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OPERATIONS OF THE 29TH INFANTRY DIVISION IN THE  
ATTACK AND CAPTURE OF ST. LO, FRANCE,  
13 TO 18 JULY 1944  
(NORMANDY CAMPAIGN)

Type of operation described: INFANTRY DIVISION ATTACKING  
AND CAPTURING A KEY COMMUNICATIONS CENTER  
IN HEDGEROW TERRAIN

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OPERATIONS OF THE 29TH INFANTRY DIVISION  
IN THE ATTACK AND CAPTURE OF ST. LO,  
FRANCE, 13 TO 18 JULY 1944  
(NORMANDY CAMPAIGN)

ORIENTATION

INTRODUCTION

This monograph covers the operations of the 29th Division in the capture of ST. LO, FRANCE, from 13 to 18 July 1944, during the First US Army offensive to enlarge its lodgement area in NORMANDY.

The capture of ST. LO was the final phase of a continuous effort on the part of the 29th Division. In order to provide a proper perspective, it is necessary to review the major events which led up to the Battle of ST. LO.

On 6 June 1944 the US First Army and the British Second Army launched a five-pronged amphibious assault on the coast of NORMANDY, with preliminary airborne assaults on each flank of the invasion zone. After bloody fighting, each of the five amphibious assaults had gained a beachhead and by 11 June all of the beachheads were linked up. (See Map A) (1) The port of CHERBOURG fell to the US VII Corps on 26 June and by 1 July all enemy resistance in the northern COTENTIN peninsula had come to an end. (2)

While VII Corps was waging the main American offensive in the CHERBOURG area, the remainder of the First US Army was slowly pushing inland and the Second British Army was maintaining constant pressure against heavy German opposition in the CAEN sector where the Germans had concentrated the bulk of their strength. (3)

The 29th Division had not only participated in the assault wave of the NORMANDY invasion, but had landed on OMAHA BEACH where the going was much rougher than anywhere else that day. The assault there was almost repulsed and

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- (1) A-11, p. 24  
(2) A-11, p. 31  
(3) A-11, p. 31

was finally carried through only because of the extreme gallantry of the assaulting elements of the 29th and 1st Divisions. (4) After the landing, the 29th Division fought forward as a part of V Corps until XIX Corps took jurisdiction over it on 14 June. At this time ST. LO was less than seven miles away. (5) Progress was slow, but the 29th Division continued to push closer and closer toward that important town.

#### THE GENERAL SITUATION

After the COTENTIN peninsula had been mopped up, the next need of the First US Army was to obtain sufficient room and satisfactory position for launching a breakthrough effort. By gaining the general line from COUTANCES to MARIGNY to ST. LO, the First US Army would be able to move out of the restrictive marshes south of CARENTAN and to use the important lateral roads between CARENTAN and LA HAYE-DU-PUITS, and between ST. LO and PERIERS.

The First Army plan was to begin the offensive on the right flank, by the sea, and then to expand it with a progression of blows from right to left. VIII Corps struck first, on 3 July, in the area where the greatest advance was planned, with LA HAYE-DU-PUITS as its objective. Then VII Corps joined the attack on 4 July, aiming at PERIERS, and finally XIX Corps was committed on 7 July in the zone that included the VIRE RIVER and the ST. LO area on both sides of that river. V Corps was used as the pivot for the moving front, with its 2d Division attacking on 11 July to aid XIX Corps in the battle for ST. LO. (See Map B) (6)

The Germans put up stubborn resistance all along the First Army line and progress was slow for all the attacking American units. On 8 July, however, the 79th Division of VIII Corps had succeeded in taking LA HAYE-DU-PUITS (7), and on 12 July the 2d Division of V Corps fulfilled its role

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(4) A-11, p. 25  
(5) A-4, pp. 75, 83  
(6) A-1, pp. 84-89  
(7) A-1, p. 85

in the First Army offensive by capturing HILL 192, a key terrain feature which dominated all approaches to ST. LO.

(8) This of course was a great advantage to the 29th Division in pressing its attack against that town.

Opposing the First US Army was the larger part of the German Seventh Army, commanded by SS Lieutenant General Hauser. This Army consisted of two Corps, the LXXXIV west of the VIRE and the II Parachute east of the VIRE. Under these two Corps were elements of at least 12 divisions, some of which were crack units such as the 3d Parachute Division, the 17th SS Panzer Grenadier Division and the 2d SS Panzer (Das Reich) Division. Others were only battle groups, composed of mobile elements that had been able to reach the battle zone from previous defensive positions. By and large the Germans were considerably under strength, Allied air supremacy hindering reinforcement as well as the replacement of combat losses. Resupply was difficult for the same reason. (9)

Although the Americans were receiving huge quantities of supplies over the beaches, the nearness of the front lines caused much congestion and traffic difficulty. Also, due to shipping delays and unusually heavy firing, stocks of artillery ammunition, particularly 105 howitzer, were quite low and unrestricted firing was not possible. (10)

But while the Germans suffered the disadvantage of being outnumbered, they had the definite advantages of ample time to prepare their defensive positions, ample room for maneuver, and good communications within their position areas. And most important of all, they had the advantage of terrain. The country was crisscrossed with hedgerows which formed small rectangular fields, usually from 100 to 200 yards long and from 50 to 100 yards wide. The hedgerows themselves were massive walls of earth, several feet thick and up to 10 feet high, usually covered on the top and sides

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(8) A-6, p. 58

(9) A-6, p. 4

(10) A-1, p. 93

by a dense growth of bushes and brambles. The hedgerows provided natural fortifications for the defense, obstacles for the offense, and excellent concealment for snipers. (11)

The weather, too, was favoring the Germans and handicapping the Americans. Heavy rains were making bigger and better barriers out of the marshes and reducing the amount of traffic that could be sent over the narrow dirt roads. The rain and poor visibility also were limiting the Allies in the use of their air advantage, since planes could not be used in such weather, either for tactical support or for observation. (12)

#### DISPOSITIONS AND PLAN OF XIX CORPS (See Map C)

XIX Corps planned to strike first with the 30th Division, on the west bank of the VIRE, to gain the high ground west of ST. LO. This was designed both to support the VII Corps attack to the west and also to straighten out XIX Corps' own front lines where the 29th Division's sector formed a large salient along the VIRE RIVER. The 29th Division was to hold on the east bank of the VIRE and then, on Corps order, to attack direct at ST. LO. (13) The 35th Division, which had just landed in NORMANDY, joined XIX Corps during the night of 9/10 July. It was put on line between the 29th and 30th Divisions, but on the east bank of the VIRE, thereby substantially reducing the front for the 29th Division. (14)

The 30th Division had jumped off on schedule 7 July, with ST.-JEAN-DE-DAYE as its immediate objective. After it had taken the objective and made one of the best advances yet registered in the general offensive, the First Army Commander decided to throw in the 3d Armored Division, previously in Army reserve, for a power drive through the German lines. Unfortunately, coordination difficulties and

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- (11) A-6, p. 4  
(12) A-6, p. 4  
(13) A-6, p. 6  
(14) A-6, p. 69

the limited area for movement resulted in bogging down not only the 3d Armored but the 30th Division as well. (15) Finally, room was made for Combat Command B and with that element leading the way, HAUTS-VENTS was taken on 11 July. (16)

The 29th and 35th Divisions opened a coordinated attack on 11 July, and although the 29th made good initial gains, the German defense stiffened and progress all along the Corps front became exceedingly slow and difficult. (17)

#### THE SITUATION OF THE 29TH DIVISION

The original invasion plan had listed ST. LO as the 29th Division's objective for D+9. (18) Now XIX Corps reassigned the mission to 29th Division as a major objective of the First Army's offensive. ST. LO had become particularly important to First Army. It was a hub of main roads going in all directions, to CARENTAN and ISIGNY, to CAUMONT and BAYEUX, to PERIERS and LESSAY, and to COUTANCES. (See Map B) First Army not only needed control of ST. LO in order to maneuver and to improve its internal communications, but also in order to deny those same advantages to the Germans. An even more important reason for gaining control of ST. LO was that attack could be mounted from there in two different directions: southwest toward COUTANCES and southeast toward VIRE. This double threat would increase the enemy difficulty of maintaining strong defenses with its limited forces. The desperate defense already made by the Germans indicates how well they appreciated the situation. (19)

The 29th Division added its strength to the First Army offensive on 11 July, carrying the main effort for XIX Corps. The only big gains were made by the 116th Regiment which by 2400 hours, 12 July, had fought its way onto the two northern

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(15) A-6, p. 4

(16) A-6, p. 42

(17) A-6, p. 72

(18) A-4, p. 75

(19) A-6, p. 5

ridges which lead from HILL 192 into ST. LO. (See Map D) Now that HILL 192 was held by the 2d Division, the dominant terrain features were three almost parallel ridges running west from HILL 192 toward ST. LO. The 2d Battalion of the 116th was on the northernmost ridge, headed at MARTINVILLE; the 3d Battalion was on the middle ridge, across the BAYEUX highway; and the 1st Battalion was fronting down the draw between the two ridges. The southern ridge, 101, was still held by the enemy. (20)

The high ground at LA LUZERNE was also key terrain and it was held by the 3d Battalion of the 115th Regiment. The 2d Battalion of this Regiment was held up northeast of BOURG d'ENFER and the 1st Battalion, after taking BELLE FONTAINE, had gone into Regimental Reserve. The 175th Regiment had been moved up from Division Reserve to positions behind the 116th Regiment but had been unable to pass through and attack to the southwest as planned for 12 July. (21)

The terrain in general was low and rolling, and even the ridges, important though they were for observation, were none too high. It was typical hedgerow country with innumerable small fields bounded on all sides by the high and massive hedgerows. (22) The Germans capitalized on their terrain advantage to the greatest possible extent. They had organized the hedgerows in depth with connecting ditches and tunnels. Primary and alternate positions were dug in deep and were well camouflaged. They had a high proportion of machine guns and mortars, and used them with great skill and accuracy. Many of their soldiers were equipped with Schmeisser machine pistols. (23) Tanks and self-propelled 88's roved up and down in the rear, ready to hit targets of opportunity or to concentrate their fires in whatever area was attacked, but never staying in any position for long at a time. (24)

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(20) A-6, p. 75

(21) A-6, p. 76

(22) A-6, p. 51

(23) A-6, p. 73

(24) A-6, p. 76

The German defenders in the ST. LO area included the greater part of the II Parachute Corps. Among the individual units believed to be present were elements of two strong regiments of the 3d Parachute Division, elements of four other infantry regiments, and a weak remnant of the 352d Division. The 3d Parachute Division, which was to be the main adversary of the 29th Division in the fight for ST. LO, was rated by First Army as the best of the German units which it encountered in NORMANDY. (25) According to G-2 estimates, the enemy had a fair amount of artillery including two batteries of 88-mm guns, 24 105-mm howitzers, 12 150-mm howitzers and one battery of 150-mm Nebelwerfers. (26)

The 29th Division, besides its three regiments of infantry and four battalions of artillery, had the 747th Medium Battalion attached, and both the 803d and 821st Tank Destroyer Battalions were helping out. (27) The infantry, however, had had no experience in working with tanks prior to landing in France. The Division had been constantly in action from D-Day on and had suffered extremely heavy casualties. Replacements had been received, but not sufficient to keep up with the casualties. Also a high proportion of the casualties had been key personnel, from squad leaders to Regimental Commanders, and it was impossible for replacements immediately to furnish the same degree of experienced leadership. Nevertheless, the Division was aggressively minded and had gained plenty of confidence from its previous achievements. With the exception of artillery ammunition, which was rationed, the status of supply was good. (28)

The weather, however, was generally bad. Rain and poor visibility were preventing effective air support and limiting

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(25) A-1, p. 92

(26) A-6, p. 53

(27) A-4, p. 100

(28) Statement of Major Eccles H. Scott, then Executive Officer, 1st Battalion, 116th Infantry, 28 November 1949

the use of liaison planes which was the best means of observing artillery fire in the flat hedgerow country. (29)

#### THE PLAN OF THE 29TH DIVISION

The Division Commander, Major General Charles H. Gernhardt, had planned to follow up the capture of the two northern ridges between HILL 192 and ST. LO by attacking down the line of those ridges with the ultimate objective of the high ground just east and southeast of ST. LO. (See Map D) He wished to avoid any difficult and costly fighting in the town itself and believed the threat of encirclement would force the Germans to evacuate. (30) His immediate plan for 13 July was to make the main effort a drive by the 175th Regiment along the BAYEUX - ST. LO highway while the 116th, which had been carrying the brunt of the offensive, dug in and held its present positions. (31) The 115th Regiment was to attack southwest from LA LUZERNE along the ST. LO - ISIGNY road. (32)

#### FINAL PREPARATIONS FOR THE ATTACK

The Division had been generally on the defensive from 22 June until 11 July and during this period had rotated its front line battalions to the rear for a few days of rest and rehabilitation. (33) Intensive training also was undertaken in means of overcoming hedgerow defenses. Infantry, tank and engineer elements of the Division were rehearsed in a tactical procedure devised by the Division whereby tanks specially equipped with heavy prongs would plunge into a hedgerow, covering the field ahead with their fire while engineers would blast a gap in the hedgerow at the spot softened by the tank. One squad of infantry accompanied each tank to provide additional protection for the operation. (34)

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(29) A-3, p. 67

(30) A-6, p. 54

(31) A-6, p. 76

(32) A-6, p. 79

(33) A-4, p. 89

(34) A-6, p. 56

No special preparations were made for the renewal of attack on 13 July, however, since the Division was already in contact with the enemy and all units were in position for the action they were to take.

#### NARRATION

##### THE ATTACK BOGS DOWN

The 175th Infantry Regiment started off down the BAYEUX highway as scheduled at 0800 hours on 13 July. Its formation was column of battalions with the 3d Battalion in the lead and the 1st in reserve, to be used only on Division order. Bad weather had prevented a scheduled air strike and tank support was lost because of fueling difficulties, but considerable assistance was available from Division and Corps Artillery. The enemy had excellent observation of the road from the parallel ridge to the south and was able to pour in mortar and artillery fire with good effect. Our own artillery tried white phosphorus as well as high explosive but had little success in reducing the German fire. By the time the 3d Battalion had covered the 500 yards necessary for it to come abreast of the 1st Battalion, 116th Infantry, it was nearly the end of the morning. (35)

Colonel Ollie W. Reed, who commanded the 175th, decided that it was necessary to get off the road, so a platoon of engineers with a bulldozer was sent to cut a new route for 400 yards. The bulldozer could not be used, however, because of the heavy artillery fire from the enemy, and most of the work had to be done by hand. Colonel Reed then requested permission to use his 1st Battalion to attack south toward RIDGE 101. This was the Division's last reserve, however, and the request was denied. Instead, Division decided to commit the 2d Battalion of the 116th Infantry along the MARTINVILLE RIDGE, in an effort to relieve pressure on the 175th. This new attack met heavy opposition

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(35) A-6, p. 77

and gained little ground. Toward the end of the day an effort was made to swing the 2d Battalion of the 175th around to the left flank of the 3d Battalion to provide a wider front for the attack. Only 100 yards was gained by this maneuver. (See Map D) (36)

In the meantime the 3d Battalion of the 115th Regiment was attempting to gain the high ground south of LA LUZERNE. It had opened its attack at 0800, but the Germans had good observation from high ground to the west as well as the south, and made progress very difficult. At 1500 the 1st and 2d Battalions were added to the 115th attack, the 1st Battalion passing through the 3d and then attacking to the west. This Battalion gained about 300 yards before overwhelming enemy fire brought it to a halt. The 2d Battalion made only a slight advance to the small stream on the outskirts of BOURG d'ENFER and was held up there by heavy small-arms fire. (See Map D) (37)

That night the 175th Infantry took over the whole zone along the BAYEUX highway, relieving the 1st and 3d Battalions of the 116th Infantry. The 1st Battalion in turn relieved the 2d Battalion of the 116th on the MARTINVILLE RIDGE, the latter moving back to the rear for a brief rest and some badly needed replacements. Even the addition of 125 men still left the Battalion at only 60 percent strength. In the meantime, Field Order 6, issued by XIX Corps on 13 July, had directed a change in divisional zones which helped the 29th Division by again shortening its front. The 35th Division moved its boundary over as far as the ST. LO - ISIGNY highway. The 1st and 2d Battalions of the 115th had been relieved by 1000 hours on 14 July and moved east of the highway to the area of LA FOSSARDIERE. The 3d Battalion remained in position south of LA LUZERNE. (See Map E) The weather again was miserable and no large scale

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(36) A-6, p. 77

(37) A-3, p. 74

action was attempted by either the 29th Division or the enemy. (38) The respite was used to good advantage in resting and reorganizing preparatory to a resumption of the attack on 15 July. (39)

#### RENEWAL OF THE ATTACK

The plan of attack on 15 July was changed, due to the difficulties the 175th Infantry had encountered on the BAYEUX highway ridge. The Division Commander now shifted the main divisional effort from left to center, with the 116th Infantry ordered to attack along the MARTINVILLE RIDGE, through LA MADELEINE and on toward the southeast edge of ST. LO. The 175th Infantry was to hold its position and support the attack by fire, while the 115th Infantry again was to attack southwest from LA LUZERNE in an effort to provide protection for the right flank of the 116th's forward advance. (40)

The initial objective of the 116th was MARTINVILLE, a typical grouping of about 10 Norman farmhouses, less than two miles northeast of ST. LO. A narrow dirt road, banked by thick hedgerows, ran down the ridge, through the village. Several sunken trails led off from the village along the ridge and the Germans were using them for communications. Enemy dugout defenses were everywhere, supplemented with self-propelled guns and machine guns mounted on half-tracks. Prisoners stated that they had been ordered to hold their positions under any circumstances and at all costs. (41)

The 116th attacked on 15 July at 0515 in a column of battalions, with the 3d Battalion passing through the 1st Battalion to lead off. It immediately received the undivided attention of German artillery and sustained heavy losses, including seven tanks from a company of medium tanks which, together with a platoon of light tanks, was

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(38) A-6, p. 79  
(39) A-4, p. 95  
(40) A-6, p. 102  
(41) A-6, p. 102

supporting its advance. Counter-battery fire was made particularly difficult by the inability of US observation planes to locate the German guns. Later, in order to decrease the pressure on the 3d Battalion, the 1st Battalion was ordered to attack to the south, but this effort got nowhere. Then the 2d Battalion of the 175th was committed southwest along the BAYEUX road. It advanced about 400 yards when heavy fire from RIDGE 101 brought it to a stop. (See Map E) (42)

By this time, Division Artillery was bringing down fire from 13 battalions on 11 targets. Air support was made available and 12 P-47's carrying 500-pound bombs hit RIDGE 101, the high ground around LA MADELEINE, and enemy 88-mm gun positions generally. (43)

The 116th Infantry regrouped and attacked again at 1930 with the 1st Battalion on the left side of the MARTINVILLE RIDGE and the 2d Battalion on the right side. This time they cut through the enemy positions with unexpected ease and were moving forward when Division decided to button things up for the night. Division did not have an accurate picture of the situation and was reluctant to expose the attacking battalions to enemy strength in the dark. The order to halt and consolidate reached the 1st Battalion in time to stop it after it had progressed 500 yards, but it failed to catch up with the 2d Battalion before that unit was near LA MADELEINE on the ST. LO - BAYEUX highway. The order was handed to the Battalion Commander, Major Sidney V. Bingham Jr., while he was checking his rear elements. The assault companies were well forward at that time, and although they were stringing wire behind them, Major Bingham had no equipment available to tap in on the wire. He started after them on foot, that being the only mode of travel through the hedgerows, but did not catch up until the Battalion was virtually on the

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(42) A-6, p. 103

(43) A-6, p. 104

objective. (44) It then dug in and put a perimeter defense around its position. (See Map E) During the night, the telephone wire was cut and the Germans closed their lines behind the Battalion, apparently without realizing the depth or strength of the penetration. The only means of communication left to the isolated Battalion was the radio of its Artillery Forward Observer. (45)

Meanwhile, the 115th Regiment also had launched an attack at 0515 that morning, jumping off in column of battalions with the 1st Battalion leading and a platoon of tanks working with each assault company. Although receiving plenty of fire, neither the infantry nor tanks could get good fields of fire for themselves. To add to the difficulties, the infantry of the 1st and 3d Battalions became intermingled, not only with each other but also with the tanks. Finally things were straightened out, the 1st Battalion got going, and 400 yards was gained. (See Map E) The 2d Battalion was committed on the left in a flanking maneuver, but it met heavy fire and was unable to advance. (46)

In considering his course of action for 16 July, General Gerhardt decided not to pull back the isolated 2d Battalion of the 116th, but instead to try to reach it as soon as possible by attacking from the north and east. The 115th Regiment began the attack at 0600, but met heavy opposition, as usual, and finally the 1st and 2d Battalions took up defensive positions at 1430 after a net gain of only 300 yards. The rest of the Division was kept on the defensive all day. The 1st Battalion of the 116th in particular had to withstand an intensive two-hour barrage and two determined enemy counter-attacks mounted with tanks and flame-throwers. (47)

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(44) A-6, p. 104

(45) A-4, p. 96

(46) A-6, p. 105

(47) A-6, p. 108

The 2d Battalion of the 116th, though cut off and under some enemy fire, did not have too hard a time. Many German artillery concentrations not only missed the 2d Battalion but fell on positions which were held by the enemy, further indicating German ignorance of the exact size and location of the American pocket in their midst. No counter-attack developed, which was most fortunate since the isolated Battalion was dangerously low on ammunition. Water was available from two wells within the position, but the men had brought food for only two meals and consequently were getting hungry. The worst problem was providing care for the wounded. There were 35 of them and only three aid men present. Blood plasma was dropped from liaison planes, but several men died from lack of expert medical attention. Communication to Division was maintained by the lone radio, and excellent artillery support was furnished through this means. (48)

#### REACHING THE ISOLATED BATTALION

New orders were issued for attack on 17 July. The 115th Infantry was directed to renew its drive for the high ground north of LA MADELEINE while the 116th was to link up with its isolated Battalion and the 175th was to renew its efforts along the BAYEUX highway. (49)

The 116th Regiment had received some replacements during the night, but the 3d Battalion, which was to make the assault while the 1st Battalion continued to hold, still had only 420 combat effectives. The 3d Battalion was commanded by Major Thomas D. Howie. It made its attack in column of companies at 0430, without artillery support and under orders to hold its own rifle fire. With the advantage of an early morning fog, and utilizing grenades, bayonets and rapid movement, the 3d Battalion managed to slip between two enemy companies and reached the 2d Battalion

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(48) A-6, p. 109

(49) A-4, p. 97

at 0600 hours. (See Map F) The position of the latter Battalion still had not been definitely located by the enemy. (50)

The next phase of the plan was for the 2d Battalion to precede the 3d Battalion straight on in to ST. LO, but the 2d Battalion was obviously too weak to do so. The Regimental Commander then ordered the 3d Battalion to go on alone while the 2d Battalion continued to hold its defensive position and conserve its diminished ammunition supply. Immediately after ordering the advance, however, Major Howie was killed by enemy mortar fire falling on the Battalion Command Post. The whole Battalion area was now being covered by enemy mortar and artillery fire, so the advance was postponed and a perimeter defense was formed adjoining the 2d Battalion. The fire kept up all day and at 1800 the enemy counter-attacked, making a penetration into the position of the two Battalions. Artillery was requested and furnished to good effect, and since it was still daylight, a request was also made at 2000 hours for an air strike. (51)

So successful was the handling of the close air support at this critical moment that it later became SOP for the Division. The 506th Fighter Bomber Squadron was given the assignment and it responded with admirable speed. The final briefing was given by the Division Air Support Officer while the planes were in the air. The men in the two isolated Battalions were meanwhile instructed to mark their lines with red panels and undershirts. The first planes came over at 2045 and disintegrated the enemy force in short order. (52)

Temporarily secure again, the two Battalions were badly in need of ammunition and medical aid. A German ammunition dump was discovered nearby, however, and enough

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(50) A-6, p. 109

(51) A-6, p. 110

(52) A-4, p. 98

mines were taken from it to mine both the BAYEUX highway and the north-south road through LA MADELEINE. Medical assistance also was obtained providentially with the capture of an Austrian doctor. Several lives were saved through his efforts. (53)

Throughout the day, and in spite of a heavy four-hour artillery barrage, the 1st Battalion of the 116th Regiment made strenuous efforts to reach the two isolated Battalions with supplies and to evacuate the wounded. A 60-man task force sent out in the morning of 17 July seized an outpost position on the eastern edge of MARTINVILLE and organized it for all-around defense. (54) An attempt to send through some half-tracks loaded with supplies had to be given up, however, because the trails were too badly clogged with debris and abandoned vehicles for them to get through. (55)

The Commander of the 116th Regiment then sent to the isolated Battalions, under cover of darkness, a carrying party consisting of 20 volunteers from the cannon company and 20 volunteers from the antitank company. Working from hedgerow to hedgerow, all personnel got through, except the ranking officer who was killed when the outposts of the 2d Battalion failed to recognize him. The Regimental Headquarters had tried to inform the 2d Battalion that the carrying party was on the way, but the 2d Battalion's lone radio had been shut down to conserve batteries. (56)

Company A of the 1st Battalion was now given the mission of opening and maintaining a 1200-yard supply corridor from the MARTINVILLE RIDGE to the isolated Battalions. On 17 July this Company had no officers and only 23 men, and only six of these knew each other. That night the Company was given 85 replacements, 10 of which became casualties on their way into the field held by Company A.

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(53) A-6, p. 111  
(54) A-6, p. 111  
(55) A-6, p. 112  
(56) A-4, p. 99

Four new officers were also furnished, and after a rapid reorganization the Company moved out early on the morning of 18 July. A novel formation was used with two columns going along parallel hedgerows, one field apart. Visual contact was maintained at all times and each column left two men in every field as it passed through, in order to hold the corridor open. In spite of mortar fire and occasional snipers, the relief party reached the two Battalions without losses. The men left over were sent back to strengthen the thin protection for the corridor. There was no attack on the corridor, however, and throughout the day Division was able to send supplies forward and evacuate the wounded. (57)

The 175th Regiment also fought bitterly on 17 July, trying to close the gap to the isolated Battalions. It used its 1st and 2d Battalions with the 29th Reconnaissance Troop on the flanks. Lieutenant Colonel William T. Terry, Commanding Officer of the 1st Battalion, was killed early in the attack. By early afternoon the three infantry companies of the 2d Battalion had a total effective strength of less than 200 men with only four officers. The 3d Battalion was now released from Division reserve to make an attack to the southwest. No major gain was possible, and the Regiment finally was ordered to dig in for the night and continue in the morning. (See Map F) (58)

The 115th Regiment made good progress with its attack on 17 July, but success came too late in the day to help the situation at LA MADELEINE. After frontal attack on LE CAUCHAIS got nowhere, the 2d Battalion of the 115th was moved over into the 116th Regimental area on the MARTINVILLE RIDGE. There it wheeled and attacked across a draw toward LA PLANCHE, flanking the Germans defending LE CAUCHAIS while the 1st and 3d Battalions renewed the frontal attack. (See Map F) Shortly after midnight the 2d Battalion of the

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(57) A-6, p. 114

(58) A-6, p. 112

115th was behind the strong German position at LE CAUCHAIS and, meeting only light resistance, it reached the area of LA PLANCHE at 0230. Here it dug in for the night. (59)

#### THE TASK FORCE TAKES ST. LO

While the 29th Division was making substantial progress on 17 July, the 35th Division on its right flank was also making sizeable gains. On the morning of the 18th, the 35th Division reported that the enemy had pulled out along its entire sector, leaving much materiel. The XIX Corps Commander now told General Gerhardt to take ST. LO and secure it. (60)

The final Division attack was to be made by Task Force C, organized two days earlier under the command of Brigadier General Norman D. Cota, the Assistant Divisional Commander. It was especially designed for speed and consisted of the 29th Cavalry Reconnaissance Troop (minus one platoon), a platoon of tanks, a platoon from Cannon Company of the 175th, a platoon from Antitank Company of the 175th, a platoon from the 121st Engineer Battalion, the Reconnaissance Platoon of the 821st Tank Destroyer Battalion, Company B of the 803d Tank Destroyer Battalion, and two artillery observer parties. (61)

While Task Force C stood by, ready to roll, the renewed attack of the 115th Regiment on 18 July was making real progress. (See Map F) The 2d Battalion was moving southwest from LA PLANCHE and the 3d Battalion was moving southwest from MARTINVILLE. But even more important was the advance of the 1st Battalion, which had begun its attack early in the morning with its left flank along the ST. LO - ISIGNY highway. By 1215 it had reached the high ground near ST.-GEORGES-MONTCOCQ on the northern outskirts of ST. LO, and during the early afternoon it sent patrols into the town. (62)

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(59) A-4, p. 99

(60) A-6, p. 115

(61) A-4, p. 100

(62) A-3, pp. 77-79

General Gerhardt now alerted Task Force C and at 1500 it set sail from its assembly area near COUVAINS down the ST. LO - ISIGNY highway. (See Map F) This route was selected because the 1st Battalion of the 115th was the furthest advanced infantry that the Task Force could pick up to support its efforts. When contacted by the Task Force, however, Major Glover S. Johns Jr., Commanding Officer of the 1st Battalion, reported that he was under strong machine gun fire from about 60 Germans in an orchard west of ST.-GEORGES-MONTCOCQ. He was ordered to contain the enemy with one platoon and pull out with the rest of his Battalion to join the Task Force at the big curve in the ST. LO - ISIGNY highway where it dropped down to the plain. (63)

Overcoming a partial road block, the Task Force arrived at the rendezvous simultaneously with the 1st Battalion. As the augmented Task Force continued forward, an antitank gun opened up on it but was soon silenced by the 37-mm guns of the Reconnaissance Troop. Harassing fire from enemy mortar and artillery was encountered and the bridge at MOULIN BEROT was crossed under heavy artillery fire coming in bursts of 10 or 12 shells at intervals of two to four minutes. The entry into town at 1800 was met with scattered rifle fire. (64)

The initial objective was a square on the edge of town, near the cemetery, where bomb damage had been relatively light. This square was quickly cleared and occupied as a base for operations within the town. The Reconnaissance Troop, which was leading the way into the town, found the streets too full of rubble to move its vehicles, so the men dismounted and deployed as infantry to seize three key road junctions within the town and organize them as strong points. (65)

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(63) A-6, p. 117

(64) A-6, p. 117

(65) A-6, p. 117

The infantry were numbered off in groups of four and five as they entered ST. LO and were sent off with a tank or tank destroyer to positions commanding other key points throughout the town. There were 17 such key points, including bridges, and once they were outposted, the strong points initially set up by the Reconnaissance Troop were reinforced to include an armored car, two tanks, two tank destroyers and an antitank gun. (66)

Apparently the Germans were surprised by the speed and boldness of the Task Force advance, and little organized resistance was encountered in the town. Enemy artillery fire was heavy, however, and a number of house-to-house battles occurred during the mopping up operations. General Cota himself was wounded by shell fragments. (67) By 1900, however, the city was firmly secured. (68)

The final victory was reported by General Gerhardt to Major General Charles H. Corlett, XIX Corps Commander, in the following proud and formal announcement:

"I have the honor to announce to the Corps Commander that Task Force C of the 29th Division has secured the city of ST. LO after 43 days of continual combat from the beaches to ST. LO." (69)

Although the original First Army objectives were achieved only in the ST. LO area, the capture of ST. LO by the 29th Division stamped the seal of success on the NORMANDY campaign and set the stage for the smashing breakthrough which was to carry the Allied armies all the way to the German border. The cost to the 29th Division during the XIX Corps part of the offensive, from 7 July to 22 July, was 3,706 casualties. (70) From D-Day through ST. LO, the Division had more than 7,000 casualties, including the Assistant Divisional Commander, two Regimental Commanders,

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(66) A-6, p. 117

(67) A-4, p. 101

(68) A-6, p. 117

(69) A-4, p. 102

(70) A-6, p. 126

six infantry Battalion Commanders and two field artillery Battalion Commanders. The replacement of company commanders was a constantly recurring problem; above company level, and excepting the Division Commander, Major Bingham was the only infantry officer in the same command he held on D-Day. (71)

#### ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

##### 1. THE TERRAIN

Hedgerow fighting was something the Americans were totally inexperienced in and largely unprepared for. The hedgerows did not offer a special terrain feature for which a major effort could be made. All were of equal importance and all were difficult. Progress had to be made in those areas and directions in which it could be made. Deep and independent penetrations, such as made by the 2d and 3d Battalions of the 116th and then by the 2d and 1st Battalions of the 115th, were not only relatively safe when accomplished by a sufficiently large unit but were the most effective means of outflanking the strong German defenses. Experience showed that communication corridors could be opened and maintained for the supply of these deep penetrations. By means of fluid movement and infiltration, the hedgerows could be made to work for the attackers instead of against them. Lightly manned, the flanking hedgerows protected penetrations and communication corridors. They would have been vulnerable to a major German counter-attack, but the Germans did not have the strength to hold their regular front against strong pressure and also to counter-attack in force against the long impromptu fronts which the penetrations created. The method used by Company A, 1st Battalion, 116th, in establishing and maintaining its corridor to the two isolated Battalions of the 116th is an outstanding example of how a weak link in the hedgerow defensive system could be penetrated in great depth by two columns in visual contact, providing mutual defense from opposite hedgerows.

## 2. USE OF NIGHT ATTACK

When combined with surprise, night attack affords great advantages in reducing the heavy casualties which would otherwise occur in daylight attacks over open terrain. It is seldom employed, however, because of the many disadvantages, such as less effectively aimed fire, increased hand-to-hand combat, difficulty of control, and difficulty in maintaining direction of movement. In hedgerow terrain, however, the disadvantages were largely nullified or at least no greater than for daylight attack. The hedgerows already had made control difficult, but at least the hedgerows themselves were limiting factors that retained control for the smaller units in each hedgerow compartment. Also the hedgerows provided definite and recognizable patterns for maintaining the desired direction of attack when properly oriented from aerial photos. The situation was such, too, that it seemed quite desirable to sacrifice the American fire power, which was none too effective against the well protected and camouflaged German positions, in order to avoid the deadly fire from the German automatic weapons. Hand-to-hand combat was no more prevalent at night than in daytime attacks, and superiority in numbers and the cover of darkness gave the Americans a psychological as well as a physical advantage at night. The first American use of night attack during this action was on 15 July, when the success of the 1st and 2d Battalions of the 116th far exceeded the expectations of higher headquarters. Again when the 3d Battalion of the 116th linked up with the isolated 1st Battalion, surprise, darkness, and the early morning fog made their advance a fast and fairly simple matter. On the night of the 17th, a large carrying party got through to the isolated Battalions without any casualties being inflicted by the enemy, and the 2d Battalion of the 115th made substantial gains that same night without much difficulty. Up to that point, those were the

only sizable gains the Division had made during the action. Night attack obviously had special advantages in the hedgerows.

### 3. COMMUNICATIONS

The compartmentation of the hedgerow terrain inevitably resulted in a decentralization of the fighting effort. The story of this action is largely a story of individual battalion struggles. To offset the decentralization, the Regiment and Division Headquarters had all the greater need for rapid and reliable communication - in order to know what was going on, in order to coordinate the independent efforts, and in order to influence the tide of battle. Unfortunately, communications were sometimes neither fast nor reliable. Because of the slow progress, because the terrain was so difficult and dangerous for vehicles, and because most of the radio facilities were vehicular, there was a great tendency to ignore radio communication in favor of wire communication. That, however, was vulnerable to enemy artillery and to our own tanks the few times they were used. Also, when the times of fast movement did arrive, the wire did not keep up with the advance. Thus the higher headquarters were slow to learn both the extent of the progress and the difficulties being encountered up front. The action on the night of 15 July is an outstanding example of the deficiency in communication. When the 1st and 2d Battalions finally began to make headway, Division Headquarters was unaware of the amount of progress and the type of opposition being encountered. Consequently, it ordered both Battalions to hold up at a time when it might have been more opportune to push ahead with all the forces available. Furthermore, due to ineffective communication, one Battalion did not get the order in time to halt and instead found itself cut off, without adequate food or ammunition. It possibly could have fought its way back to the rest of the Division, but the fact that it was not wiped out by the enemy seems due more to providence than any other factor. Again, if that

Battalion had been adequately provided with radio means of communication, it could have been informed that the carrying party was coming through, and the tragic error of shooting the leader of the carrying party would not have occurred.

#### 4. THE EMPLOYMENT OF ARTILLERY

The Division Artillery was of great assistance in spite of the restrictions on firing. It caused considerable casualties and also had a good psychological effect in softening up the enemy. There was, however, a serious shortcoming: it was woefully ineffective against the German artillery itself. There is not one single instance during the entire action described of US artillery accomplishing any effective counter-fire against German artillery, although observation planes were used whenever possible. Almost every daylight attack made by the Division from 13 July until 18 July came under such heavy and accurate enemy artillery that it could make scarcely any progress and had to endure heavy casualties. In their counter-attacks on 16 July and 17 July, the Germans poured on heavy artillery fire for hours at a time, without any apparent interference from the Americans. Part of the problem, at least, appears to be a need for more thorough training of observers to recognize enemy artillery locations, and faster and more accurate means of determining locations through computation. Speed is particularly important in order to get into action before the enemy artillery has changed to new positions.

#### 5. THE EMPLOYMENT OF TANK SUPPORT

The elaborate technique which the Division had devised for using tanks in hedgerow warfare, and which had been rehearsed prior to the final attack on ST. LO, failed to provide any worthwhile results before the town was actually entered. Tanks were used in conjunction with infantry attacks on two occasions during the period of this action, each time without any appreciable result other than a loss of tanks and confusion between infantry and tanks while

enemy fire poured in on both. After these two unsuccessful attempts, the Division seems to have given up on trying to use the tanks and infantry together. Obviously, the hurried rehearsals could not compensate for the prior deficiency in training. Tanks and infantry were uncertain of each other and failed to provide mutual protection. The Division technique was sound, and if the tanks and infantry had been able to employ it properly, it should have made the attack much easier. Tanks were badly needed by the infantry for the mobile machine gun and artillery fire they afforded in attack upon individual hedgerows, just as the tanks needed infantry protection against the German tank hunters and roving antitank weapons.

#### 6. THE EMPLOYMENT OF AIR SUPPORT

The two isolated Battalions of the 116th Regiment were in dire straits during the strong German counter-attacks on 17 July. The call for artillery support was automatic and the assistance it brought was anticipated. The call for air support, however, was a desperation measure, and since there was scarcely an hour of daylight remaining, there was little expectation of results. The air force proved that it was capable of fast action, however, and common-sense improvisations worked well, both in the briefing of the air strike and in the marking of the American positions. This was one of the first uses by the invading American army of close air support in defense, and it was a spur-of-the-moment measure that had not even been pre-planned let alone pre-tested. It worked spectacularly, not only easing the pressure against the isolated Battalions but also inflicting great damage on the Germans. This instance proved that air support could be applied close to ground troops and that it was valuable on defense as well as offense.

#### 7. ENEMY DEFENSIVE MEASURES

The hedgerows could not have been more useful defensive fortifications if they had been made to order. But with all their skill in using the terrain and their automatic weapons,

the Germans had one serious weakness. They not only permitted infiltrations but did not keep track of them when made. They knew that some American unit had gone through their lines on the night of 15 July, but they did not know how large it was or exactly where it had gone. If they had located it on the 16th, they could have wiped it out. It would have been a damaging blow to the Americans, even more important psychologically than physically. They also permitted the 3d Battalion of the 116th to slip between companies without realizing the size of the unit or offering serious opposition. It was only when the 3d Battalion had linked up with 2d Battalion that the size of the troop concentration and its location along a main highway forced the Germans to realize the situation. By then, however, it was too late for even the strongest of counter-attacks to do any good. The Germans still failed to take proper precautions against infiltration, for that night the carrying party got through them without any difficulty, and again, during daylight on the 18th, a company-manned corridor was pushed all the way through the German lines without any kind of a fire fight against German defenses or patrols.

#### LESSONS

1. Tactics must be adapted to make any possible use of terrain and to counter the enemy's use of terrain.
2. Night attacks have special application in hedgerows and similar terrain where the enemy has special advantages and where the terrain can be used to maintain control and direction of movement.
3. Effective and alternate means of communication must be maintained at all times, and used to keep higher, lower and adjacent headquarters informed of all developments.
4. Counter-battery fire is a major mission for artillery and must be done with speed and accuracy to be effective.

5. Tanks and infantry must be given intensive training together in order to obtain teamwork and proper results in battle.

6. The air force can provide rapid, close and effective support, and should be used in defense as well as offense.

7. Effective defense must be maintained against infiltrations and ground between defense areas must be carefully patrolled if it cannot be observed.