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THE OPERATIONS OF THE U. S. FIRST ARMY IN THE
ST. LO BREAKTHROUGH, 25 JULY - 1 AUGUST 1944
(NORTHERN FRANCE CAMPAIGN)

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THE OPERATIONS OF THE U. S. FIRST ARMY IN THE
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INTRODUCTION

This monograph covers the operations of the U. S. First Army in the St. Lo breakthrough, 25 July - 1 August 1944, during the Northern France Campaign.

In order to orient the reader, it will be necessary to go back to the landing in Normandy on 6 June. As a result of their D-day operations, the Allies had gained a foothold on the continent of Europe. They had achieved surprise; the troops had fought magnificiently, and their losses had been much lower than had ever seemed possible. The Atlantic Wall had been breached along the whole Neptune* frontage, and all assaulting divisions were ashore. In spite of the bad weather, the sea passage across the channel had been successfully accomplished; and following this, the Allied naval forces had given valuable support by fire from warships and lesser crafts. The Allied air forces had laid the foundation of success by winning the air battle before the invasion was launched and by applying their whole collective striking power, with magnificient results, to assist the landings. (1)

Even with all the strong fortifications ~~and~~ the enemy's supposedly impregnable defense, and his intentions to defeat the invaders on the beaches, it was found that Normandy was not nearly as tough as had been expected. The methods used to overcome the defenses proved successful.

Although it might seem that the Allies had an easy time in securing these initial gains, there were a few objectives which proved to be tough, such as Omaha beach, which was far from secure. During the initial periods, they hung on only by the never quitting spirit of the infantry and the continuous assistance of supporting naval forces.

By dark on D-day, five American divisions had landed, the 1st, 4th, and 29th Infantry and the 82nd and 101st Airborne, with tanks, artillery,

(1) A-3, p. 60

* SH. IT. HAD. BEEN. I. HANDED. IN. A. C. 1944

and other reinforcements. Advanced headquarters of the V Corps, commanded by Major General Leonard T. Gerow, and the VII Corps, commanded by Major General J. Lawton Collins, had also landed. Additional divisions were beginning to land a steady stream, augmenting those of the first wave which had achieved such brilliant success.

Forty-eight hours after the landing it was evident that the beachhead was secure and that one of the most important steps of the campaign towards the destruction of the German Army had been taken. The crust of the coastal defenses had been pierced, and the beachhead was being expanded to link up in one continuous area. Simultaneously, spearheads were being thrust inland to deepen and solidify the beachhead; the flow of supplies and reinforcements continued.

By the 9th of June, American forces secured control of St. Mere ~~E~~lise and were planted astride one of the two main highways leading to Cherbourg. On the next day, Isigny fell, and columns from both American sectors converged on Carentan. The German boast that an invading army could not spend nine hours on the shores had been thrown back on the desperate defenders.

The second phase of the invasion had two objectives: First, the capture of the port of Cherbourg, and second, the buildup of sufficient forces and material to enable the forces to break out from the beachhead and strike towards Germany. (2)

During the early part of this phase the air assault played an important part. Allied planes kept up their continuous hammering of the battle area, which was bounded by rivers for protection on the flanks. No time was lost in the isolation of this area. Supplementing these assaults was the marvelous work of the French underground, which launched a concentrated campaign of sabotage through the area.

(2) A-6, p. 34

For its full success Allied forces had to depend on swift penetration. It became evident that harbors had to be taken to relieve the unsatisfactory condition of landing reinforcements and supplies over the improvised landing facilities at the beaches.

The basic mission of the Germans at this point was to prevent exploitation and to smash the invaders by counterattack. Although there were many German divisions in France at this time, the greater part of these units stood along the channel coast with the mission of repelling an invasion, the heaviest of these concentrations being in the area of Calais. The German high command favored a holding of the beachhead with a counterattack to be made after it was determined where the main Allied invasion was to strike.

By 12 June the Allies held a continuous strip of coastline 60 miles long and varying in depth up to 18 miles. Pressure was exerted in the direction of St. Lo and Caen, and at the same time an effort was being made to cut the Cherbourg peninsula. The city of Cherbourg was in Allied hands by 27 June, and there remained only small pockets of resistance to be mopped up. Other Allied forces had by 1 July deepened the beachhead by advances up to 20 miles in the area between Caen and St. Lo against increasingly stubborn resistance in the aggressively defended hedgerows of the Cotentin peninsula. (3)

The capture of Cherbourg was an important event. The Allies now had a major port from which they could vastly increase the flow and volume of supplies into the invasion area. This situation was not immediately relieved, however, as the port demolitions at Cherbourg had been extensive and effective. (4)

On 3 July the Americans began pressing a determining advance through the flooded country around La Haye. Two days later advance

(3) A-6, p. 34; (4) A-9, p. 34

forces succeeded in penetrating the town but were driven out again. A bitter battle raged until 9 July before possession of La Haye was finally secured. Meanwhile, however, action had flared at other points. One spearhead struck through St. Jean de Daye and towards St. Lo from the north. Between St. Jean and La Haye, other columns drove south towards Periers. The whole Nazi left flank was slowly pushed back to a line just north of Lessay, Periers and St. Lo. By mid-July the first two of these points were under increasing pressure, and an arc was gradually being drawn around St. Lo from the north around to the southwest.

On 18 July, St. Lo fell. This was one of the decisive stages of the battle of Normandy, as the loss of St. Lo deprived the enemy of a main road center. Continuous pressure by the Allies had ground the German defenses until they were almost at the breaking point. This last reverse had weakened the enemy's chances for maneuver from the east to meet the forthcoming drive and had forced him to guard against a further attack up the right bank of the Vire River. The capture of St. Lo and the high ground around it gave us an anchor for the left flank of the breakthrough to come. (5)

THE ENEMY MISSION (MAP "A")

The enemy's plan had been to hold the Normandy beachhead with his Seventh Army. He had lost the contest for the beaches, and many miles of rich Normandy countryside lay between those beaches and the line now held by him on 18 July. But his new position was not without advantage. On the beaches the enemy's Seventh Army was stretched a taunt 80 miles from Lessay to Caen, with both flanks secured by the sea. If it could be stabilized, it would be the most economical the Nazi high command could hope to find in the west. It was decided to hold in place, if

(5) A-1, p. 123

possible, until it was certain that invasions would not occur at other points. Then future strategy would be determined by the speed with which strength could be built up in a race against increase of Allied offensive power. Forces from the ~~Army~~^{SEVENTH ARMY}'s First, Nineteenth, and Fifteenth Armies were to be concentrated in an effort to destroy the invaders. (6)

THE ALLIED MISSION ✓

The Allied mission in Normandy had been to drive back the enemy, destroying him if possible, and in any case to secure maneuvering space for open warfare. Two possibilities for the realization of this mission now became evident, the first being a break through the enemy lines at the east end of the salient in the vicinity of Caen, using the British Second Army in that area to move south in the direction of Falaise, then swing west to pin the enemy against the Atlantic beaches and either annihilate him or cause him to withdraw from the western sector. The second method was a breakthrough at the west end of the line by the First U. S. Army along the coast of the Cotentin peninsula. If successful, this would give the Allies an entrance to the Brittany peninsula. This was a desirable goal because on this peninsula were many of the important French ports which could be used at this time to expedite the movement of reinforcements and supplies. However, a breakthrough here would not cut off the German main forces; it would only cause him to retire to be fought again.

Behind the Allied lines, which extended from just north of Lessay to Periers, St. Lo, and Caen, and then north to the channel, poured reinforcements and supplies until the area bulged with power. Accompanying this buildup of strength and supplies, the Allies had gained a tactical posture favorable to the commitment of their full weight

(6) A-2, p. 13

against the enemy lines. It was felt that by committing in mass at this time not only would the Allied mission in Normandy be realized, but in the long run the cost of final victory would be less.

The enemy information at this time led to the conviction that a hard blow should be struck in the left of the sector, followed by the real blow in the area west of St. Lo.

The plan called for the British Second Army to make a thrust in the vicinity of Caen, making the enemy believe the British aim was to drive across the Orne River towards the south and southwest, exploiting in the direction of the Sienne basin and Paris. It was hoped this would cause the enemy to withdraw more of his armor westward across the Orne to meet the expected thrust. On the following day, the American First Army was to launch a major attack across the Periers - St. Lo Road at a point west of St. Lo. Once a breakthrough was achieved, it was to swing its spearhead westward to Coutances in order to isolate the enemy between St. Lo and the coast.

The attack was to be preceded by the heaviest and most concentrated air assault ever employed to support ground operations. (7)

TERRAIN ANALYSIS ✓

This area had many narrow roads, hedgerows, and rugged hills. The principal ridge line ran east and west from St. Lo to Coutances, with drainage to the north and west.

The principal rivers are the Vire in the east, the Sienne and the See in the south and east, and the Taute in the north.

There is high ground east and west near Marigny and south of St. Lo near St. Thomas de St. Lo.

The principal road net in the east is from St. Lo to Vire; in the north, from Lessay to St. Lo; and in the west, from Lessay, via Coutances

and Granville to Avranches, and numerous other roads running in all directions, which ~~was~~^{we} favorable for a large scale operation.

Some of the critical terrain features were:

1. Hill 101 south of St. Lo.
2. The Vire River.
3. The high ground near Marigny.
4. Villedieu - controls central road net.
5. Coutances - key coastal communications center.
6. Granville - coastal strong point.
7. Avranches - key to the Brittany peninsula.

FIRST U. S. ARMY PLAN OF ATTACK

The attack which the British had made to the east had met with fierce opposition. It had been halted after a gain of about a mile, but it served as a powerful holding attack which prevented the Germans from shifting a large force to meet the American strike the following day in the west, a tactic of desperate need to the enemy in view of his thinness and lack of depth facing the First Army.

This plan was known as "Cobra." It called for the main attack to be made by the VII Corps in the center; and the VIII Corps on the right, the V Corps on the left, and the XIX Corps in the left center were to maintain continuous pressure in their sectors. (8)

Phase One called for a heavy aerial bombardment and artillery preparations on the main enemy position in an area along the Periers - St. Lo Road west of St. Lo. This was to be followed up by the VII Corps attacking on a three-division front which was to fan out on a general line, with Marigny - St. Gilles as the primary objectives. On the left of the flank, secondary objectives were specified to include the more southernly crossings of the Vire River. (9)

(8) A-4, p. 96; (9) A-4, p. 96

In Phase Two, three more divisions, two armored and one motorized, were to pass through the three front line divisions. One armored column, passing through Marigny, was to move south as far as Cerisy-La-Salle, then turn west and seize the high ground to the west of, and including, Coutances. The second armored column was to pass through St. Gilles, turn southwest at Le Mesnil-Herman, pass through Hambye, seize the high ground on the eastern bank of the Sienne River northwest of Gavray, and capture the town of Brehal, thus cutting off the enemy in the area Periers - Lessay and preventing any enemy reinforcements from moving to the north. Each armored column was to ~~contain~~^{have attached} some parts of the motorized division. The bulk of the motorized division was to follow the second column, turn southwest at Canisy, and take positions near Notre-Dame-de-Cenilly, prepared to move either southwest, south, or southeast to support the mobile armor. (10)

Phase Three called for continuous pressure on the enemy by the VIII, V, and XIX Corps, keeping in contact with him and exploiting any advantage that might be gained by his disorganized withdrawal, with VIII Corps at the same time taking up the offensive and advancing along the coast on our right flank. (11)

A detailed air-ground plan was drawn up by the First Army in conjunction with the Ninth Tactical Air Command. Priority^{ies} of targets were established and further plans were developed for the isolation of the battlefield.

1. General Plan

- a. Twenty minutes (H-80 to H-60) of bombardment by 350 fighter bombers on a narrow strip along the Periers - St. Lo Road.
- b. One hour (H-60 to H-hour) of bombardment by

(10, 11) A-4, p. 97

1575 heavy bombers on an area 6000 yards wide and 2500 yards deep on the front of VII Corps.

- c. Twenty minutes (H-hour to H/20) of bombardment by 350 fighter bombers on the original narrow strip.
 - d. Forty-five minutes (H/30 to H/75) of bombardment by 396 medium bombers on the southern half of the main bombing area.
 - e. Bombardment of the bridges along the Vire and Sienne Rivers and their tributaries.
 - f. After H/6 hours, medium bombers would be available on turn-around missions.
2. Reconnaissance - Tactical reconnaissance was carried out continuously over the Army and Corps zone of action. (12)

PLAN OF THE VII CORPS

The VII Corps was to attack with three divisions abreast, the 9th, 4th, and 30th, in that order from west to east. The 30th Division was to secure crossings of the Vire River as far south as Tessy and to protect the left flank of the penetration. The 4th Division was to move south on a narrow front and protect the southern end of the penetration. All divisions were to mop up the routes within their zone of action as soon as the initial objectives had been taken to allow for the rapid movement of the 1st Infantry, 2nd and 3rd Armored Divisions down these roads to exploit the breakthrough, contact being maintained from right to left. (13)

The 2nd Armored Division, with the 22nd RCT (motorized) of the 4th Infantry Division attached, was to move through the gap on two

(12) A-4, p. 99; (13) A-8

routes. The division (less one combat command) was to move rapidly through the gap to seize initially the line Le Mesnil-Herman - St. Samson-de-Bon-Fosse - Hill 183 in order to cover the movement of the 1st Infantry Division and the 3rd Armored Division through the Marigny - St. Gilles gap. One combat command of the 2nd Armored Division was to move via the Pont Hebert - St. Gilles - Canisy Road prepared to seize objectives between Cerences and St. Denis-le-Gast, to move on Coutances to reinforce the 3rd Armored Division or to move to the southeast to reinforce the 2nd Armored Division.

The 3rd Armored Division, less Combat Command B, with one battalion combat team of the 1st Infantry Division attached, was to drive through the gap cleared by the 4th Infantry Division, move rapidly to the southwest to secure the southern exits of Coutances and secure the south flank of the 1st Division between Hyenville and Cerisy-La-Salle.

The 1st Infantry Division, less one battalion combat team and with Combat Command B of the 3rd Armored Division attached, was to drive through the gap created by the 9th Infantry Division, turn to the southwest, and block the enemy in front of the VIII Corps between Coutances and Fontenay. (14)

THE ATTACK OF THE FIRST ARMY (MAPS "B" AND "C")

The attack awaited only clear weather for air operations. It was originally set prior to the 25th of July. On 24 July planes actually took to the air, but bad weather and low ceiling resulted in the canceling of the assault. The morning of the 25th, however, dawned clear and the operation was ordered. The front line troops were withdrawn 1200 yards to the north of the target area, and at 0940 hours bombers began to strike the area west of St. Lo on the Perriers - St. Lo Road with everything they possessed. The area 5 miles long and 1 mile wide was

(14) A-3 and A-4, p. 100

blasted by 1,495 heavy bombers of the Eighth Air Force, and 388 aircraft of AEF dropped over 4,700 tons of bombs. At the same time fighter bombers with bombs and rocket projectiles attacked behind the German lines. The total of 4,979 sorties were flown by the AEF on this day. Of all the planes employed in these sorties, our losses were comparatively low. Only 6 heavy bombers, 4 light bombers, and 19 fighters were lost. These were chiefly the victims of flak. Although the German air force was more active than it had been in the last few weeks, it did not succeed in penetrating the Allied fighter screen to reach the bombers.

The massive air strike which preceded the attack, although one of the heaviest ever flown, did not produce as many casualties as had been expected, but it did cause great confusion. Communications broke down and supply lines to the rear had been cut off. The enemy was stunned, but the effect was only temporary; and when the ground attack was launched, it ran into stubborn opposition. However, the narrowed time lapse between the air strike and ground attack made possible a success of great proportions when compared to prior operations. This was chiefly due to the experiences achieved in the last few months, and great strides forward had been made in this respect. The need for quick ground follow-up at the conclusion of the bombing, in order to avoid cratering in areas we expected to use for our advances and to attack targets far to the rear and flanks of the bombardment area, had been learned from previous operations. However, Allied air technique over St. Lo was far from perfect; and bombs did fall short, causing casualties to the assaulting regiments and some artillery and tank battalion positions. The lead battalions of the 47th Infantry Regiment of the 9th Infantry Division and the 120th Infantry Regiment of the 30th Infantry

Division suffered severe casualties and about an hour and a half was lost in bringing up rear battalions to reinforce these regiments. Among those who lost their lives during this bombardment was Lieut. Gen. Lesley J. McNair, who was watching the operation from a foxhole in the front line. His death was a heavy blow to the United States Army. (15)

At the commencement of the ground battle, the VII Corps in the sector west of St. Lo had under its command the 2nd and 3rd Armored Divisions and the 4th, 9th, 1st, and 30th Infantry Divisions, while the VIII Corps in the Periers - Lessay sector had the 8th, 79th, 83rd, and 90th Infantry Divisions with the 4th Armored Division. The V Corps had the 2nd and 5th Infantry Divisions, and the XIX Corps had the 29th and 35th Infantry Divisions. The battle began with the advance of the VII Corps at midday on 25 July; the 9th Infantry Division on the right, the 4th Infantry Division in the center, and the 30th Infantry Division on the left, with the 1st Infantry Division, the 2nd and 3rd Armored Divisions in the rear. At the same time the VIII, XIX, and V Corps maintained their pressure along the remainder of the front. (16)

The advance met with stubborn resistance and intense artillery fire from positions not neutralized by the air bombing on the left flank; on the right flank German parachute units resisted fiercely. The Germans gave ground in front of the 4th and 9th Infantry Divisions after his light and medium artillery had been silenced. Prisoners of war stated that the carpet bombing was devastating. Weapons not destroyed had to be dug out and cleaned before they could be fired. Communication had been badly damaged. After penetration of the front lines, resistance decreased and by the end of the day the VII Corps had advanced between a mile and a half and two miles. The enemy position

(15) A-4, p. 99; A-7, p. 121 (16) A-4, p. 99; A-10

had definitely been broken, but at the moment this seemed to give little promise of an early decision. The enemy still resisted fiercely as night closed in. (17)

The next day, 26 July, however, the picture changed. While resistance to the west of the penetration still continued heavy, resistance to the south became light and penetrations were deep. The leading battalion of the 4th Infantry Division advanced more than 8000 yards south to La Conviniere. Two armored columns supported by an infantry division drove through the German main lines and secondary defenses in parallel thrusts. The 1st Infantry Division passed Combat Command B of the 3rd Armored Division through the gap, ^{IS. P. COB?} reaching positions west and southwest of Marigny. The 1st Infantry Division with the 745th Tank Battalion attached passed through the 9th Infantry Division that morning also, capturing Marigny in the afternoon. The column on the left of the penetration (2nd Armored Division) passed through the 30th Infantry Division, captured St. Gilles, and was south as far as Canisy by night. The 30th Infantry Division advanced as far as the Canisy - St. Lo railway. A breach had been torn in the German line and the narrow opening that had been made opened the way for the Allies to break out of Normandy and also to turn the left flank of the Germans. (18)

At the same time the V and VIII Corps attacked. The V Corps, with the 2nd and 5th Infantry Divisions, pushed their lines out between 2000 and 3000 yards on a line south to St. Pierre-de-Cenilly and up to the Rouxville and Vidouville Road. However, on the western flank in the sector of the VIII Corps the attack of the 83rd Infantry Division met with stiff resistance, including several small counterattacks; the 8th Infantry Division advanced between 500 and 1000 yards against light small arms fire; and the 90th Infantry Division, in the face of sporadic

(17) A-4, p. 99; (18) A-5

small arms fire and mortar fire, secured a bridgehead on the Seves River to include the town of Longuet. Enemy batteries which had been silenced that morning by our counter-mortar fire resumed their fire on a moderate scale that afternoon. (19)

The Germans continued to counterattack vigorously and, as the columns swung westward towards Coutances, it became clear to the Germans that their only hope of evacuating their troops from the north was to hold the town as long as possible.

The next day, 27 July, set the seal of the initial success. The towns of Periers and Lessay were taken. Despite many mines and booby traps, the advance on Coutances was pushed ahead, led by the armored units. The enemy units north of Coutances at this time were elements of the 77th, 243rd, and 353rd Infantry Divisions and the 2nd SS Panzer and 17th SS Panzer Grenadier Divisions. The enemy made a bold effort to evacuate his forces, concentrating primarily on the SS troops and leaving the remainder of the infantry to their fate. The enemy's withdrawal, as he streamed southward along roads that converged on the city, became a pilot's dream. Allied air forces took heavy toll on the vehicles racing south trying to escape the encircling movement. (20)

The decisive action of the operation had been accomplished; but the speed of the enemy retirement behind strong rearguard action, leaving blown bridges, anti-tank and personnel mines, and numerous booby traps, frustrated the attempt at wholesale encirclement near Coutances. The American advance continued to meet with some enemy mortar and artillery fire, but there was little small arms fire. Delay was caused mostly by the enemy mines and the repair of the blown bridges. By 2200 hours on 27 July the VIII Corps had taken the towns of Periers and Lessay, the latter being heavily booby trapped. The

(19) A-4, p. 101; (20) A-10, p. 35

VII Corps had made excellent progress. The 9th Infantry Division not only held its position, but made some advance to the west to widen the penetration. The 30th Infantry Division mopped up its area, and extended southward behind the advancing armor. The 2nd Armored Division was in St. Samson-de-Bon-Fosse by noon, and by night was in Fervaches and Notre-Dame-de-Cenilly. The 1st Infantry Division, supported by Combat Command B of the 3rd Armored Division, was driving rapidly down the St. Lo - Coutances Road and had elements at Camprond and less than two miles from Coutances, where it met stubborn resistance from the enemy attempting to hold an escape corridor for the LXXXIV Corps. (21)

East of St. Lo the XIX Corps attacked with its 35th Infantry Division (first time committed) and captured St. Thomas-de-St. Lo and Hill 101, which had been a threat to St. Lo for about ten days. With the capture of these key points, the artillery which had been harrasing the city was eliminated. The 2nd Infantry Division made slow progress against light resistance, capturing Notre-Dame-d'Elle, and improved its positions along the Rouxeville - Vidouville Road. Information gained from prisoners of war identified the 275th Infantry Division in this area. Tactical reconnaissance proved that other German columns were moving into the area of penetration. (22)

The area of the VII Corps became very large and required the shifting of some of the responsibility to the XIX Corps on its left. At 1200 hours 27 July the boundaries of the XIX Corps were moved farther west of the Vire River where the main pressure was to be exerted. In addition, the 30th Infantry Division and Combat Command A of the 2nd Armored Division were attached in place to the XIX Corps area. (23)

On 28 July the German escape route through Coutances was sealed

(21, 22, 23) A-4, p. 102

by the 4th and 6th Armored Divisions, who drove through the infantry and down the road to the north which converged on Coutances. These two armored columns formed the spearhead of the VIII Corps, while the 79th and 90th Infantry Divisions mopped up the area. By noon contact was made with the 1st Infantry Division, which had moved in from the east. By 1700 hours the 4th Armored Division had captured Coutances, and by nightfall had advanced about one mile beyond the city. The 6th Armored Division, which had been delayed in the morning near Lessay by road mines, had reached a point about three miles southwest of Coutances by dark. The right flank of the Corps had been protected by the 106th Cavalry Group, which had reached the edge of the Sienne River. (24)

To the east the VII Corps had made progress; the 3rd Armored Division and the 1st Infantry Division had moved west and made contact with the 90th Division of the VIII Corps near Coutances.

The 9th Infantry Division was mopping up enemy resistance in its zone of action, consolidating and making limited attacks. The 4th Infantry Division (less RCT 22) drove south, maintaining contact with the enemy, and reached the town of Notre-Dame-de-Cenilly. The 2nd Armored Division (less CCR) continued to attack southwest and were on a line with St. Denis-le-Gast and near Villebaudon to prevent the enemy's escape to the south. From Conde-sur-Vire on the Vire River the line extended south to Villebaudon. (25)

At this point a completely disorganized enemy was holding the area from the Vire River to the west. The enemy had suffered considerable losses in both men and materials and was becoming disorganized under our constant pressure and continuous bombardment.

In the XIX Corps zone the 30th and 29th Infantry Divisions and Combat Command A, 2nd Armored Division, with 22nd RCT, 4th Infantry

(24) A-4, p. 102; (25) A-4, p. 104

Division, attached, advanced south along the banks of the Vire River, holding a line from Villebaudon to the Vire River south.

The attack was resumed by the V Corps, which now consisted of the 35th Infantry Division on the right, 2nd Infantry Division in the center, and 5th Infantry Division on the left. The Corps was to continue the pressure in order to prevent the enemy from being disengaged or allowing him time to prepare strong defensive positions. (26)

The major part of Operation "Cobra" had been completed. The continuous advance and bombardment had caused disorganization of the enemy. Pressure was essential to keep him from disengaging and to further exploit his weaknesses. It was also necessary at this time to make adjustments in boundaries, reorganize, and mop up the areas that had been overrun. After these had been completed, the Corps was to issue order for the continuation of the attack. At this time we had a salient of 12 miles into the enemy lines. (27)

It became evident to the enemy at this time that the main threat was in the Normandy breakthrough. Our threats to make landings in the Pas-de-Calais area had decreased, and he began to shift divisions from his First and Fifteenth Armies in France.

On 29 July the German evacuation of Cautances was intercepted by the Americans, but they were not strong enough to keep the enemy from breaking through. In the sector between Roncey and St. Denis-le-Gast enemy tank and mortar columns were intercepted by "our air force," and 66 enemy tanks, 204 vehicles, and 11 artillery guns were destroyed; 56 tanks and 55 motor vehicles were damaged. (28)

In the VII Corps zone the 1st and 9th Infantry Divisions continued mopping up enemy pockets of resistance and continued the attack. The 3rd Armored Division continued its attack to the southeast, and the 2nd

(26) A-8, p. 122; (27) A-4, p. 104; (28) A-4, p. 107

Armored Division attacked to the southwest. The southern limit of the front line of the Corps now ran along the highway from Cerences through Hambye to Percy, and mopping up activities continued in the entire Corps area. (29)

The XIX Corps attacked towards Tessy-sur-Vire, meeting strong resistance and gaining very little ground; however, it was successful on the right, where it advanced from Villebaudon to east of Percy on the same general line with the VII Corps. (30)

The V Corps continued the attack to the south and advanced on an east and west line north of Torigny-sur-Vire.

The VIII Corps continued its rapid advance to the south in its narrow sector with the two armored columns, the 6th and 4th Armored Divisions, abreast.

On 30 July substantial progress was made in the VIII Corps zone. The 4th and 6th Armored Divisions, followed by the 79th and 90th Infantry Divisions, made large gains, and by 2000 hours had crossed the Sienne River, entered Avranches and secured two bridges across the See River. (31)

The VII Corps, with the 1st and 4th Infantry Divisions, each with a combat command of the 3rd Armored Division, attacked south and entered the towns of Gavray and Percy.

The V Corps met with heavy resistance from mortar, artillery, and dug-in infantry well equipped with automatic weapons. (32)

The 5th Infantry Division met strong resistance but was able to cross the Torigny-sur-Vire - Gaumont Road by late afternoon, and the 2nd Infantry Division advanced about 1300 yards against strong resistance. The 35th Infantry Division made only slight gains against a determined enemy. (33)

(29, 30) A-4, p.107; (31) A-4, p. 110; (32, 33) A-8, p. 148

The XIX Corps attacked towards Tessy, but made little progress. The 28th Infantry Division became operational in the Corps area, which gave the Corps three divisions, the 28th, 29th, and 30th. (34)

On 31 July the advances of the VIII Corps were large, capturing Avranches, and some of its units were on the outskirts of Pontaubault, Ducey, and Marcilly across the Avranches - Mortain Road. (35)

In the VII Corps area the 1st Infantry Division had captured Brecey, while the 4th Infantry Division had taken Villedieu Les Poeles. (36)

The V Corps resumed its attack and advanced between 4000 and 7000 yards along the Corps front. (37)

The XIX Corps continued its attack towards Tessy against stiff resistance. The 30th Infantry Division succeeded in entering Troisgots at 1025 hours but were unable to advance past the town. (38)

The breakthrough had been accomplished; in eight days of continuous fighting an advance of 35 miles had been made over very difficult terrain. We had opened the enemy's flank and the pursuit across France was ready to be undertaken.

At this time a reorganization of the Allied forces, due to large new reinforcements being available, was made. The Commander in Chief, General Eisenhower, transferred GHQ from England to Normandy. The First U. S. Army was relieved from duty with the 21st Army Group and assigned to a new 12th Army Group, to which was added the newly joined Third U. S. Army under Lieutenant General George S. Patton, Jr. Lieutenant General Bradley assumed command of the 12th Army Group, and was succeeded in command of the First Army, which took over the left of the Army Group, by Lieutenant General Hodges. (39)

(34) A-4, p. 107; (35, 36) A-4, p. 110; (37) A-8, p. 148; (38) A-4, p. 110;
(39) A-10, p. 37

ANALYSIS

1. The large scale air attack on the 25th of July stunned the enemy and reduced his fighting efficiency, disrupted his communications, and greatly aided the American forces in the exploitation of the breakthrough. American advance was greatly slowed down by craters caused by the intensive bombing.
2. This operation marked the beginning of close air support to armored columns on exploitation and an improved system of air-ground cooperation.
3. Armored columns used in exploitation moved rapidly down roads, bypassed centers of resistance, which were left for infantry to mop up.
4. It would be profitable at this time to review some of the principles used by the First U. S. Army in effecting the breakthrough.
 - a. Many divisions were massed on a narrow front to effect the breakthrough.
 - b. Air power was used in mass and not "piecemeal" as had been the case previously.
 - c. Breaking through the enemy lines and encircling his forces enabled the Allied forces to pursue and defeat the German army.
 - d. Continuous pressure was used by corps on the flanks to contain the enemy and keep him from cutting the penetration.
 - e. Close cooperation between the air and ground forces was achieved throughout the whole operation.
 - f. Teams of tank, artillery, and infantry units cooperated in all phases, which enabled each unit to perform that part of its job more efficiently.
 - g. The simplicity of plans, orders, and the manner of execution

throughout the operation was given a great deal of consideration by all commanders.

CRITICISM

1. Tanks used to support the infantry were improperly employed by subordinate commanders.
2. Units that moved into the beaches during the massing for the breakthrough did not have an opportunity to work with their tank and artillery support prior to being committed.
3. In some cases the enemy was allowed to disengage from front line units. Contact, once gained, should never be lost.
4. There seemed to be a lack of proper means of identification of front lines, especially during the initial bombing stage.
5. Units should move in close behind bombardments and artillery preparation to gain the maximum effect while the enemy's communications are disrupted and he is still in a state of confusion.

LESSONS

1. There must be close coordination between air and ground forces to obtain maximum results. This can be achieved by a study of the characteristics of support aircraft and close follow-up of bombardment by ground troops.
2. Prior to commitment of tank-artillery-infantry teams there should be extensive training to develop coordination, confidence, and spirit within the teams. These teams once trained should be kept together as much as possible.
3. Infantry must be bold and aggressive to ensure success.
4. Artillery must give close and continuous support if the infantry is to advance rapidly and exploit a delaying enemy.

5. Operations which move fast must have flexibility of orders and plans.
6. To be successful, surprise once gained must be used to every advantage in destroying the enemy.
7. Subordinate infantry commanders must be aggressive in their plans.