IV tanks, 4 armored cars, and 60 prisoners.

East of the highway to Pont-Hebert, German tanks were reported behind the 119th Infantry's front by daylight. During the night a group of seven Mark IV's and approximately a company of infantry penetrated the left flank of the 3d Battalion on the river road. By 0930 a tank, accompanied by a small group of infantrymen, had been sighted near la Coquerie, a mile behind our forward lines, and ten minutes later another was reported just south of Bahais. Enemy artillery showed unusual activity, including a willingness to exchange punches with American artillery. German artillery strength on the division front was estimated at four battalions, one of 150-mm guns, and a battery of mobile 88-mm's. The fire of the 150's was particularly accurate.

The 119th Infantry, which was preparing to attack with Combat Command B in the direction of Hauts-Vents at 1100, sent its reserve (the 1st Battalion) toward the threatened area and asked Combat Command B for tanks. Task Force Y, including Companies F and I, 33d Armored Regiment and Company A, 36th Armored Infantry, were sent from their positions southwest of Cavigny. The 823d Tank Destroyer Battalion indicated at this time that it was prepared to deal with the enemy in the vicinity of Bahais. By 1045 the two tanks reported near Bahais had been destroyed and the accompanying troops were casualties. Bazooka fire had accounted for one tank and TD fire had destroyed the other.

Task Force Y moved northeast to Cavigny, where two columns were formed, one moving south on the river road through Bahais and the other advancing southwest toward la Coquerie. The main difficulties of the second column came, not from the withdrawing enemy remnants, but from German self-propelled guns east of the river near St-Gilles, which scored hits on six U. S. tanks as they moved down the river road. By mid-afternoon the situation near the Vire was under control; the Germans had not been able to get armored units in any strength through the 119th's lines.

Leaving Task Force Y to clear up the infiltrations, Task Force Z, reinforced by three companies of Task Force X, went ahead with its attack as planned toward the high ground at Hauts-Vents. The 119th and 120th Infantry were ready by 1530 to attack in their zones.

Hauts-Vents Is Taken (11 July)

When the assault task force of Combat Command B started on its new drive for Hill 91 enemy tanks opened with flanking fire from Belle-Lande. (See Map 8.) In the ensuing action the American armored column lost six tanks. Reorganization of the task force was nevertheless accomplished,

and the advance continued. On nearing Hauts-Vents, Task Force Z was hit by friendly artillery fire which fell short and this, coupled with enemy mortar and artillery fire, made it possible for the Germans to reoccupy some of the high ground. Colonel Roysdon then went forward and personally led the task force's attack, which reported taking Hill 91 at 1736. The American armor drove headlong to the top of the hill and quickly established a defensive position, with the infantry on the forward slopes and the tanks on the slope north. There the task force dug in and held, despite heavy enemy pressure. The Germans attempted to organize a counterattack in the evening, sending a column of tanks forward from the southeast, but Division Artillery smashed this threat before it could reach the hill. The enemy armor retreated and dis-

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persed; German infantry continued to hold a line 500 yards south of Hauts-Vents.

The capture of Hill 91 was the signal achievement in this sector of the XIX Corps front; only limited advances were made by right- and left-wing units of the 30th Division. Recovering from the confusion caused by the armored penetrations during the night, the 119th Infantry got its attack under way in mid-afternoon. The 3d Battalion, having been heavily hit by mortar fire, was replaced by the 1st Battalion, which attacked abreast of the 2d. They managed to advance about 200 yards before the 1st Battalion was hit with another counterattack, beaten off with the aid of artillery and smoke. The two battalions dug in short of the road from Belle-Lande to the river. Farther west, the 120th Infantry, supported by the 743d Tank Battalion, advanced in stiff hedgerow fighting and pushed a battalion down from le Rocher to tie in with Combat Command B. The enemy used tanks in an unsuccessful effort to stop this advance.

With Panzer Lehr armor roaming around on the front, the division commander ordered physical contact ("not people using radios") with units to left and right. On the deep right flank, which still was open, the busy 30th Reconnaissance Troop was patrolling and strong roadblocks were being maintained. The 823d Tank Destroyer Battalion continued close support of the two leading infantry regiments, staying in position to counter armored thrusts from the south and southwest. The 117th Infantry, now in reserve, was placed to give protection in depth to the right flank.

The day had brought 367 casualties to the 30th Division, 174 in the 119th Infantry, and 153 in the 120th. Attack and counterattack had brought heavy artillery activity, with the 30th Division Artillery firing 9,000 rounds. This fire had been reinforced by Corps Artillery support in addition

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(Map No. 8)

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to 6,000 rounds expended by the 3d Armored Division Artillery.

(The Enemy Side)

The 11th of July was a hard day for Seventh Army on its whole front, and its War Diary could get little comfort from the reports of Panzer Lehr's attack, on which so much hope had been placed. The complete failure of the attack must have been a bitter pill, but the Diary records it with grim objectivity. The effort north of Pont-Hebert by the 902d Armored Infantry Regiment was reported as getting as far as Cavigny, but the German units had to withdraw because of powerful American counterblows against the "deep left flank." apparently this report refers to the U. S. advance, becoming pronounced by the evening of 10 July, toward le Rocher and Hill 91. This seems to have thrown Panzer Lehr's right wing

column off balance. General Bayerlein later (in 1945) stated in an interview that one battalion of the 902d was diverted to meet this American attack. This may have been the unit that infiltrated some tanks into the le Rocher area, which was not in Panzer Lehr's zone of attack as originally planned, [12] or it may refer to the German tanks that attempted to stop Combat Command B by flanking fire from Belle-Lande. The attack of the 901st Panzer Grenadiers beyond le Desert, in battalion strength, was reported to have got as far as the St-Jean-de-Daye highway, but was then hit by a flanking attack from the north. Elements of this combat group were cut off and surrounded. American attacks between the two penetrations of Panzer Lehr got "as far as

[12] But these tanks may have been from the 2d SS Panzer Division's Engineer Battalion still in this sector after its unsuccessful effort of 9 July.

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Eslandes," and a break in the German lines was only closed by use of the Engineer Battalion of Panzer Lehr in counterattack. The details were "unclear" and the whole situation was regarded as critical. The Panzer Lehr units had definitely been forced to the defensive, and its effort "did not relieve the pressure on the main point of enemy effort."

General Bayerlein's memory of his attack, recorded a year later, was marked by an estimate of losses running to as high as 50 percent of the attacking force, though his figures of 20 tanks and 500-700 men lost are low in comparison with American claims and cannot be checked by available records. Bayerlein attributed the result of the day to the exhausted condition of his men when they entered battle, and to the difficulty of operating Mark V tanks in the hedgerows. He declared that his armor had to fight at maximum ranges of 200 yards because hedges concealed everything farther away. He could not use the Mark V's for cross-country movement. Light tanks would have been better for the St-Lo terrain but he did not bring them because he had been told the area was better suited for tank operations than that around Caen.

Panzer Lehr had been severely mauled by the combined onslaughts of the U. S. 9th and 30th Divisions, and was now crippled to an extent that removed the possibility of further large-scale counterattack west of the Vire.

Action West of the Taute (7-11 July)

The slugging match in VIII and VII Corps zones continued through this period, and only toward the end of it were any sizable gain recorded. (See Map IV.)

The 79th Division entered la Haye-du-Puits on 7 July, and the 8th Division took over the center

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of VIII Corps' front, relieving the 82d Airborne. The 90th Division met determined enemy counterattacks in the Mont-Castre Forest sector, but fought its way through that difficult ground during the next four days. On the corps' right, the 79th Division became involved in the severest type of hedgerow battles; on 9 July its gain for the day was 200 yards. Finally, on 10 July all three divisions began to move against diminishing enemy resistance, and forward lines were pushed 3,000 yards south of la Haye-du-Puits. By the end of the next day it was clear that the German MLR had been definitely broken, as all divisions continued to make progress. The 90th Division was now be-

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yond the Mont-Castre hills, one of the toughest sectors on First Army's front; its casualties for a week of fighting were almost 5,000 men. All

attacking divisions had sustained heavy losses in this period, averaging several hundred casualties per division each day.

VII Corps' efforts met equally determined enemy resistance; on 9 July the 4th Division ground out 400 yards and the 83d, 700 yards. But here again, on 10 July the enemy opposition began to show signs of wear. On that day the 4th Division repelled an enemy counterattack; then struck a well-timed blow that broke the German front and drove large columns from their dug-in positions onto open ground where American artillery could hit them. For losses of only four men, the 8th Infantry's battalion that pushed home this attack captured 50 Germans and counted 480 bodies. Some gains were also made beyond Sainteny, and VII Corps' main effort was about to feel the advantages resulting from the entrance of the 9th Division into the battle, east of the Taute.

But the week of heavy fighting left VIII and VII Corps still far short of their original objectives. Except for the higher command, with its knowledge of the enemy's problems and weakness, American soldiers were in little position to feel anything save disappointment over the results of bitter struggle for a few miles of ground. But aspects of the battle other than the gain or loss of a little terrain were very clear to the German command, which was not happy over the situation on the left wing of Seventh Army.

(The Enemy Side)

During this five-day period from 7 to 11 July, Seventh Army's War Diary reflects the unremitting, ever-increasing strain produced in LXXXIV Corps by the continued pressure of American attack. All German efforts at counterattack failed to restore the situation and only used up their slim reserves. When Panzer Lehr Division came in, that unit was hard hit on 11 July and thrown immediately on the defensive. Day after day, Seventh Army congratulates its units on defensive successes, but these consisted ordinarily in preventing breakthroughs or in stopping penetrations.

In the western sector, from the Prairies Marecageuses to the coast, the period began with the attempt of a battle group of the 2d SS Panzer, aided by the 15th Parachute Regiment (of the 5th Parachute Division), to restore the MLR in the Mont-Castre area. At first, hopeful reports came in from this counterattack, but by 8 July Army had to recognize that the results were not decisive. Furthermore, American progress in the St-Jean-de-Daye sector made it necessary to plan at once for pulling the 2d SS Panzer's combat group out of the west wing and using it to reinforce along the Vire. But this move would weaken the west wing so greatly that, lacking reserves behind it, Army felt a withdrawal on the coastal end of the front would be necessary in order to obtain shorter lines. Rommel discussed this withdrawal plan on the 7th with Army, but (after orders came down from Hitler) decided that no terrain would be yielded unless under pressure. If withdrawal were forced, Rommel approved taking up a line covering Lessay. So, the left wing of LXXXIV Corps tried to stand its ground during the next three days, only to be steadily pushed back and heavily punished. La Haye-du-Puits was lost on 8 July. By 10 July the Germans were at the southern edge of the Mont-Castre hills, and were also being forced back west of the Lessay-la Haye-du-Puits highway. Strength of the units resisting in the sector opposite U. S. VIII Corps was listed on 10 July as follows:

77th Division.....	1,840 men
353d Division (with remnants of 91st Division).....	1,250 men
243d Division.....	700 men

On 11 July, alarmed by American success directly east of that sector (in the U. S. VII Corps zone), Army finally got approval from Rommel and Hitler for a withdrawal of the west wing. The line proposed was about two miles north of the Ay River, protecting Lessay, but certain U. S. forces had already reached this new line at some

points; Seventh Army was talking on 11 July of a further withdrawal, this time behind the Ay River.

The next sector to the east was that protecting the direct route to Periers, along the Carentan-Periers highway. [13] Seventh Army had always regarded this as the point of the American main effort and as the most critical defensive sector west of the Vire. From 7 to 9 July the 17th SS Panzer Grenadier Division, aided here by remnants of the 6th Parachute Regiment, was under extremely heavy pressure and lost Sainteny (to the U. S. 83d Division). On 10-11 July the German defense of this corridor was made harder by a flanking threat from east of the Taute, as American advance [14] wiped out the Graignes-Tribehou salient

[13] U. S. VII Corps' zone.

[14] That is, U. S. 9th Division's attack.

and uncovered the Taute flank. On 11 July, Panzer Lehr's counterattack failed to ease this situation. Furthermore, on that day, a new American penetration south of Sainteny was checked only by committing a regiment of the 2d SS Panzer, which suffered heavily. With its commitment, there were no more reserves on hand at this main pressure point, and the threat here influenced the belated decision to withdraw the German lines toward Lessay.

By 11 July, the problem of building reserves for LXXXIV Corps was as far from solution as ever. The pressure from American attacks was not letting up, and German efforts to counterattack had exhausted their small potential reserves. The 2d SS Panzer units, as a result of battles in three different sectors, were worn down to what was described (12 July) as a very weak combat group, again in line on the front protecting Periers, with smaller units committed elsewhere. Reinforcements from Brittany and the Loire, so long requested, had been started on the march 7 July. But these reinforcements were suffering the same disappointing delays, caused by Allied air activity and their own lack of transport, that had dogged German efforts since D Day. The 5th Parachute Division (less the 15th Regiment, already in line and badly used up at Mont-Castre) was still short of Avranches by 11 July. The 275th Division (not including the elements in Battle Group "Heintz," now worn to remnants and facing U. S. XIX Corps) was even farther south in Brittany. The Engineer Battalion of the 5th Parachute Division was the only unit near the battle zone and likely to be available to reinforce LXXXIV Corps during the next few days. Seventh Army renewed its request for getting up the last two battalions of the 2d SS Panzer, still in southern France. But their arrival, with transport uncertain, would be a matter of weeks rather than days.

Both transport and ammunition presented serious difficulties in the battle zone of Seventh Army. There was no hope of getting further transport from the Brittany sector, where remaining units had been already so stripped of their resources that they were increasingly worried by the problem of holding the peninsula against possible Allied landings. The French Resistance movement, armed by Allied air drops, was in virtual control of large inland areas, and put an increasing strain on the weakened German garrison forces. As for ammunition, the pressure of supply west of the Vire was such that Army refused on 7 July to reinforce LXXXIV Corps by an additional battalion of heavy artillery because this would only further decrease the ammunition available to Corps.

American use of artillery in overwhelming quantity is stressed during these days, the barrage of 9 July along the whole corps front being described as something "never seen before." Such fire, along with Allied air attacks, caused losses in men and transport even on relatively quiet

days and prevented the "superiority of German infantrymen" from coming into play.

From this summary of the battle, as Seventh Army experienced it, the importance of the U. S. XIX Corps' attack is readily apparent. Coming into the fight when Seventh Army's reserves were already committed, the American effort along the Vire, though not unexpected, had created a new crisis. To meet this, Seventh Army was given an armored division from the neighboring army on its east, had thrown in this precious reserve against the XIX Corps sector, and had failed to accomplish any worthwhile results. Such was the situation on 11 July, when XIX Corps, aided by the 2d Division of V Corps, was widening its attack to include the zone east of the Vire by a powerful blow aimed directly at St-Lo.