

APPENDIX #1

CAPTURE OF CHERBOURG AND CONTENTIN PENINSULA BY VII CORPS, U.S. ARMY (6 June to 1 July 1944)

The Initial Landings and Establishment of a Beachhead by 4th Infantry Division, 82nd and 101st Airborne Divisions. (6-7 June)

In the assault on the European Continent, which opened on the 6th of June, the US VII Corps, under the command of Major Gen. J. Lawton Collins, was assigned a position on the extreme Allied right. It had the mission of securing a beachhead on the Cotentin Peninsula, making contact with the US V Corps on its left, and seizing the major port of Cherbourg for use as a base for future operations.

Chief among the considerations which influenced the detailed plans of the Corps were the beach defense proper; the inundated area immediately behind the beach; the River Douve, and the Prairies Marecaugeuses, which would serve as a defensive barrier on the South during the operations against Cherbourg; and the roads and bridges in the vicinity of Carentan which it was essential to control in order to insure a junction with the V Corps.

Considerations of security prevented any air preparation, beyond the limited amount, which could be ascribed to routine coastal bombing, until the night of 5-6 June. That night heavy attacks were launched against key coastal batteries and other defenses in the area, and during a planned pause in the early morning bombing missions large flights of transport planes brought in major elements of two US Airborne Divisions. The 101st Airborne Division, commanded by Brig. Gen. Maxwell D. Taylor, began dropping southeast of Ste Mere Eglise at about 0130 with the mission of seizing the western exits of the beach between St Martin de Varreville and Pouppeville to facilitate the expansion of the beachhead by the 4th Infantry Division. These airborne troops were also charged with securing the lock at la Barquette which controlled inundations along the Douve River, destroying certain of the bridges northwest of Carentan, seizing others to the northeast and securing a bridgehead across the Douve northeast of Carentan.

When the units of the 101st Airborne Division in the coastal area were relieved by the 4th Infantry Division it was to seize Carentan, make contact with the V Corps via the seized bridges, and thereafter protect the southern flank of the VII Corps east of the Merderet River.

The 82nd Airborne Division, Major Gen. Matthew B. Ridgway, commanding, which began dropping astride the Merderet at about 0230, was charged with the seizure of the crossings over the Merderet River, the security of the northern and western flanks of the 101st Airborne Division, the seizure of Ste Mere Eglise, and the destruction of crossings of the Douve South and Southeast of Pont l'Abbe.

After relief by the 4th Division in the area east of the Merderet the 82nd was to destroy the bridges over the Douve east of Nehou and St Sauveur le Vicomte and protect the southern and western flanks of the VII Corps along the line of the Douve River west of the Merderet. Both the airborne divisions were therefore to destroy crossings of the Douve in order that the river and the inundated areas along its banks might serve as an additional protection to the south flank of the Corps.

The 101st Airborne Division had considerable difficulty because of the size of the area over which it was dropped, but took St Martin de Varreville and Pouppeville promptly and set about its other

tasks. Glider elements of the command, which landed at dawn and dusk of the 6th suffered heavily because of crash landings and landing in enemy-dominated area, but managed nevertheless to do yeoman service.

Although normal communications were not established between the 82nd Airborne Division and Corps Headquarters until 0930 of June 7 because of damage to radio equipment and the widespread drop of troops, that division had succeeded in securing the north and west flanks of the 101st against heavy pressure, taking Ste Mere Eglise and establishing contact with elements of the 8th Infantry in the vicinity of the town.

It was later learned from several sources that Major General Falley, Commanding General of the 91st German Infantry Division was killed by our airborne personnel on the first day.

The landing of the strongly reinforced 4th Division, Major General Raymond O. Barton commanding, were preceded by a heavy naval bombardment on prearranged targets; the two key Iles St Marcouf near the landing area were occupied by detachments of the 4th Cavalry Group (Col. Joseph M. Tully); and numerous specially equipped landing craft provided fire support. Some thirty amphibious tanks of the 70th Tank Battalion were launched against the beach into waves from 5000 yards at sea. Of these only one failed to reach shore; the remainder were able to give valuable close support to the assault Regiment.

The 1st and 2nd Battalions of the 8th Infantry (Colonel James A. Van Fleet) landed at about 0630 and rapidly cleared the way for the further build up of the 4th Division and 1st Engineer Special Brigade, charged with the vital organization of the beach. During D-Day the 4th passed the inundations, relieved the troops of the 101st at St Martin de Varreville and Pouppeville and generally expanded the beachhead. During the afternoon the enemy kept up a sporadic fire on the beach with guns whose positions could not immediately be located. Some damage was done to landing craft left to "dry out" and to waterlogged trucks.

By the end of the following day (7 June) the chief offending guns had been taken out by our artillery. The highlight of the day's operations was the drive of the 8th Infantry of the 4th Division into Ste Mere Eglise and its firm junction in that area with the 82nd Airborne Division. Elsewhere on D+1 our troops, in spite of heavy counterattack, had passed Ravenoville on the north and almost reached Azeville farther west. For several days, guns from the north flank and from the south side of the Douve estuary fired harassing rounds onto the beach; the beachhead, however, could now be considered as established and consolidated.

Extension of Beachhead West of the Merderet and Securing of a Link with V Corps. (8-12 June)

The push in the north and northwest by the 4th Division and its attached troops on the Quineville-le Mont de Lestre ridge continued for a week.

Montebourg was entered on June 11 by elements of the 8th Infantry, but being unable to hold it with the forces then available for the purpose, the Division partially enveloped the town, separate companies taking up a perimeter defense which was proof against effective penetration by the enemy forces, but which could not prevent infiltration at will. Supplies were brought into such posts under armed guard during this phase of operations.

Farther east near the coast progress was slower because of the fixed fortifications, particularly between Crisbecq and Quineville, which were finally bypassed to the West. On the 12th the 39th RCT (Colonel Harry A. Flint) of the 9th Division entered Crisbecq and Danguerville, and as these and other inland strong points fell, stubborn coastal centers of resistance were cut off and reduced. This coastal drive ended on 14 June with the capture of Quineville and a line running roughly along the road to Montebourg. The capture of Quineville following a heavy aerial bombardment, was important for the security of the beach, because guns in this area had been harassing landing operations since D-Day.

In the south the 101st Division succeeded in clearing the enemy from its zone east and north of the Douve River and the Canal du Port de Carentan and seized the dam at La Barquette. The main bridge north of Carentan was blown by the enemy. However, by pushing troops south across the river the Division enveloped Carentan on the west on the 10th and sent patrols east to make contact with patrols of the V Corps at Les Veys. Carentan itself was taken at 0820 on the 12th, following a night of shelling and a succession of brilliant river crossings by the 327th Glider Infantry (Colonel Harper), and 501st Parachute Infantry (Colonel Johnson), made on three sides of the city. The enemy delivered a strong counterattack on Carentan the next day and temporarily reoccupied the city; later in the day, however, the town was cleared out again and with the aid of an armored combat command (Col. John H. Collier), from the V Corps, a line was established about 1000 yards to the south.

Further west the 82nd Division, originally the only one between the 101st and the 4th, pushed across the Merderet on 10 June on one of the toughest and most daring attacks of the campaign. Union was thus established with elements of the Division, which had been isolated west of the Merderet since D-Day. On the following day the 82nd Division captured le Ham, which was turned over to the 90th Division to permit the concentration of the 82nd west of the Merderet.

On 10 June the 90th Division, Brig. Gen. Jay W. MacKelvie, committed for the first time, passed through the bridgehead established by the 82nd west of the Merderet with the objective of securing the Douve River between Terre de Beauval and St Sauveur le Vicomte. It also relieved elements of the 82nd Airborne northeast of the Merderet in the le Ham area. The immediate objective of the 90th was the high ground north of Pont l'Abbe extending to Gourbesville. Stiff opposition was encountered and counterattacks received, particularly south of Gourbesville. The Division persisted in its attack and occupied Pont l'Abbe on 12 June, but was unable to seize Gourbesville.

The 12th roughly marks the end of the second phase of the invasion for by that date it was clear that the period during which a crisis might be expected was past. When the assault had begun on the 6th of June the enemy forces on the peninsula consisted mainly of 3 Infantry Divisions -- the 709th, 91st, and 243rd. Making their appearance as the campaign progressed were the 77th Infantry Division, the 17th SS (Gotz von Berlichinger) motorized Division, a regiment of the 265th Infantry Division, the 1st and 6th Parachute Regiments, several battalions of impressed Russians and the naval garrison at Cherbourg. The assigned garrison units fought in mixed battle groups rather than in divisional formations and newly arrived units were in practically all cases committed piecemeal.

Interrogation of prisoners indicated that troops arriving on our front nearly always had great difficulty in transit, air action having decimated some units and generally disrupted systems of supply and movement schedules. Key railroad yards, such as those at St Sauveur le Vicomte and La Haye du Puits, received repeated heavy bombings as reconnaissance aircraft revealed evidence of troop movements. The Gotz von Berlichingen Division, elements of which were expected any time from the evening of D-Day on, was not finally identified on the front until the 12th. The German Air Force could operate only in small nuisance flights and those almost entirely at night in the face of overwhelming

Allied air superiority.

The Breakthrough by the 82nd Airborne and 9th Divisions of the German Position Between the Merderet and the Douve, and the Drive of the 9th Division to the West Coast. (13-18 June)

In order to prevent the arrival of any additional reinforcement of the Cherbourg defenders and likewise to forestall any orderly withdrawal of troops from the Cherbourg area the VII Corps undertook a third phase of operations designed to cut off the peninsula entirely.

The 508th Infantry (Lieut. Col. Arthur A. Maloney) of the 82nd Division, crossed the Douve east of Bezeville la Bastille on the night of 12/13 June and the following day occupied an extensive area south of the Douve. A German motor pool was captured at Baupte and contact was established with the 101st Airborne in that area.

The 9th Division, commanded by Major General Manton S. Eddy, which had commenced debarking on 10 June, was committed as a Division on the 14th when the 60th Infantry (Col. Frederick J. de Rohan) attacked in the zone between the 90th and 82nd Divisions just north of Pont l'Abbe. The Pont l'Abbe-Orglandes-Gorbesville area had already caused considerable difficulty for the 90th Division, and the 60th Infantry met an initial rebuff in the same area. However, the drive across the Peninsula began to gain momentum on the 16th. The 90th captured Le Calais just north of Gourbesville, the 60th Infantry crossed the west bank of the Douve at Ste Columbe, and the 505th Infantry (Lt. Col. William E. Ekman) of the 82nd Airborne captured St Sauveur le Vicomte, thus establishing additional bridgeheads. The 9th and the 82nd Divisions now held a front 16 miles inland from Utah Beach, and more than half way across the Peninsula.

Intelligence reports indicated that the enemy situation was rapidly deteriorating. The determined thrust of our forces had greatly demoralized the enemy troops; many units had suffered crippling losses and were being recombined into new battle groups that continued to dwindle; and a complete breakdown of supply appeared to be impending.

On the 17th the 9th Division captured an order of the German LXXXIV Corps, which gave a good indication of the enemy situation as of that time. Apparently fully realizing the power of the American drive, that Corps directed the dissolution of the enemy forces on the Peninsula into two general groups. The Helmich Group, built around the remaining elements of the 77th and 91st Divisions had the mission of making its escape to the south; the von Schlieben Group comprising what was left of the 243rd and 709th Divisions, remaining coastal defenses, and the naval garrison of Cherbourg, was ordered to fight a delaying action back to the Fortress of Cherbourg.

The 9th Division continued rapidly across the Peninsula during the 17th of June and at 2300 hours the 1st Battalion of the 47th Infantry (Col. George W. Smythe), which had driven about 12 miles southwest from the vicinity of Ste Columbe, cut the north-south coastal highway at a point about three miles south of Barneville-sur-Mer, thus closing off the Cotentin Peninsula, cutting the escaping 77th Division in half and killing its commanding general. The 9th Air Force added to the enemy's difficulties by repeatedly bombing and strafing all units from the Peninsula for two days. The 60th Infantry, following closely on the right of the 47th, reached St Jacques de Nehou on the night of the 17th. The following morning the 39th Infantry met enemy units moving south and repulsed them north of St Jacques de Nehou. The Commanding General of the VII Corps transmitted to all troops a message of congratulations received from General Montgomery.

As the VII Corps pushed to the west and then the north, responsibility for holding the defensive fronts to the south passed to the VIII Corps. The 101st Airborne Division was transferred to that Corps on 15 June, and on the 19th the buildup of that Corps was completed by transfer of the 82nd and 90th Divisions.

The Quick Northward Thrust to Isolate the Fortress Cherbourg. (19-23 June)

The speed with which the Peninsula had been closed off made possible the rapid mounting of the fourth phase, the resumption of the drive on the original goal of the VII Corps, Cherbourg. Field Order Number 2, 18 June, directed that three divisions of the Corps would attack abreast on the 19th of June, in order from right to left, 4th, 79th (Major General I. T. Wyche), and 9th. The 4th Cavalry Group was assigned the task of reconnoitering and maintaining contact between the 79th and 9th Divisions. The 4th Division was to attack at 0300 without artillery preparation to seize initially the high ground north of Montebourg. The remaining divisions were to attack at 0500. The 79th, which began coming ashore on the 14th, was to pass through the 90th and to seize the high ground west and northwest of Valognes. The 9th was to push up the west side and establish the line Reuville la Bigot-Crossaille-St-Germain le Gaillard.

The offensive progressed according to expectations on the 19th. The 4th Division initially encountered prepared defenses, which had to be cleaned out before the division could advance. The 4th occupied Montebourg at 1905 hours and passed to the northwest. The 79th passed through the 90th and pushed to the ground Northwest of Valognes, against light opposition. The 9th advanced rapidly toward the north, also meeting light resistance. Elements of the Cavalry attached to the 9th, advanced to within 4 miles of Cherbourg on the southwest.

On June 20 Valognes, the hub of the rail and road network in the northern Peninsula, which had been bypassed during the swift advance from Montebourg, was occupied by our forces, and as the enemy continued to withdraw north, all divisions closed in on the outer ring of defenses around Cherbourg. Vigorous reconnaissance on the 20th probed enemy defenses to pinpoint strong points and pillboxes along the semi-circular perimeter of fortifications some 4 miles out from the city. Patrols covered the area from Quettehou to the upper River de Saire on the right, and the vicinity of Haut Biville on the left.

That night a message was sent to the commander of the Fortress Cherbourg by all available means, pointing out the hopelessness of his situation and that of his garrison and offering a surrender which would have made possible the personal safety of the remaining garrison as well as no further damage to this French city and its harbor installations. The substance of the message was repeated by radio in German, Polish, Russian, and French to the members of the garrison.

The ultimatum expired at 0900 on the 22nd without a reply, having been received; accordingly at 1240 large flights of Allied aircraft carried out their scheduled bombardment of the defenses of the city. Following this, at 1400, there began a methodical reduction of the defenses. The infantry supported by artillery and mortar fire reduced one strong point after another. This continued through the remainder of the day and, gathering momentum on the 23rd, carried the attackers deep into the enemy defenses and netted sharply increasing numbers of prisoners.

The Capture of Cherbourg and Mop-Up of Cap de la Hague Area. (24 June-1 July)

During the next three days operations progressed slowly but systematically to where, on the 26th, Corps forces were in control of the city except for isolated points held by enemy detachments. On June 24, the 4th Division pushed through to the coast; the 79th in a coordinated attack just beyond the city took an organized strong point dominating the highest ground along its route of advance into Cherbourg. At midnight that night the 47th Infantry was subjected to a heavy artillery concentration, which contrasted sharply with the meager fire of the day; after this, however, there was relative quiet.

On the following day naval gunfire joined in with the field artillery fires and air attacks in supporting the advance into the city itself. Enemy artillery was correspondingly active from the area west of Cherbourg throughout the day, although on a scale far below that of our own. At 2145, after fighting for several hours, first on the top of Fort de Roule, a rocky stronghold built into the northern end of a hill projecting into the city from the high ground on the south, and then on its lower levels, the 79th Division closed the day by capturing this principle enemy redoubt.

Besides this progress in the city, equally important gains were being registered on the flanks of the drive, where enemy groups not trapped within the city were being pushed outward. Excellent progress was also made in the clearing of strongly entrenched enemy groups in the center of the Peninsula, which had been bypassed during the rapid advance to the outer defenses of the city; these groups were finally liquidated on 26 June.

On that day the infantry of all three divisions operated in the heart of the city, breaking all enemy resistance except that of scattered minor groups and the more important detachment which held the naval arsenal, and the forts in the outer breakwater. The Engineers were already at work clearing debris and making the necessary surveys for reconstruction of the city.

The highlight of the day, was the capture of the German Commander-in-Chief, Lieut. Gen. Dietrich von Schlieben as well as Adm. Hennecke and members of their staffs. Gen. Collins offered Gen. von Schlieben the opportunity to use U.S. Army communication facilities to transmit word to his isolated groups that their situation was hopeless and that they should now surrender to avoid further useless bloodshed. The German commander, however, refused to assume responsibility for issuing such an order, and rejected the offer.

Early in the morning of the 27th a truck equipped with a public address system was driven close to the Arsenal and other enemy groups still holding out. A clear statement of the situation, including news of the capture of the Commandant, was broadcast and an appeal made to surrender. Several hundred enemy took advantage of the offer to surrender individually and the Arsenal itself flew the white flag. The Commandant, of the Arsenal, at first refused the preferred terms, which provided very particularly for the removal of all mines. When informed that his only alternative was to return to the Arsenal and continue the struggle he readily agreed to the surrender terms. He stated that to the best of his knowledge there were no mines. During the day Major Gen. Robert Sattler deputy to Gen. von Schlieben, was also captured.

On the 28th all enemy forces east of Cherbourg, consisting of some four hundred officers and men, surrendered to the 4th Division troops. In the town itself, Ile Pelee, one of the forts in the harbor also surrendered, and the next day the remaining harbor defenses, Fort de l'Est, Fort Central and Fort de l'Ouest capitulated.

The only remaining enemy threat to the harbor was now long-range artillery fire from Cap de la Hague peninsula, which was still in the hands of the enemy forces cut off from Cherbourg. By the 30th

these forces though resisting strongly all attacks of our troops, had been pushed back by the 9th Division to a line between Beaumont-Hague and Gresville. On this day the second ranking officer of the forces, Lieut. Col. Franz Mueller, was captured; he was joined on the 1st of July by the commander himself, Lieut. Col. Gunther Keil. An indication of the morale of this unit generally was the speed with which the white flag was allegedly raised when thought that Lieut. Col. Keil had been hit by shellfire.

This was then the end of a campaign -- begun 26 days before -- in which a beachhead had been secured against all enemy threat; a first-class port had been made available to support further operations, and practically the entire garrison of a large key enemy coastal bastion captured or destroyed. A total of over 39,000 prisoners were taken by this Corps in the process, at a cost of some 2800 Americans killed; 13,500 wounded; 5700 missing and known captured. Even more important, the way had now been cleared in all respects for an unlimited drive into the enemy's vital inland areas.