

UTAH BEACH TO CHERBOURG (6 June-27 June 1944)

American Forces in Action Series Historical Division

DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY

(For sale by the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office Washington, D.C., 20402)
(uploaded by Larry W. Jewell, jewell@mace.cc.purdue.edu)

Facsimile Reprint, 1984 CMH Pub 100-12 Center of Military History United States Army Washington, D.C.

FOREWORD

In a nation at war, teamwork by the whole people is necessary for victory. But the issue is decided on the battlefield, toward which all national effort leads. The country's fate lies in the hands of its soldier citizens; in the clash of battle is found the final test of plans, training, equipment, and—above all—the fighting spirit of units and individuals. AMERICAN FORCES IN ACTION SERIES presents detailed accounts of particular combat operations of United States forces. To the American public, this record of high achievement by men by men who served their Nation well is presented as a preface to the full military history of World War II. To the soldiers who took part in the operations concerned, these narratives will give the opportunity to see more clearly the results of orders which they obeyed and of sacrifices which they and their comrades made, in performance of missions that find their meaning in the outcome of a larger plan of battle.

DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER Chief of Staff United States Army

Department of the Army Historical Division Washington 25, D.C. 1 October 1947

UTAH BEACH TO CHERBOURG, thirteenth in the series called AMERICAN FORCES IN ACTION, is the last of three narratives dealing with the U.S. military operations in Normandy. Intended as a companion volume to OMAHA BEACHHEAD, published in 1946, the present study rounds out the account of the landings at corps-level and below and relates the course of VII Corps combat operations which resulted in the capture of Cherbourg on 27 June 1944. The third volume, ST-LO, relates the operations of a single corps in the First Army's offensive during the first three weeks in July, designed to deepen the lodgment area preparatory to the great breakthrough from Normandy.

UTAH BEACH TO CHERBOURG is the work of Maj. Roland G. Ruppenthal, member of the 2d Information and Historical Service, attached to the First Army. The manuscript was edited under the supervision of Lt. Gordon Harrison of the Historical Section, European Theater of Operations, and in the Historical Division, War Department Special Staff. Although as published this book contains no documentation, the original manuscript, fully documented, is on file in the Department of the Army. The sources on which the narrative is based consist primarily of the official records of the units involved and of data collected by the writer and other historical officers in the field through interviews with participants in the action. Material on the enemy was derived chiefly from the War Diary of the German Seventh Army, which was captured in August 1944 by Polish forces at Falaise; from interviews with high-ranking German commanders; and from the war diaries of divisional units encountered in the Cotentin Peninsula. Of the American division records, only those of the 9th and 4th Divisions constitute adequate historical evidence. Only the barest outline of the 79th Division's operations was obtainable from official documents, and there were only scattered official records of the two airborne divisions. The gap in the records of the airborne division was largely filled by voluminous material gathered in interviews by Col. S.L.A. Marshall in the field shortly after the action. Supplementary data on the 9th and 4th Divisions were gathered by the author in the field, and additional material on the 4th Division made available by its historian, Lt. Col. William T. Gayle. No interviews were held in the 90th Division, and in the 79th Division a first-hand account of one regiment's action was not obtained until 1947. The paucity of material on these two divisions was keenly felt because of the inadequacy of their official records.

THE SEABORNE ASSAULT

Task Force U Moves In

While parachutists attempted to assemble in the labyrinth of the Normandy hedgerows and marshes, troops aboard transports prepared to transfer into landing craft for the assault on the beach. At 0430 (H minus 2 hours) detachments of the 4th and 24th Cavalry Squadrons under Lt. Col. E. C. Dunn landed on the Iles St. Marcouf to capture what was suspected to be a hostile observation post or casemate for mine-field control. Prior to the landing four men armed only with knives swam to what was supposedly an enemy-held shore to mark the beaches. No enemy was encountered, although both islands were found to be heavily mined and some casualties were suffered. All elements of the detachment (numbering 132 men) were ashore and the island occupied by 0530.

In the meantime the unloading of troops into assault landing craft proceeded uneventfully. After the transfer, LCVP's circled the transports awaiting the order to rendezvous. At H minus 40 minutes (0550) warships of the bombardment group of Task Force 125 began firing on enemy shore batteries. A few minutes later 276 Marauders of the Ninth Air Force dropped 4,404 250-pound bombs on 7 objectives on the beach, extending from les Dunes de Varreville to Beau Guillot. The effectiveness of this attack is difficult to assess. Les Dunes de Varreville seems to have received more bombs than any other target, possibly because the conspicuous tank ditch surrounding the area persuaded pilots to unload on it when briefed targets could not be located. About one-third of all bombs fell between high and low tide water marks. As assault craft started for the beach, the fire support group, consisting of thirty-three variously equipped craft, began the process of beach drenching. Seventeen of these craft mounted rocket launchers and discharged their rockets when the first waves of assault craft were still 600 to 700 yards from shore.

One of the earliest mishaps caused the immobilization of one of the control vessels. At approximately 0455 the Green Beach primary and secondary control vessels and the Red Beach primary control vessel left the Transport Area for the beach. The secondary control vessel for Red Beach fouled her screw on a dan buoy and was unable to proceed. An hour later, while still more than 7,000 yards from the beach and already 10 to 15 minutes late, the Red Beach primary control vessel was sunk, probably by a mine. Shortly thereafter an LCT behind the Green Beach primary control vessel also hit a mine and sank. The run into shore was already behind schedule, and these sinkings caused some of the landing craft to slow down. The Green Beach secondary control vessel therefore turned about to bring the landing craft in closer to the beach and announced that it would lead all amphibious tanks in. The tank-carrying LCT's were supposed to launch the tanks at 5,000 yards, but to save time they were brought to within 3,000 yards of the beach and then discharged.

The first wave consisted of 20 LCVP's, each carrying a 30-man assault team from the 8th Infantry (Map VII). The 10 craft on the right were to land on Tare Green Beach, opposite the strong point at les Dunes de Varreville. The 10 craft on the left were intended for Uncle Red Beach, 1,000 yards farther south. The entire operation was timed against the touchdown of this first assault wave, which was scheduled to take place at 0630. Eight LCT's, each carrying 4 duplex drive (DD) amphibious tanks, were scheduled to land at the same time or as soon thereafter as possible. [The 32 DD tanks played little part in the assault. The tanks beached approximately 15 minutes after the first assault wave. One LCT had struck a mine when its ramp was lowered and sank, so that 4 of the 32 tanks did not reach the beach.] The second wave comprised another 32 LCVP's with additional troops of the 2 assault battalions, some combat engineers, and also 8 naval demolition teams which were to clear the beach of underwater obstacles. The third wave, timed for H plus 15 minutes, contained 8 more LCT's with dozer tanks. It was followed within 2 minutes by the fourth wave, mainly detachments of the 237th and 299th Engineer Combat Battalions, to clear the beaches between high and low water marks.

The first wave arrived at the line of departure on time and all twenty craft were dispatched abreast. Support craft to the rear were firing machine guns, possibly with the hope of exploding mines. When the LCVP's were from 300 to 400 yards from the beach, the assault company commanders fired special smoke projectors to signal the lifting of naval support craft fire. Almost exactly at H Hour the assault craft lowered their ramps and six hundred men walked into waist-deep water to wade the last 100 or more yards to the beach. The actual touchdown on the beach was therefore a few minutes late, but the delay was negligible and had no effect on the phasing of the succeeding waves. Enemy artillery had fired a few air bursts at sea, but otherwise there was no opposition at H Hour. The morale of the assault troops was excellent. The men waved their rifles as they reached the dry beach, some of them shouting, "Goddam, we're on French soil." They were obviously relieved and happy that this was not another "dry run."

The first troops to reach shore were from the 2d Battalion, 8th Infantry. The 1st Battalion landed a few minutes later. Both came ashore considerably south of the designated beaches. The 2d Battalion should have hit Uncle Red Beach opposite Exit 3. The 1st Battalion was supposed to land directly opposite the strong point at les Dunes de Varreville. The landings, however, were made astride Exit 2 about 2,000 yards south.

It is difficult to pinpoint the cause for this error. Both Red Beach control vessels had been lost, and one of the Green Beach control vessels had gone back to bring in the LCT's carrying DD amphibious tanks. Guiding the initial assault waves to the proper beaches was therefore the sole responsibility of one control vessel. The possibility of error was increased by the strong tidal current as well as by the beach drenching administered by naval fire support craft, which threw up a tremendous cloud of smoke, dust, and fine sand, obscuring the beach for many minutes just prior to and after the jump-off from the line of departure.

Potentially this error was very serious, for it might have caused great confusion. In fact it did not. The original plans, in which each assault section had a specific mission, could not be carried out in detail, of course. Brig. Gen. Theodore Roosevelt, Jr., assistant commander of the 4th Division, had volunteered to coordinate the initial attack on the beach strong points until the arrival of the regimental commander, Colonel Van Fleet, and had landed with Company E. When it was realized that the landings had been made at the wrong place, he personally made a reconnaissance of the area immediately to the rear of the beach to locate the causeways which were to be used for the advance inland. He then returned to the point of landing, contacted the commanders of the two battalions, Lt. Cols. Conrad C. Simmons and Carlton O. MacNeely, and coordinated the attack on the enemy positions confronting them. These impromptu plans worked with complete success and little confusion. The errors in landing actually proved fortunate. Not only was the beach farther south less thickly obstructed, but the enemy shore defenses were also less formidable than those opposite the intended landing beaches.

Clearing the Beaches

Such clearing of beach obstacles as was necessary was the mission of a special engineer force which was scheduled to land directly after the 8th Infantry. The engineer elements were organized as a Beach Obstacle Task Force, commanded by Maj. Herschel E. Linn of the 1106th Engineer Combat Group. They were to clear four 50-yard gaps in the obstacles on each beach from the high water mark seaward by hand-placed charges and tank dozers. Naval demolition teams were to destroy all obstacles under water and Army engineer teams were responsible for those above water. Army combat engineers were from the 237th Engineer Combat Battalion. The detachment of eight tank dozers was from the 612th Light Equipment Company and 70th tank Battalion.

The plan contemplated the simultaneous landing at H plus 5 minutes of eight naval teams to clear eight 50-yard gaps in the first band of obstacles. [The Navy teams contained about 50 percent Army personnel who had volunteered for this mission and had trained and lived with the naval demolition teams.] This wave was to be followed in 10 minutes by 8 LCT's carrying, in addition to other tanks, 8 tank dozers. Immediately behind the tanks were to come 8 engineer combat demolition teams to clear obstacles above water. A reserve of 3 naval teams and 4 engineer teams was included in the fourth and fifth waves.

Like many other D-Day operations, this plan was not executed as conceived. Two LCT's were sunk while approaching the beach. One LCM, with an engineer demolition team, was hit by shell fire just as it lowered its ramp on Green Beach, and six men were killed. Both Army and Navy demolition teams beached almost simultaneously, together with the four reserve engineer teams which landed on Green Beach. These discrepancies between plan and performance in no case seriously hindered the operation.

The parties left the LCV's and LCM's in three feet of water and waded ashore, each man carrying sixty pounds of explosives. Aerial photos had indicated three bands of obstacles in depth. Since H Hour was timed for a rising tide favorable for landing craft, it was expected that one band would be either in or near the edge of the water. Actually all obstacles were found dry. The Navy teams, however, proceeded as instructed to x explosives on the seaward band and the engineers moved to the next band. After the first gap at the junction of the beaches was blown, it was decided to proceed at once to the clearing of the entire beach. The landing craft heading for the initial gap were bunching so dangerously, and the obstacles were so much more sparsely distributed than expected, that the original plan of clearing only 50-yard gaps was abandoned.

Major Linn and the executive officer of the 237th Engineer Combat Battalion, Maj. R. P. Tabb, had both planned to direct operations from their M-29's (Weasels) on the beach. Major Linn's craft was sunk and Major Tabb's vehicle sank as it left the landing craft. Major Tabb saved the crew and a radio and made for the beach, where he got in touch with General Roosevelt. There was little of the expected excitement and not much confusion. Control during the landing was never a serious problem because it was decentralized. The fortuitous simultaneous landings of Army and Navy demolition teams made possible the setting and blowing of charges for all three bands of obstacles at once and consequently saved time.

As expected, obstacles consisted mainly of steel and concrete pikes, some steel tetrahedra, and hedgehogs. Tank dozers worked effectively against some of the piling and pushed the obstacles up onto the beach, but hand-placed charges accounted for most of them. Only a few mines were found on the beach, attached to the obstacles. Belgian Gates were found in small number, a few on the beach and a few blocking the roads leading from the beach. The four reserve teams which landed on Green Beach blew these gates and assisted in blasting additional gaps in the sea wall.

The entire beach was cleared in an hour, and by that time elements of the 87th Chemical Mortar Battalion, the 3d Battalion of the 8th Infantry, and the 3d Battalion of the 22d Infantry were moving across the beaches, while engineer units were arriving to organize the beach operation. The Beach Obstacle Task Force was occupied with odd jobs for several hours more, but before noon had completed its task and reorganized. Of the 400 men involved, 6 were killed and 39 wounded.

Clearing the beach was only the first of the tasks assigned to combat engineers. One platoon of engineers was attached to each assault company of the 8th Infantry to blow gaps in the sea wall, destroy barbed wire in front and to the rear of the wall, and clear paths inland through the sand dunes. These tasks completed, they were then to perform normal assault missions against fortifications. For their initial missions they were equipped with bangalore torpedoes, mine detectors, explosives, and pioneer tools and markers. The demolition of the sea wall and clearance of paths through the sand dunes were accomplished very early. Company A, 237th Engineer Combat Battalion, blew two gaps in the wall on Red Beach, and Company C blew two on Green Beach. In addition Company A blew two Belgian Gates at the entrance to Exit 2 and picked up several prisoners from the pillboxes along the beach wall. The engineers then accompanied the infantry, removing mines and "dozing" roads across the dunes. As enemy artillery began to interdict the entrance to Exit 2, a trail was broken through the fields to the south and joined with the road which paralleled the coast and led back to Exit 2 south of la Madeleine. Many of the fields back of the beach marked Miner were free, but the pattern was such that all were suspect and had to be cleared.

The 4th Division Pushes Inland

While combat engineers prepared the beaches for the follow-up of additional men and materiel, the 1st and 2d Battalions of the 8th Infantry proceeded on their altered mission. When General Roosevelt and the battalion commanders became aware of the error in the landings, it was decided to reduce the enemy strong points immediately confronting them and proceed inland to their original objective (Map No. 8). Directly in front of the 1st Battalion was the fortification in and around Madeleine, and facing the 2d Battalion approximately 1,300 yards to the southeast, was another fortification, just south of the Exit 2 road. These were field fortifications placed to cover the causeway roads; they were not formidable. They were all taken by forces of company size or less against light opposition. Other troops cleaned out houses along the road running parallel with the beach. The enemy coastal garrisons, apparently demoralized by the preparatory bombardment, showed little fight; some did not fire at all.

Two or three hours were consumed in eliminating opposition in the beach area and in reorganizing for the advance inland. The two battalions then diverged, the 1st moving north and then inland through Exit 3, and the 2d moving down the coast to Exit 1. By this time additional waves of infantrymen had landed. At approximately 0745 (H plus 75 minutes) the 3d Battalion, 22d Infantry (initially attached to the 8th Infantry), touched down on Green Beach and moved north along the coast to reduce beach strong points. The 3d Battalion of the 8th Infantry landed in the same waves on Red Beach and moved inland across Exit 2. Four battalions of infantry had thus landed by 0800. Two more came in at about 1000—the 1st Battalion, 22d Infantry, on the northern beach and the 2d Battalion, 22d Infantry, on the southern. According to plan these two battalions were to march inland through Exit 4. Since the eastern end of this exit was still covered by enemy fire and the causeways to the south were already congested, some of the 22d Infantry's units were compelled to wade two miles through the inundations. Elements of the 12th Infantry, which landed shortly after noon, also waded through the flooded area. The water was generally only waist-deep, but the area was full of ditches and holes, and men frequently dropped into water over their heads. Since the 22d Infantry's objective lay to the northwest in the direction of St. Germain-de-Varreville, it had to cross the Exit 3 road and wade through the swamps. In doing so it found itself crossing rear elements of the 8th Infantry moving west on the road.

This was only part of the traffic congestion resulting from the errors in landing. The original traffic plan envisaged the use of Exit 2 and Exit 3 for vehicles. Exit 3 could not be used because of the nearness of enemy positions to the north. Consequently all vehicles tried to use Exit 2. The 3d Battalion, 8th Infantry, supported by tanks of the 70th Tank Battalion and engineers of the 237th Engineer Combat Battalion, had begun to move down the causeway to Exit 2. Halfway down the causeway it found that the culvert over a small stream had been blown, and the road was covered by an antitank gun off to the right. The first tank was stopped by a mine. Another was knocked off the road by an anti-tank gun. It was not until a third tank silenced the enemy gun that the column proceeded to ford the stream. The blown culvert never really obstructed traffic; Major Tabb of the Beach Obstacle Task Force immediately brought up a platoon of engineers and built a small treadway bridge.

Meanwhile a great many vehicles accumulated in the areas behind the beach. Enemy shelling of the beach intensified during the morning but fortunately did not hit the parking fields. Beginning about noon Exit 2 became jammed with trucks. Engineer work parties had unloaded bridging equipment on the causeway, an anti-aircraft half-track had taken up a position on the road, and a signal truck was slowly laying wire. Exit 2 was narrow and practically without shoulders. At noon, General Barton, concerned over an enemy tank threat, ordered that the road be cleared for antitank guns, even if other vehicles had to be pushed into the swamp. Late in the day there was still considerable congestion east of the bridge because trucks were maneuvering to reclaim partly mired vehicles.

After the capture of the coastal positions, the 1st Battalion, 8th Infantry, moved north and then west on the causeway to Exit 3. Despite enemy artillery fire, it crossed the inundated area and reached the vicinity of Turqueville by evening.

The 3d Battalion moved west beyond Exit 2, meeting little opposition until just north of Ste. Marie-du-Mont. There, at Germain, it encountered enemy dugouts, underground shelters, three or four 88-mm guns, and smaller weapons. After a short fire fight, the battalion closed in. Fifty Germans were cut down as they broke and ran; a hundred were taken prisoner. At night the battalion bivouacked north of les Forges, confronting the high ground south of Ste. Mere-Eglise. Company K took up a position far to the left and sent one platoon to Chef-du-Pont to establish contact with the 82d Airborne Division.

The 2d Battalion moved straight south toward Pouppeville. Colonel MacNeely (commanding the 2d Battalion, 8th Infantry), scheduled to land at H plus 30 minutes, had decided to go in earlier. When he landed, Company F was already moving in to reduce the fortification confronting it. Company E had found a path through the mine field behind the dunes and followed it under artillery fire without losing a man. Colonel MacNeely shortly had his battalion in hand and, while Company F was still engaged, he moved Company E around behind Company F and led it down the road along the eastern edge of the inundations. Company G moved south also, hugging the sea wall. The battalion encountered continuous small-arms fire all the way down the coast. Company G received artillery fire as it approached the strong point at Beau Guillot, and ran into a mine field, but decided to move through. The battalion was assembled at the road junction northeast of Pouppeville and then advanced on the village, where first contact was made with the 3d Battalion, 501st Parachute Infantry.

The battalion thus bypassed some enemy positions at the southern tip of the inundated area, including the lock north of Grand Vey which in part controlled the inundations. The lock, which was originally the mission of Company G, 8th Infantry, was secured later by Company A, 49th Engineer Combat Battalion. In the course of reducing the surrounding enemy defenses, the engineers took 125 prisoners. The 2d Battalion, 8th Infantry, relieved the 3d Battalion, 501st Parachute Infantry, at Pouppeville. From there it pushed on west and at night it bivouacked just south of the main road intersection at les Forges.

The 8th Infantry had reached its D-Day objectives. It had relieved elements of the 101st Airborne Division in the Pouppeville area and was in a position to protect the southwest flank of the 4th Division. Only north of les Forges did it encounter difficulties. A finger of strong enemy resistance extended through Fauville to Turqueville. Entrenched along a ridge, the enemy cut the les Forges-Ste. Mere-Eglise highway, and prevented contact between the 8th Infantry and the main body of the 82d Airborne Division at Ste. Mere-Eglise. Attacked earlier in the day by the 505th Parachute Infantry troops from Ste. Mere-Eglise, the Germans had apparently given some ground to the north but had consolidated again at Fauville.

Late in the afternoon the advance elements [consisting of one platoon of the 4th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron a company of the 746th Tank Battalion and ninety riflemen of the 325th Glider Infantry.] of the seaborne "Howell Force," which was attached to the 82d Airborne Division and commanded by Col. E. D. Raff, followed the 3d Battalion, 8th Infantry, across Exit 2. They were to join the 82d Airborne Division at Ste. Mere-Eglise. When the 3d Battalion, 8th Infantry, came up against the enemy positions on the high ground to the north, it requested artillery but did not intend to advance farther that evening. Colonel Raff, on the other hand, considered it necessary to attempt forcing his way through in order to accomplish his mission. He was also concerned over clearing the area to permit the landing of gliderborne artillery units of the division scheduled to come in at 2100.

Twice tanks and infantry struck at the German defenses and were turned back. One tank was disabled in the first attempt; two were destroyed in the second. The enemy had not been budged at 2100 when, on schedule, sixty C-47's appeared over the area with gliders in tow. Despite heavy enemy fire most of the gliders were cast loose over the German positions. Some came down in enemy lines; some drifted farther south; most crash landed with high casualties. Colonel Raff was able to gather only miscellaneous personnel to help set up a defensive line against enemy counterattack. And there in the vicinity of les Forges his force spent the night.

The other two regiments of the 4th Division did not reach their D-Day objectives. After wading through the inundated area, the 12th Infantry came up on the left of the 502d Parachute Infantry south of Beuzeville-au-Plain, and remained there for the night. The 1st and 2d Battalions, 22d Infantry, which also had to wade inland through the swamps and spend about seven hours in the marsh, reached dry land in the vicinity of St. Martin-de-Varreville and moved on to St. Germain-de-Varreville, where they bivouacked for the night. The 3d Battalion, 22d Infantry, as already noted, was assigned the task of reducing enemy beach strong points. The battalion moved north past les Dunes de Varreville and the Exit 4 road and reached the southern edge of Hamel de Cruttés by nightfall.

The Landing in Retrospect

The relative ease with which the assault on Utah Beach was accomplished was surprising even to the attackers, and gave the lie to the touted impregnability of the Atlantic Wall. The 4th Division's losses for D Day were astonishingly low. The 8th and 22d Infantry Regiments, which landed before noon, suffered a total of 118 casualties on D Day, 12 of them fatalities. The division as a whole suffered only 197 casualties during the day, and these included 60 men missing through the loss (at sea) of part of Battery B, 29th Field Artillery Battalion. Not less noteworthy than the small losses was the speed of the landings. With the exception of one field artillery battalion (the 20th) the entire 4th Division had landed in the first fifteen hours. In addition there came ashore one battalion of the 359th Infantry, the 65th Armored Field Artillery Battalion, the 87th Chemical Mortar Battalion, the 899th Tank Destroyer Battalion (less two companies), the 70th and 746th Tank Battalions, components of the 1st Engineer Special Brigade which had begun organizing the beach for the build-up, seaborne elements of the airborne divisions, and many smaller units. A total of over 20,000 troops and 1,700 vehicles reached Utah Beach by the end of 6 June.

Corps headquarters had, up to the night of D Day, participated but very little in the initial beachhead operation. Consequently, all activity centered around the divisions and, more particularly, their subordinate units.

VII Corps Headquarters was actually divided on D Day. An advance detachment of the headquarters, under Maj. Gen. Eugene M. Landrum, had crossed Exit 2 late in the afternoon, paused in an orchard in the vicinity of la Houssaye at the west end of the causeway, and proceeded to Audouville-la-Hubert at 1900 to establish a command post only a few hundred yards from that of the 4th Division. But by nightfall higher headquarters still had little contact with most of the units on the Utah beachhead, and direction of the battle remained almost completely decentralized.

The Corps commander, General Collins, was at the close of D Day still aboard the Bayfield with the major portion of his staff. For a number of reasons the Corps commander had decided to maintain his headquarters aboard ship. The Bayfield had been especially fitted with radio communication in order that contact could be kept with V Corps on the left and with General Bradley, whose command ship was nearer the Omaha than the Utah Beach operation. The Bayfield was also prepared to receive radio communications directly from the two airborne divisions and from the 4th Division. Furthermore, General Collins wanted to be near Admiral Moon's headquarters to insure that landing operations would continue uninterrupted in spite of adverse weather. This decision was fortunate, for Admiral Moon became greatly concerned over the loss of some vessels in the Task Force. Late in the day he considered a recommendation of his staff to suspend landing operations during the night, but General Collins convinced him of the necessity of continuing landing operations as uninterruptedly as possible. This was agreed to.

Among the commanders who were on the ground and whose units were in contact with the enemy there were uncertainty and anxiety on the night of D Day. Most disturbing was the lack of information about other units. This uncertainty had already affected the decisions of many commanders on D Day, and was most keenly felt by the airborne units, particularly the 82d Airborne Division, which had little or no knowledge of the course of the battle on other parts of the beachhead. The anxiety experienced by some ground commanders on the night of D Day was not as keenly felt at higher headquarters, where a somewhat broader picture of the operation was obtainable. Some assuring reports had

reached the Bayfield on the course of the operation. General Collins had heard as early as 0700 or 0800 that the 101st had taken St. Martin-de-Varreville, and by noon he had learned that definite contact had been established between the 4th Division and the 101st and that the beach exits were in their possession. These reports were particularly reassuring, for the greatest causes for concern had been the six 150-mm guns reported at St. Martin-de-Varreville and the fear that the western ends of the causeways would be mined and held in strength. It was a great relief to learn that the inundated area had been crossed and that the exits were in American hands.

In general, on the Bayfield there was reason to believe that things were going well ashore, except for the lack of information about the 82d Airborne Division. General Collins' headquarters called the division repeatedly on D Day, but could not raise a single response. Early in the evening a report was received at 4th Division headquarters at Audouville-la-Hubert to the effect that elements of the division were being attacked from the northeast and south; but this message was not clearly identified as to its origin. Two-way communication with the 82d Airborne Division was not established on D Day. The first report did not come in until late during the night. However, with favorable reports from both the 4th and 101st Divisions, General Collins saw no need for any changes in the Corps plans. He was confident that the veteran 82d possessed the leadership and fighting ability to take care of itself until contact was made with other units ashore (Map No. 9).

German Reactions to the Landings

Apparently the Allied assault on Normandy had achieved tactical surprise in spite of the enemy's awareness of an impending invasion. This success could be attributed in part to the fact that the enemy defense plan for the Atlantic Wall included basic miscalculations and in addition could never be fully put into effect because of German helplessness in the air and the steady attrition of German forces on two other major fronts. The German effort to build permanent coastal defenses had been handicapped throughout the winter both by the inability of the crowded and bombed railroads to carry sufficient building materials and by the higher priority for men and materials which was assigned to the V-Bomb sites. Those defenses which were completed were concentrated most heavily in the area between the Somme and Seine Rivers which the Commander in Chief West consistently estimated as the most likely spot for an Allied invasion attempt. This region presented the most direct way to the Ruhr and from its excellent port, Le Havre, a fine road net led to the interior. Moreover, some effort had also to be expended to meet Hitler's insistence on maximum defense of the Channel Islands. It was not until May 1944, when the imminence of a landing became obvious to all, that Hitler reportedly foresaw, by "intuition," the likelihood of an assault on the Cotentin Peninsula. At that time it was too late to improve the fixed defenses. But additional anti-aircraft and anti-tank weapons were emplaced in the peninsula, one more division (the 91st) was moved there, and units were supplied with "extra weapons mainly of a type useful in combating airborne troops."

Though the landings in Normandy might have been foreseen it was not considered likely that they would constitute the main Allied effort. For weeks after the Normandy invasion Hitler and his generals continued to expect a second major effort in the Somme area and kept the Fifteenth Army there to meet it.

The army high command also found it difficult to agree on the best method of dealing with the invasion once it struck. One faction of the high command wanted to retain the bulk of the armored reserves well inland for eventual employment in mass counterattack. Field Marshal Rommel, on the other hand, was adamant in his contention that all reserves should be moved in as close to the coast as possible. He thought that it would be impossible to throw back an invasion once it had gained a foothold and that Allied air power would make impracticable extended troop movements. His view, backed by prior experience in North Africa, prevailed and in May three of the four armored divisions in strategic reserve, the 21st Panzer Division, 12th SS-Panzer Division, and 2d Panzer Division, were moved into Normandy proper—one to the south of Caen and two to the Alençon-Evreux region. Henceforth the Germans were committed to the coastal areas as their main line of resistance with all the dangers inherent in such an extended linear defense.

If there were some doubts on the wisdom of the plan, there were none on what was at stake. The Germans recognized from the beginning that failure to repel the invasion at the outset would rapidly unbalance both their tactical and strategic positions. Given a foothold, the Americans and British could ultimately win the race for the build-up of men and supplies, and so make it impossible to dislodge the enemy forces. But if the landings could be pushed back into the sea at once, it was likely that invasion would not be attempted again in the near future and perhaps not at all. Germany would then have a large part of the sixty western divisions for use as reserves against the Russians.

Considering the importance attached to fast and total reaction to any attempt to crack the Atlantic Wall, it is notable that so little German air power was used against the beachheads. Apparently Reichsmarschall Hermann Goering, Commander in Chief of the Luftwaffe, considered at one time the possibility of committing the whole of his fighter force against the expected invasion, but was forced to abandon the idea. Allied bombings had hit hard at Luftwaffe ground installations in France, and by moving large numbers of fighters to France, months ahead of time, the Luftwaffe would have been inviting destructive fights with Allied planes which it could not afford. Moreover, Goering was reluctant for obvious political as well as military reasons to strip Germany of fighter protection.

Even though Allied control of the air and sea, together with bad weather, had curtailed German reconnaissance, enemy intelligence had secured a fairly accurate picture of Allied strength and estimated that the invasion would come as soon after 1 April as weather permitted. Yet the Germans had no knowledge of Allied plans for artificial ports and they underestimated the speed with which the build-up could take place across the beaches. Col. Gen. Alfred Jodl figured that the landing of about six American divisions across open beaches would require from five to six days and thought that within that time the German tactical reserves could be committed in a main counterattack. Actually the early build-up was much more rapid—within four days six and one-half divisions were ashore—and the movement of German troops took three or four times longer than expected. Despite the German command's estimate in May that an Allied invasion attempt was imminent, the actual landfall on 6 June took the enemy by surprise. Field Marshal Rommel was not present at the front, and the troops in the sector attacked had been taken out of their defense positions to construct additional fortifications.

Word of the Allied landings reached Hitler's headquarters about four hours after the first airborne troops came down in the peninsula, but it was not until several hours later that the landings were reported as part of a full-scale invasion and not until late in the day that even the Seventh Army realized that seaborne landings had taken place at Utah. The German high command released two of the four armored divisions in Seventh Army reserve for employment in Normandy; the expectation was that these reserves would arrive in the battle area by the end of D Day. The Sturm Battalion AOK 7 (Assault Battalion, Seventh Army) was ordered from Cherbourg into the beachhead sector. But generally the Seventh Army command was sure that the coastal forces could cope with the invaders. No other major troop shifts were ordered at the time. The German command still feared further landings elsewhere on the French coast, especially in the area between the Somme and Seine Rivers.

The disposition of the enemy forces in the Cotentin largely confirmed Allied estimates of the enemy Order of Battle prior to D Day (Maps Nos. 1 and 10). Manning the coastal defenses at Utah Beach was the 919th Regiment of the 709th Division. Other units of this division (729th and 739th Regiments) were identified as they reached the battle area from positions farther up the coast. It developed that there was no Georgian regiment in the 709th Division as believed in G-2 estimates prior to D Day, but the 729th Regiment had an 0st Battalion (the 649th), and the 739th Regiment a Georgian battalion (the 795th), the latter of which was encountered in the Ste. Mere-Eglise area. Both the 795th Battalion and the 1st Battalion, 919th Regiment (which was at Utah Beach), lost communications with higher headquarters early on D Day. Elements of the latter escaped over the Carentan Canal and joined other German units southeast of the Douve River.

Pre-D-Day intelligence had placed only the 716th Division southeast of Carentan, but elements of the 352d Division had also moved into this area. The 6th Parachute Regiment, located near Carentan, had not been listed separately in VII Corps' enemy Order of Battle, but had been mentioned in intelligence reports of higher headquarters as part of the 91st Division. The 1057th and 1058th Regiments, also part of this division, were identified along the Merderet as expected.

Covering the west coast of the Cotentin was the 243 Division, with about half its personnel manning beach fortifications and the remainder occupying higher ground a few kilometers inland, with the mission of breaking up any attempted airborne attack. This division was in the process of reorganization which would have upgraded it from its limited employment category and given it greater mobility. Its retraining and reequipment, however, had not been completed. Units of the division were ordered to regroup eastward early on D Day and were identified in the invasion area a few days later.

Unpreparedness of the enemy in ground and air defense, his indecision which tied up reserves, and his miscalculation of both his own and Allied capabilities played perhaps as important a part in allowing Allied forces to establish a foothold on the Continent on D Day as the efforts of the assaulting troops themselves. In the week that followed, the same enemy weaknesses, exploited in particular by overwhelming Allied air power which provided time for powerful build-up over the beaches, was to insure that Allied invasion forces had come to stay.

SECURING THE BEACHHEAD (D PLUS 1)

Most of the actions on D plus 1 were aimed at the destruction of scattered enemy groups which still held positions within the perimeter of the beachhead. There was no front line at the end of D Day (Map No. 9). The airborne operations had pocketed sizeable enemy forces which had to be eliminated before communications and supply lines could be secured. This was the task accomplished on 7 June. By the end of that day the VII Corps beachhead had taken more definite shape.

The 82d Division at Ste. Mere-Eglise

The dawn of D plus I confronted the 82d Airborne Division with the unsolved problems of the day before. The la Fiere bridge and Ste. Mere-Eglise remained the critical areas in the western sector. Until 0900 the division continued to be out of touch with higher headquarters. D Day had left all of the division units hard-pressed, and General Ridgway's primary concern was in the arrival of expected tank and infantry reinforcements. At the close of the day he had reported his position, his losses in men and materiel, and his need for artillery, antitank guns, ammunition, and medical supplies. He had stated that he was prepared to continue his mission when reinforcements came. But the communication was one-way and General Ridgway did not even know whether his messages got through.

More fruitful was a D-Day contact by patrol with the 4th Division. Late in the evening Lt. Col. W. F. Winton, assistant G-3, took a patrol northeast in the direction of Beuzeville-au-Plain. He contacted elements of the 12th Infantry and went on south to the division command post at Audouville-la-Hubert. At midnight he talked to General Barton, from whom he obtained for the first time information on the 4th Division. At 0800 the next morning he returned to his own command post with assurance of relief by the 8th Infantry and Colonel Raff's force, the advance elements of the seaborne Howell Force which had tried to break through to the 82d Division the night before.

Between the 82d Airborne Division's main body at Ste. Mere-Eglise and the 8th Infantry at les Forges the enemy still had a large force, holding the ridge between Fauville and Turqueville and blocking the highway south of Ste. Mere-Eglise (Map No. 11). Another enemy force was threatening the 82d Division from the north. The elimination of these enemy forces became the main preoccupation of both the 8th Infantry and the 505th Parachute Infantry on D plus 1.

The 8th Infantry attacked the Turqueville salient on the morning of 7 June, with the objective of establishing contact with the 82d Airborne Division at Ste. Mere-Eglise. The 1st Battalion's attack on Turqueville itself was the first to get under way late in the morning, and succeeded in eliminating the eastern tip of the enemy salient. Turqueville was held by a battalion of Georgians (79th), which initially put up a stiff fight but was finally talked into surrender. During the morning the 4th Division G-1, Lt. Col. Gorlan A. Bryant, Sgt. John Svonchek, and a driver had left the division command post intending to visit the 22d Infantry. They had made a wrong turn at Audouville and had driven west, into the enemy position near Ecoqueneauville, where they were taken prisoner. They were moved to a house south of Turqueville and held there along with twenty-three American parachutists. When it was learned that the enemy unit was Georgian, Sergeant Svonchek, who spoke Russian, persuaded some of them to surrender, and about seventy-five gave up. Then the German captain gave the cease fire order and surrendered at about the same time that the 1st Battalion, 8th Infantry, was closing in on Turqueville. Upon entering the town the battalion rounded up 174 prisoners.

Meanwhile, the 2d and 3d Battalions of the 8th Infantry had attacked northward from their positions in the les Forges area to link up with the 82d Airborne Division at Ste. Mere-Eglise. The 3d Battalion advanced astride the highway while the 2d Battalion attacked toward Ecoqueneauville. As the two battalions reached a creek bed in front of the enemy lines, they received heavy machine-gun and artillery fire from enemy positions along the ridge Fauville-Ecoqueneauville. The 3d Battalion was held up and had one of the severest fights of these first few days, but as the 2d Battalion took Ecoqueneauville both battalions continued their advance toward Ste. Mere-Eglise. South of the town, enemy interdiction of the road caused the 2d Battalion to circle to the east and make an approach to the town from the northeast. But almost immediately after it had established contact with the 505th Parachute Infantry within the town, it was engaged by the enemy north of Ste. Mere-Eglise. The main German position was to the west of the highway. Colonel MacNeely (2d Battalion, 8th Infantry) and Colonel Vandervoort (2d Battalion, 505th Parachute Infantry) planned a coordinated attack. The 2d Battalion of the 505th moved up astride the road and attacked, supported by tanks, while the 2d Battalion, 8th Infantry, crossed the road behind the 505th Parachute Infantry and attacked on its left. By the end of the day the two battalions had killed or captured 300 Germans and cleared the enemy from his positions to the west of the highway.

Earlier in the afternoon an enemy armored thrust from the north had been beaten back on the very edge of Ste. Mere-Eglise by an American tank force. This force had been dispatched by order of the Corps commander himself, who learned of the 82d Division's request for assistance upon his arrival at the Corps command post late in the morning after he had come ashore. At the 4th Division's command post, across the road, General Collins met one of General Ridgway's staff officers, who outlined General Ridgway's situation and repeated the 82d Division commander's desire for tanks to meet a threatened armored attack. General Barton still had tanks of the 746th Tank Battalion in reserve at Reuville, and General Collins ordered these to be sent to General Ridgway under the officer's guidance.

On reaching Ste. Mere-Eglise the tank column turned north. After moving a few hundred yards it received heavy artillery and mortar fire from an enemy armored column, consisting of five tanks and a few other vehicles, about 300 or 400 yards away. Lt. Houston Payne, in the leading American tank, shot at the first enemy tank, setting it afire, and then knocked out an antitank gun on the side of the road. As both American and enemy tanks were in column only the lead tanks had targets. Lieutenant Payne destroyed one more enemy tank before his ammunition was exhausted and then moved back to permit the second tank to come forward.

Seeking a way of attacking the flank of the enemy column, Lt. Col. C. G. Hupfer, the 746th Tank Battalion commander, had in the meantime reconnoitered to the east and north and found, to the right of the highway, a trail which led straight north about a mile and joined a secondary road which entered Neuville-au-Plain. Some of the American tanks drove north on this trail and entered Neuville-au-Plain. At a cost of 2 of their own they destroyed 2 enemy tanks, took 60 prisoners, freed 19 American parachutists, and forced the German armored column to retreat northward. They stayed in Neuville-au-Plain until 2100 when they withdrew for lack of infantry support.

It is not clear whether the German armor which had supported the infantry attack along the highway had come from Neuville-au-Plain, but the two actions do not appear to have been coordinated. Whatever the enemy's intentions, Lieutenant Payne's engagement with the German armor and Colonel MacNeely's and Colonel Vandervoort's later attack west of the highway removed the enemy threat to the town and allowed the 82d Division units in Ste. Mere-Eglise to give more attention to developments along the Merderet.

Even before the German threat north of Ste. Mere-Eglise had been eliminated, the anxiety at the command post of the 82d Airborne Division had been relieved, and General Ridgway reported to Corps that the "situation is under control." Contact had been established with elements of the 8th Infantry south of Ste. Mere-Eglise and the 325th Glider Infantry had arrived and was ready for commitment against the enemy to the west. Shortly thereafter General Collins made his first personal contact with General Ridgway in the latter's command post west of Ste. Mere-Eglise.

The 325th Glider Infantry had arrived in two serials, one at 0700 and one at 0900. Although the landings were somewhat scattered, most of them were made in the les Forges area. One serial received ground fire from enemy positions to the north and there was a total of 160 landing casualties. But the regiment was given some protection by the attacks of the 8th Infantry and it made a rapid assembly near the les Forges crossroads.

The 325th Glider Infantry had the mission of proceeding to Chef-du-Pont as division reserve. But when Col. Harry L. Lewis (commanding officer) contacted division headquarters by radio at about 1000, he was instructed to use at least part of his force to eliminate the enemy force in the Carquebut area, where the Germans were threatening the security of the Chef-du-Pont bridge and causeway. The 1st Battalion, 505th Parachute Infantry, had been unable to divert forces to counter this threat. At the same time Colonel Raff received orders to bring his seaborne force up to Chef-du-Pont and then to the 82d Airborne Division command post. While Colonel Raff carried out his orders, arriving at the division command post at noon, Colonel Lewis took his 3d Battalion to the Carquebut area and sent the other two to Chef-du-Pont. He found Carquebut evacuated by the enemy and proceeded to rejoin the other two battalions. The 1st Battalion was then sent, under General Gavin's order, to la Fiere, and the 2d Battalion to Ste. Mere-Eglise, where it was to be attached to the 505th Parachute Infantry for operation in the north on the 8th Infantry's left.

Meanwhile, the action at la Fiere bridge had been a continued stalemate. Enemy counterattacks were repulsed and the American position was slightly strengthened by reorganization. But no progress had been made in establishing a bridgehead on the west bank. In the evening the 1st Battalion of the 505th, which during the day had fought of the enemy with heavy losses at la Fiere, was released to Regiment for the next day's operation. The 82d Airborne Division forces west of the Merderet remained isolated. In general, the situation of the 82d at the end of D plus 1 had been solidified, particularly around Ste. Mere-Eglise, although its D-Day mission was still unaccomplished.

The 12th and 22d Infantry Regiments Pursue Their D-Day Objectives

The 4th Division extended the northern arc of the beachhead some two miles on D plus 1 in its advance toward its D-Day objectives, and pushed the enemy back against his main headland fortresses at Azeville and Crisbecq.

On the beach the 3d Battalion, 22d Infantry, continued the methodical destruction of beach defenses (Map No. 12).

The 12th Infantry had come up on the left of the 502d Parachute Infantry late on D Day, just south of Beuzeville-au-Plain. On 7 June it attacked northwestward toward the high round crossed by the Ste. Mere-Eglise-Montebourg highway north of Neuville-au-Plain. The 1st Battalion took a strong point southwest of Beuzeville-au-Plain; the 2d Battalion fought a sharp engagement on the eastern outskirts of Neuville-au-Plain, but did not take possession of the town, thus necessitating its capture by other units later in the day. In the middle of the morning the two battalions pressed their attack northward. Early in the afternoon they were stopped on the forward slopes of the hills between Azeville and

le Bisson, where they reorganized for the night. The gap between the 12th Infantry's left flank and the 8th Infantry was covered by guns of Company A, 899th Tank Destroyer Battalion.

Probably the most difficult of the 4th Division's missions were those assigned the 22d Infantry on the division's right flank. The regiment had the task of reducing both the strongpoints along the beaches and the heavily fortified headland batteries two to three miles inland and west of the inundations. On D plus 1 the first attacks against the enemy's inland positions were made by the 1st and 2d Battalions.

The two battalions had spent most of D Day moving across the inundated area, but had come through almost without losses. From their positions at St. Germain-de-Varreville, where they had relieved the 502d Parachute Infantry, they started out at 0700 on 7 June, with the 1st Battalion on the right advancing astride the highway which runs parallel to the coastline, and the 2d Battalion using the trails to the west. They moved rapidly until they approached the higher ground between Azeville and de Dodainville, where they received fire from the forts of Crisbecq and Azeville. The 1st Battalion pushed on to enter St. Marcouf.

The two battalions now faced the enemy's two most powerful coastal forts. With their heavy guns (the Crisbecq guns were 210-mm.) these forts threatened the beaches as well as shipping and stood as the last serious barrier before the regiment's D-Day objectives. Each position consisted of four massive concrete blockhouses in a line; they were supplied with underground ammunition storage dumps, interconnected by communication trenches, and protected against ground attack by automatic weapons and wire. An arc of concrete sniper pillboxes outposted the southern approaches to Azeville. Crisbecq mounted the larger guns and occupied a more commanding position on the headland overlooking the beaches.

Immediate attacks were launched against both forts. The 2d Battalion tried for several hours to move forward against the Azeville position, but a counterattack drove it back to its line of departure with considerable losses. The 1st Battalion attack on Crisbecq was even more fiercely contested. As the battalion passed through St. Marcouf, it received heavy artillery fire from the Azeville battery to the southwest. Company C was organized into assault sections, in the same manner as the units had been organized for the assault on the beach on D Day. It was ordered to move up a narrow trail, along with the two other rifle companies of the battalion, to blow the blockhouses. This was the only approach the battalion could make, for to the east the ground dropped off to the town of Crisbecq and the swampland, and to the west the ground was high and open. As the three companies moved forward they suffered heavy casualties from shell fire. They inched ahead, up the thickly hedged trails, but as they reached the trail block and the wire obstacles on the perimeter of the position the Germans counterattacked their left flank.

To contain the counterattack the 3d Platoon of Company B was moved behind Company A to the left. In the fields northwest of St. Marcouf it met a strong enemy force supported by at least one tank. Capt. Tom Shields of Company A, who took command of the battalion when its commanding officer was wounded, decided that the position was too dangerous to hold and at 1600 he ordered a withdrawal. The battalion became increasingly disorganized as it retreated, still under heavy fire. Nineteen men of Company A were cut off on the left and probably captured. Another platoon on the right lost its way and wandered as far as the beach, which was still in enemy hands. Late that night these men found their way to the battalion, bringing with them 113 prisoners. The battalion withdrew to a line 300 yards south of de Dodainville. After dark the Germans counterattacked again but were routed by accurate naval fire.

On the extreme right flank of the 22d Infantry, separated from the rest of the regiment by the inundations, the 3d Battalion meanwhile proceeded against the string of beach fortifications which extended all the way up the coast. Those which posed an immediate danger to the Utah landings lay between les Dunes de Varreville and Quineville, on the narrow strip of land between the sea and the inundations, and could be approached only by movement along the sea wall. The strong points were reinforced concrete blockhouses, armed with artillery pieces and turreted machine guns. Most of them had the additional

protection of wire, ditches, mines, and outlying infantry pillboxes and had communication with supporting inland batteries by underground telephone cable.

The 3d Battalion (Lt. Col. Arthur S. Teague) had been constituted as a task force with the mission of reducing these beach fortifications. [Attached to it were a naval shore fire control party (NSFCP), a platoon of tanks from Company A, 746th Tank Battalion, Company D of the 87th Chemical (4.2) Mortar Battalion, and a platoon of Company C, 4th Engineer Combat Battalion] The method of attack followed the pattern taught at the Assault Training Center in England. Naval gunfire adjusted by the Naval Shore Fire Control Party laid down a preparation. Then tanks and 57-mm. anti-tank guns approached within 75 to 100 yards of the fort to fire point-blank, while infantrymen moved, often through waist-deep water, to the rear of the strong point under the cover of mortar fire. The enemy, however, would allow the men to come near the fort before opening up with small-arms fire, and in addition subjected the assaulting troops to artillery fire from inland batteries. The reduction of the forts thus turned out to be slow and costly.

On D Day the 3d Battalion had advanced 2,000 yards beyond Exit 3 and destroyed one fort. On D plus 1 it advanced another 2,000 yards and captured two more. As it faced the fort at Hamel de Cruttet on the evening of 7 June, it received orders to move inland as regimental reserve, since a counterattack was feared against the shattered 1st and 2d Battalions of the 22d Infantry. Colonel Teague left Company K, supported by the chemical mortar company, a machine gun platoon, an antitank platoon, and one-half of the NSFCP, to contain the strong point, and moved the remainder of the battalion inland to the vicinity of Ravenoville. That same evening, in the one gain of the day for the 22d Infantry, the battalion recrossed the inundation to capture the beach fort at Taret de Ravenoville. The fort had been shelled by the Navy, and a number of Germans had slipped out to surrender. One of them reported that many of the Germans still inside the fort wished to surrender but until this time had been prevented from doing so by their officers. On the strength of this information Colonel Teague obtained permission to move the bulk of his battalion from Ravenoville northeast across the inundated area and close in on the rear of the fort. A prisoner who was sent ahead returned with the entire garrison of eighty-two Germans. Colonel Teague and his men billeted themselves in the fort for the night. Between Taret de Ravenoville and Company K to the south three enemy strong points still held out. One of these surrendered the following day.

The Southern Flank on D Plus 1

On the southern arc of the beachhead the leading elements of the 101st Airborne Division converged on St. Come-du-Mont on D plus 1 in preparation for an attack on the bridges which span the Douve and its tributaries northwest of Carentan (Map No. 13). The enemy held stubbornly to the ground commanding the approaches to the Douve, and it was feared that, unless he was dislodged, he would bring up reinforcements over the bridges. It was here that the main effort of the 101st Division was made on D plus 1. Farther east, Captain Shettle's men of the 506th Parachute Infantry and Colonel Johnson's miscellaneous forces continued to hold their positions at the la Barquette lock and the le Port bridges.

After dark on D Day Captain Shettle's engineers had prepared the two le Port bridges for demolition, but on the morning of D plus 1 the Germans made no attempt to cross the river. At noon a flight of P-47's came overhead and Captain Shettle, with improvised panels, requested the bombing of the enemy on the opposite beach. At 1430 a dozen bombs were dropped over the bridges. Later in the afternoon about three hundred Germans were approaching Captain Shettle's position from the north. One of the patrols he sent out against them demonstrated so successfully that, overimpressed with American strength, some of the Germans began to surrender. Between 30 and 50 enemy troops were killed in the next few hours and groups of 30 and 40 came in to surrender. By the end of the day Captain Shettle had 255 prisoners. That night an enemy force made an attempt to reach the bridges from the east but was driven back by small-arms fire. The American position was still secure at the end of D plus 1.

The enemy force which Captain Shettle's patrols dealt with that afternoon turned out to be elements of the 6th Parachute Regiment. The bulk of this force attacked Colonel Johnson's group of some 250 men at the la Barquette lock that same afternoon. Colonel Johnson had improved his position the night of D Day but he was short of ammunition and still isolated. Patrols which he had sent out during the day to look for the 506th Parachute Infantry did not return. In the hope of getting a resupply of ammunition, Colonel Johnson laid out an orange panel. Shortly after dawn a plane passed over, and a drop was made at 0630, but the bundles landed in marshes covered by enemy fire and could not be retrieved.

At about 1500 Colonel Johnson saw the German troops approaching his position from the northeast. At first he was not sure whether they were friendly or hostile. They came straight through the fields and marshes and seemed headed directly for the river. Colonel Johnson's position faced south and he had to redispense his men and machine guns to meet this threat from the north. The Germans moved carelessly, bunched together without advance security. When they approached within 350 yards, all of Colonel Johnson's men, at a signal, opened fire. The Germans took cover, returned fire, and sent up a rocket signal, which shortly brought mortar and artillery fire on Johnson's men. It was difficult to spot the Germans in the clumps of tall grass, and after the fire fight had gone on for a while Colonel Johnson became worried about the expenditure of ammunition. At that time several cries of "Kamerad" from across the fields indicated that he might possibly get the whole enemy force to surrender. He gave the cease fire order and went forward with two volunteers.

As the three men walked forward carrying an orange flag, the firing on both sides stopped. But shortly it broke out again, wounding the colonel and one of his men. They crawled back 125 yards to their own lines and the fight continued. In about half an hour the German fire slackened and Colonel Johnson decided to try again. This time he and the two enlisted men were met halfway by two wounded German privates, who said that they wanted to surrender but that their officers were shooting men who talked about it. Colonel Johnson sent one man back to the German lines with the message that the Germans were to surrender in thirty minutes or be annihilated by "our superior forces." The firing was resumed at that time, but exactly thirty minutes later the first small group of Germans formed a column and came into the American lines. It was the beginning of a procession of 350 Germans which continued until after dark. At the end came the battalion commander, a lieutenant colonel, who wanted to "talk over" his surrender. About 150 Germans had been killed or wounded; the rest escaped to Carentan. Colonel Johnson's force had lost ten killed and thirty wounded.

The appearance of enemy paratroops in this area was not entirely expected. While the 91st Division was known to have two or three regiments in the Cotentin, the 6th Parachute Regiment had not been identified. It has since been learned that the bulk of the regiment occupied a reserve position just north of Periers at the time of the invasion. But captured prisoners revealed that one battalion had been in the Vierville area for some weeks, engaged in anti-airborne defense preparations and exercises. On D plus 1 this battalion found itself hemmed in on three sides by American paratroop forces and was moving south with no apparent plan, direction, or resolution when it encountered Colonel Johnson's and Captain Shettle's forces just north of the Douve. The Germans had a strength of well over eight hundred men. By the end of the day the bulk of the force had been captured and its defensive mission thus nullified.

Meanwhile, Colonel Johnson had not abandoned the plan to reach the Douve bridges along the Carentan causeway and had been trying to get Colonel Ballard's force at Bse. Addeville to join him. But Colonel Ballard was still engaged and could not shake free at that time nor on the following day. Consequently Colonel Johnson's men remained in position at la Barquette during all of 8 June.

Communications had been so poor on D Day that only Colonel Johnson knew definitely that the bridges had not been blown. General Taylor and General McAuliffe, lacking that information, conferred with Colonel Sink of the 506th Parachute Infantry at the latter's command post at Culoville late in the afternoon of D Day and decided to send the 506th on a reconnaissance in force southward. It was to pass through Vierville and Beaumont and

then continue southward to the west of Colonel Ballard's 2d Battalion of the 501st Parachute Infantry, which had been engaged at les Droueries throughout D Day.

The 1st Battalion of the 506th Parachute Infantry led the regimental column on the morning of D plus 1 down the road from Culoville to Vierville. From the beginning the column was harassed by snipers firing from the front and the flanks. Finally, at Vierville it stopped long enough to clear the houses. From that town Colonel Sink and General Taylor saw several hundred men moving about in the open field some 2,000 yards to the southeast. It was the battalion of German parachutists which later attacked the rear of Captain Shettle's and Colonel Johnson's positions on the Douve. Bunched as they were, the Germans would have made an excellent target, but Colonel Sink hesitated because he was not sure they were enemy. A patrol was sent out to investigate, but before it reported back the column was out of sight.

At Vierville, Colonel Sink's column split. The 1st Battalion proceeded down the highway toward Beaumont, while the 2d Battalion swung off to the left with the intention of advancing on Angoville-au-Plain. Both battalions were pinned down by machine-gun and small-arms fire soon after they came out of Vierville. They moved on again when a platoon of medium tanks (Company A, 746th Tank Battalion) came up to support them. The 1st Battalion was harassed on its right flank by Germans who moved behind trees and hedges along the ridge which paralleled the road, but it finally fought its way into Beaumont. There it reorganized, but further advance was blocked by two enemy counterattacks, repulsed only after hard fighting.

Thereupon Company D and a platoon of light tanks, which had been detached from the 2d Battalion, and ordered to join the 1st, crossed to the latter's right flank. With this new power the battalion pushed ahead to the crossroads 500 yards east of St. Come-du-Mont. Company D went on to the junction of the two highways south of St. Come-du-Mont, where it ran into a convoy of eight American trucks loaded with quartermaster supplies, which had inadvertently come through German-held St. Come-du-Mont. In the meantime the 1st Battalion moved back to the small forces of Colonel Johnson and Captain Shettle. But the danger of a major counterattack had not passed. In the initial assault plans the enemy had been judged capable of a major counterattack on D plus 2. So far as the Americans knew at the close of D plus 1, the way was still open for such an attack to develop on 8 June. The southwest corner of the bridgehead remained unsealed. It was conceivable that German reinforcements might push up from Carentan and overwhelm the weak American forces clinging to the rim of the Douve marshes. As a matter of fact, on 7 June Field Marshal Rommel had taken the first step toward committing reinforcements when, convinced at last that there was no danger of Allied landings in Brittany, he ordered the 77th Division, which had assembled there, to move to St. Lo.

Furthermore, the situation at the beaches, where the American build-up was proceeding far from smoothly, was not reassuring. Enemy guns, some in the coastal forts and some probably mobile, continued to harass the unloading, which had already fallen behind schedule. Admiral Moon found that the congestion of shipping was causing a constant loss of time, and considered delaying the convoys. The transshipment of materiel by small craft was so slow that Brig. Gen. Williston B. Palmer, Corps artillery commander, urged the Admiral to beach LST's at full tide to permit the landing of vehicles directly. On D plus 1, 10,735 men, 1,469 vehicles, and 807 tons of supplies were landed at Utah Beach, making a total of 32,000 men, 3,200 vehicles, and 2,500 tons of supplies for the first two days. But the schedules had called for the landing of 39,722 men, 4,732 vehicles, and 7,000 tons of supplies.

The continued failure of the 82d Airborne Division to establish a bridgehead over the Merderet and the 4th Division's slow progress toward its D-Day objective on the northern flank forced the first modification in the VII Corps plan. It was originally planned that part of the 4th Division would cross the Merderet and that the entire division would then attack northward astride the river, capture Valognes, and continue northwest to Cherbourg. The 90th Division, part of which started landing on D Day, was to pass through elements of the 4th east of Montebourg and drive toward Cherbourg on the right. The implementation of these plans was predicated on the rapid attainment of the D-Day objectives.

But both the 82d and the 4th had made only slow progress during the first two days. Rather than disengage the 4th Division, which had become involved along the entire northern flank, General Collins on 7 June ordered the 4th to continue its northward attack east of the Merderet and to seize the coastal forts and the line Quineville-Montebourg Station. Elements of the 82d Airborne Division (the 505th Parachute Infantry reinforced with the 2d Battalion of the 325th Glider Infantry) were to take over the left flank of this northward drive and seize the line Montebourg Station-le Ham. The remainder of the 82d was to continue on its D-Day mission of establishing a bridgehead over the Merderet. The 90th Division was given another mission a few days later. In the southern sector the 101st Airborne Division was to continue its mission of securing the southern flank of the beachhead by seizing the causeway approaches to Carentan. These tasks were to require the major efforts of VII Corps for nearly a week.

FROM ANOTHER SOURCE:

UNIT	COMMANDING OFFICER
1st Engineer Special Brigade	General James E. Wharton
4th Engineer Combat Battalion	Lt Col. William H. Ragland
49th Engineer Combat Battalion	
237th Engineer Combat Battalion	Major Herschel E. Linn
B/299th Engineer Combat Battalion	
531st Engineer Shore Regiment	
1/531st	Lt Col. Robert May
2/531st	Lt Col. Stephen Force