

PART I

PERIERS TO LE MANS

The 90th Infantry Division passed from VIII Corps and First Army into the XV Corps and Third Army at noon 1 August 1944. At that time it was in bivouac in the vicinity of PERIERS. It had just advanced out of the CHERBOURG PENINSULA.

During the day the Division received orders to move on ST HILAIRE DU HARCOUET by motors. The initial missions were as follows: (1) To seize and secure the bridges over the SELUNE RIVER near ST HILAIRE. (2) Block the advance of enemy to the WEST on AVRANCHES, between the SELUNE RIVER and the SEE RIVER. (3) Relieve elements of VIII Corps and protect the DAMS on the SELUNE RIVER between ST HILAIRE and AVRANCHES. (4) Be prepared to move EAST, NORTHEAST, or NORTH. This mission was later expanded. (5) To capture the town of LOUVIGNE and extend the zone to the SOUTH to connect with the 79th Infantry Division operating on our right.

This move was to have had priority on the road to the SOUTH from PERIERS. Many other units, which moved on this road caused this to be a very ragged march. However, units closed with reasonable expeditiousness, and the combat elements promptly took up positions.

The movement to this position was preceded by a special force, which acted as an advance cavalry. This force, "TASK FORCE RANDOLPH", commanded by Lt. Col. George B. Randolph, composed of 90th Reconnaissance Troop, Company D 712th Tank Battalion (Lt), moved forward with all possible speed. It promptly destroyed or pushed aside the light resistance, which it met. TASK FORCE RANDOLPH was followed by a special task force commanded by Lt. Col. Christian N. Clarke, Jr. This force was composed of the 3rd Battalion 358th Infantry (Mtz) (Lt. Col. Jacob W. Bealke, Jr.), 344th FA Battalion (105 mm howitzers) (Lt. Colonel Merton Munson), 1 platoon Company A 315th Engineer Battalion, 607th TD Battalion less one platoon. Medium tanks were left in rear so as not to impede mobility of either TASK FORCE CLARKE or the main body.

The vicinity of ST HILAIRE DU HARCOUET was found to be defended and the railroad bridges had been blown. The main bridge, however, was found to be intact when leading elements reached the high ground overlooking it. The road leading to the bridge came under heavy artillery fire as the troops approached and it was decided to pass rapidly through the area by rushing the bridge from front and close flank simultaneously, and at the same time to make a wider envelopment toward the high ground on our right front. Both of these missions were launched simultaneously without reconnaissance except what could be seen from the observation post near the road. A base of fire was quickly built up and the artillery was positioned. The attack drew enemy fire, which was quickly neutralized and the town was occupied. Security forces pushed to the EAST and SOUTH and immediately began patrolling their part of the area.

[Page 1]

The attack of ST HILAIRE was characterized by aggressive action of the advance guard, which quickly organized a base of fire to support the charge on the bridge and maneuvered fast

to prevent its destruction. The platoon forming the advance party moved down the road at double-time just after crossing the River and quickly deployed as enemy machine guns opened fire on it. Light tanks, which had moved up, moved across the bridge and facilitated the reduction of the small arms fire. Although enemy high velocity weapons were firing into the zone, the tanks moved so rapidly that none were hit and the resistance ceased immediately. Their approach was defiladed to within 100 yards of the bridge. A small arms fight NORTH of the town was characterized by infantry moving forward rapidly shooting as they advanced, using walking fire. Attack had started at 1100 and by 021430 August the town was taken. The position was held during the 3rd and 4th. Mission accomplished.

The 1st Division was moving EAST along the SEE RIVER on MORTAIN. It closed in an area short of the town. Its left rear was still not secure. Our left following the 1st Division was advanced to JUVIGNY.

An additional mission was then received to move SOUTH and to capture and extend the zone to LOUVIGNE DU DESERT. This mission was accomplished with minor resistance and patrols at once started toward LANDIVY. Resistance to LANDIVY quickly withdrew and a small force was left in the town to hold it against the German's return.

On 5 August the Division was given the mission of marching on the MAYENNE RIVER in a zone, the right of which was LAVAL (exclusive to the 79th Division), to seize and secure crossing NORTH of LAVAL, within zone. It was also given a contingent mission that unless the 1st Division on our left, then at MORTAIN advanced on MAYENNE, the 90th would swing left in front of the 1st Division wherever it stopped, to capture and secure the bridges at and near MAYENNE. To accomplish these missions only one regiment of infantry was motorized. A special force was organized, called TASK FORCE WEAVER, commanded by Brigadier General William G. Weaver, Assistant Division Commander. It was composed of TASK FORCE RANDOLPH (90th Reconnaissance Troop, Company D 712th Tank Battalion (Lt) plus CT 357 (Col. William B. Barth)) remainder of tanks, a battalion of medium artillery and staff and limited amount of communications.

The 1st Division did not move forward of MORTAIN and the 90th began the advance. It was relieved of all other missions. TASK FORCE WEAVER advanced rapidly preceded by the special force of reconnaissance, light tanks and sub-group under Randolph, which reduced several roadblocks in time for the main column to keep up a continuous movement. The town of ERNEE was not defended. Resistance encountered in the woods between ERNEE and MAYENNE was rapidly pushed back and bypassed. The force arrived just WEST of the city at 1200 after having marched a distance of 37 miles. [Page 2]

Weaver found the bridge that crossed the MAYENNE RIVER at the city still intact and determined to capture it before the enemy could destroy it. He organized his force into two sections and sent Colonel William B. Barth commanding officer of the 357th Infantry, with the 2nd and 3rd Battalions of the 357th to cross the River SOUTH of the town and make the main attack on MAYENNE from the SOUTH in an attempt to secure a bridgehead. The remaining elements he dispatched under Major Edward S. Hamilton in a direct frontal attack down the road from the WEST, across the bridge and on into the town. Although Barth's effort was planned to

be the chief way of attack, Hamilton's progress forward was so rapid, that the bridge was seized and the enemy pushed to the other side of the city by the time Barth had made the crossing and could organized his men for combat. The bridge was found to have been prepared for demolition but the speed of the attack had been such that the enemy could not find time to destroy it. The TASK FORCE then occupied the city of MAYENNE and organized all around defense for the night.

The 358th and 359th Infantry Regiments had started marching on foot. The 358th, which had been in ST HILAIRE, marched on GORRON, covered a route distance of 27 miles and closed late in the afternoon. They sent reconnaissance and established a bridgehead at the blown bridge near ST GERMAIN midway between LAVAL and MAYENNE. The Engineers began to rebuild the bridge about noon the next day. The following morning, 6 August, this regiment marched on MONTSURS and arrived at the bridge before it was completed. The foot elements crossed via the DAMS and rafts. When the bridge was completed about 1745 the motor elements crossed and the regiment went into bivouac about 5 miles short of MONTSURS. The 359th, having closed on LANDIVY the preceding day, after a foot March of 22 miles, marched on ERNEE, went into bivouac in the afternoon just SOUTH of the town and was moved early in the evening farther SOUTH to the vicinity of ANDOUVILLE where it bivouacked for the night. They moved early the following morning, by truck, over a bridge NORTH of LAVAL, which had been constructed by the 106th Cavalry. They marched on LE MANS.

The following day (6 August 1944) the Division was informed that the 1st Division would relieve it of defending the bridgehead at MAYENNE. It was ordered to move the elements at MAYENNE on LE MANS by the most expeditious routes. It was decided to move the column in two echelons, one under Weaver moving on ARON-EVRON-ST SUZANNE-ST DENISE D'ORQUES-LE MANS. Infantry elements motorized under Barth were to move SOUTH thru MONTSURS-ST SUZANNE-BERNAY-LE MANS. Weaver's column preceded by Reconnaissance Troop less 1 platoon, tanks, and 1 Battalion of Infantry and 1 Artillery Battalion advanced against the town of ARON. Barth's column composed of the remainder of the 357th Infantry (reinforced by 2 platoons medium tanks) followed by a Battalion of 359th which had been moving to MAYENNE to take over the bridgehead before it was known that the 1st Division would relieve us of this mission. Weaver's force met a German force moving up with the mission to recapture MAYENNE. A battle was fought until late that evening at the town of ARON. The enemy was driven back several hundred yards. [Page 3] Barth's force rushed through MONTSURS and his leading elements reached ST SUZANNE during the evening. However, his column was caught by a small force and rear Battalion of Barth's force was cut and did not reach MONTSURS. It did brush aside the resistance and advanced early the next morning and closed up on the rear of Barth's force at ST SUZANNE. After having been relieved by the 1st Division near ARON, Weaver reversed his column. Moving SOUTH through MONTSURS he found the 359th Infantry (Commanding Officer, Colonel Robert L. Bacon) engaged with the enemy forward of the town of VAIGES.

After Weaver's column cleared, Clarke followed Barth on foot toward ST SUZANNE.

All columns had now emerged successfully and the Division was intact within its Division Zone. However, it was necessary to block all roads to the NORTH and EAST at MONTSURS

because heavy forces were reported in the woods between MAYENNE and ST SUZANNE. The 106th Cavalry had been stopped in front of EVRON. They contained an opposing force and continued their reconnaissance to the EAST. The enemy attempted to reach MONTSURS and his armored vehicles were destroyed by our roadblocks.

At ST SUZANNE, Barth encountered heavy artillery fire and a determined attack of infantry and about 15 tanks. Supported by the artillery, he drove the enemy back into the woods SOUTHEAST of the town. While his route was still under fire, he rushed his column in motors by the enemy position and past BERNAY. The head of his force arrived at the road junction short of LE MANS early the following day (8 August 44). It extended along the route well back towards ST SUZANNE. Clarke immediately closed up making a solid column along this route. A Battalion was left in the rear to cover the zone of advance from MONTSURS to the rear of Clarke's regiment.

Weaver finding Bacon already engaged in front of VAIGES, turned the column toward ST SUZANNE with the plan of bypassing the enemy at VAIGES by way of CHAMMES. At CHAMMES, however, he ran into elements of the same force, which had attempted to regain ST SUZANNE, and although the attack made progress forcing the enemy back into the woods, he found the reduction of this route would be prolonged. Leaving a small containing force, he reversed his column. Since Bacon at that time had cleared the enemy at VAIGES, he passed through Bacon and moved his motorized column on LE MANS.

Bacon was later given the task of reducing the pocket at ST SUZANNE-CHAMMES.

Successive centers of resistance were encountered by Weaver at ST JEAN SUR ERNEE, ST DENISE D'ORQUES, JOUE EN CHARNIE, CHAISSILLE, BRAINS SURE GEE, COULONS, and CHAUFFOUR NOTRE-DAME. This resistance became more intense as the advance progressed. At first it was thought the resistance was only a minor force but [Page 4] in view of the fact that approximately 1200 prisoners were captured in this area, there must have been a very considerable force defending the area. The prisoners were captured by being forced back by Weaver's attack down the main road. They ran into the columns of Barth and Clarke, who had faced in along the ST SUZANNE-BERNAY-LE MANS road, as the enemy attempted to escape to the NORTH.

When Clarke arrived, Barth immediately moved one Battalion on LE MANS via the main road. It ran into resistance just after passing the road junction. All other units were held in place by the Division Commander until later in the afternoon during the process of closing in. These troops on the NORTH were not permitted to advance but held their position in order that the two forces would not mistake their positions and shoot into each other. All possible means were used to mark their relative positions. The NORTH troops were fixed along the road and their position was sent to the SOUTH column by organic radio, artillery radio, tanks and in the final stages an artillery liaison plane was ordered to circle over the leading elements of each group and in particular over the road junction then held by Hamilton's Battalion. Barth's Battalion moving on LE MANS immediately, encountered strong roadblocks and reduced them successfully.

By 081945 August 44, the situation had clarified so that the Division Commander ordered

Clarke to proceed by a route which he had reconnoitered, to cross the River NORTH of LE MANS, to cut the roads running to the NORTH and NORTHEAST and to move on LE MANS from the NORTH, while Barth's column pushed down the road and passed through the city.

A force was left along the road to continue to pick up the prisoners as they came forward.

Shortly after midnight in the morning of August 9th patrols from Mason's Battalion (3rd Battalion 357) operating with Weaver made contact with Hamilton's Battalion (1st Battalion 357) across the road junction and the two forces were merged, the pocket reduced. Some small enemy forces were located and the area continued to receive some harassment from these forces.

Barth's advance on LE MANS was successful and early in the morning (090030B August 44) it had reached the River in the town.

Clarke moved promptly at 1945 the 8th of August and placed roadblocks along the reconnoitered route leading NORTHWEST from LE MANS. On one of these routes before the advance of his column reached it, the roadblock encountered a large German force moving out of the town. He immediately opened fire and took approximately 40 or 50 prisoners. Because of the small strength roadblock many others escaped before assistance could arrive. Clarke crossed the river during the night and by morning was astride the NORTH [Page 5] ROAD. He moved promptly toward the city. He had been preceded by elements of the 79th Infantry Division, which had entered their zone of the city from the SOUTHEAST. The 5th Armored Division had encircled the city from the SOUTH. The following morning all combat elements of the Division promptly moved through the city, took positions NORTH and EAST of the city and prepared to move to the NORTH, NORTHEAST, or EAST.

The Artillery under Brigadier General John M. Devine always kept pace. The Division Commander seldom gave a thought except when he needed it. It was always there. All missions were accomplished.

The Division had marched 140 miles in 10 days, 53 hard engagements, and numerous skirmishes. 1517 prisoners were taken in the five days during the advance from MAYENNE RIVER to the SARTHE at LE MANS. Practically all were from the pocket ST SUZANNE-VAIGES-LE MANS. Many were killed. Our killed, wounded and missing were less than 300. Many tanks, armored and other vehicles were destroyed. The force defending LE MANS was completely destroyed.

McLAIN
COMMANDING
OFFICIAL:
STILWELL
G-3 [Page 6]

PART II

LE MANS to CHAMBOIS

Battle of the open "Pocket"

As of midnight 9-10 August, the 90th Division was disposed to the North and East of LE MANS in a position of readiness for movement to the North. 79th Infantry Division, also a part of the XV Corps was South of LE MANS, the 5th Armored Division generally East of the town and the newly joined the 2nd French Armored Division was passing through the 90th Division enroute North.

At 1000 10 August, XV Corps issued an order for an advance of the Corps to the North to seize the line CARROUGES-SEES. Advance was to be made with 5th armored Division followed by the 79th Division on the right and 2nd French Armored Division followed by the 90th Division on the left. All units were immediately alerted for movement. At 101200, 90th Division issued orders for the advance in three columns on order. (1) RCT 9 motorized, followed by 357th Infantry in the right column, (2) Engineers and Artillery in the center column and (3) RCT 8 followed by the Tank Battalion in the left column. 358th Infantry was also responsible for the left flank protection of the Corps, utilizing for this purpose a reinforced motorized battalion.

At 1800 the three CTs were instructed that they would move at 110600. Meanwhile liaison was established with 2nd French Armored Division which had initiated movement to the North the previous day and was advancing rapidly against scattered resistance chiefly in the nature of roadblocks.

The Division advanced throughout the day of 11 August by bounds behind the 2nd French Armored Division and at nightfall had closed in the general area RENE-FRESNAY SUR SARTHE-ORNE RIVER. Elements of the 357 and 358th Infantrys provided protection for the crossings of the ORNE RIVER within the Division zone.

During the night of 11 August and morning of 12 August, the 5th Armored Division broke through to SEES and the 2nd French Armored Division to ALENCON, and was approaching the FORET D'ECOUVES. At 121050, Corps ordered the 90th Division to advance without delay to complete the capture of ALENCON and advance North through the FORET D'ECOUVES and secure the high ground in the vicinity of LE CERCUEIL (2802) and establish contact with the 2nd French Armored Division in the vicinity of CARROUGES. Upon receipt of this order the Division was immediately put in motion, sideslipping to the East slightly to avoid FORET DE PERSEIGNE, which was reported to contain a sizable German force.

RCT 9 moved by motors on ALENCON to relieve elements of the 2nd French Armored Division in that town and to continue to the North to final objective. RCT 7 followed in trace of RCT 9, and RCT 8 [Page 1] moved by marching in the left Division column, maintaining the left flank security. 90th Reconnaissance Troop was directed to assemble at ST PATERNE to contact Assistant Division Commander at that point for detailed instructions and to precede the 359th

Infantry screening their advance North from ALENCON. 90th Reconnaissance Troop forged ahead of the 2nd French Armored Division and made first contact with the enemy on the high ground just South of FORET D'ECOUVES. In mid-afternoon they were passed through by elements of the 2nd French Armored Division who engaged the enemy in what developed to be a comparatively stiff fight.

Since it had become apparent that the enemy was in some force in the FORET D'ECOUVES, the CG XV Corps changed the orders for the day for the 90th Division as follows:

(1) Establish ALENCON bridgehead.

(2) Do not commit the division in the FORET. Reconnaissance elements only will enter the FORET.

These changed orders were communicated to the Regiments enroute. RCT 9, which had closed on those elements of the 2nd French Armored Division, engaged at the southern edge of the FORET, was directed to occupy positions astride the roads North and Northeast out of ALENCON. RCT 7 was directed to move through ALENCON to Northwest and occupy positions from the left flank of the 359th Infantry to the SARTHE RIVER inclusive. 358th Infantry was directed to move into assembly position South of ALENCON, with 1st Battalion of that Regiment outposting the area to the West and Southwest of ALENCON generally a long continuation of the SARTHE RIVER as far Southwest as FRESNAY-SUR-SARTHE. The Division CP moved to location 1 mile South of ALENCON.

Due to the confused situation to the Northwest of ALENCON and our inability to determine exact location of French in the direction of CARROUGES, 357th Infantry occupied positions short of the assigned line. All units closed into assigned areas by 2200.

On 13 August the Division expanded and consolidated the ALENCON bridgehead. RCT 7, with 345th FA Battalion attached, moved to the Northwest and established itself on the dominating ground Southeast of CARROUGES. 3rd Battalion 358th Infantry was moved North of the SARTHE RIVER relieving the left elements in the original zone of action of RCT 7 and establishing contact with the 357th Infantry and 1st Battalion 358th Infantry which remained South of the SARTHE RIVER. The remaining Battalion, 358th Infantry, was retained as mobile reserve in vicinity of Division CP. The 357th Infantry took numerous prisoners during the day chiefly in the nature of disorganized remnants moving eastward to escape encirclement. 359th Infantry, late in the day, pushed 1 Battalion North through the FORET D'ECOUVES to block the CARROUGES-SEES road. Meanwhile, the 2nd French Armored Division and the 5th Armored Division were heavily engaged in the CARROUGES- [Page 2] ECOUCHE-ARGENTAN area and 79th Infantry Division was assembled in the vicinity of MELE-SUR-SARTHE.

Information was received early in the day that XX Corps, with 80th Infantry Division on the right, had attacked at daylight on the left of the XV Corps with an objective already occupied by XV Corps. By mid-afternoon reports were received from left flank elements of the Division that 1 motorized CT of the 80th Infantry Division was moving Northeast through the Division. Unsuccessful attempt was made to halt this unit pending reorientation. Corps was promptly

notified and the information relayed to Army. This particular unit of the 80th Infantry Division was eventually ordered to assemble North of the FORET D'ECOUVES pending return to its unit. Subsequently XX Corps was redirected to the South and East of XV Corps.

On 14 August, 90th Division was directed to mop up the FORET D'ECOUVES. This was accomplished without incident by 2 Battalions of the 359th Infantry and 1 Battalion of the 357th Infantry. At 1600, Division was alerted for move to the East on 15 August. 1 RCT was to remain to protect ALENCON bridgehead, facing West and Northwest. Upon receipt of these warning orders, all units were alerted and 357th Infantry was directed to send 1 Rifle Company to relieve the 2nd Battalion 359th Infantry in position on the CARROUGES-SEES Road. Later that night an Army directive was received by XV Corps which divided Corps into two parts. 5th Armored Division and the 79th Infantry Division were to advance to the East on 15 August with a mission of seizing bridgehead over the SEINE RIVER North of PARIS. 2nd French Armored Division was to remain in its present position, general area ECOUCHE-ARGENTAN. 90th Division was to relieve the 5th Armored Division by 151100 in the area Northeast of SEES, maintaining 1 RCT in position protecting ALENCON from the North and Northwest.

RCT 9 was given the mission of effecting this relief and moved by motor 150800 preceded by a reconnaissance detail to effect the relief. The remainder of the Division, less RCT 7 and service elements, followed RCT 8 by marching and motor and by 2100 and closed in its new area. Division CP was established 2 miles Northeast of SEES.

The dispositions of the Division as of 2200 were generally as follows: RCT 9 protecting the Division front maintained a series of roadblocks on the arc LE BOURG ST LEONARD-EXMES-CROISILLES-LE MERLERAULT. The 358th infantry less 2nd Battalion, occupied assembly area astride the SEES-NONANT LE PIN Road, vicinity of CHAILLOUE. The 2nd Battalion 358th Infantry, less Company E was at ALMENECHES while E Company had moved to the high ground just Southeast of ARGENTAN to provide infantry protection for elements of 773rd TD Battalion, which covered by fire the main road East from ARGENTAN and was interdicting the town itself. RCT 7, which had relieved the 3rd Battalion 358th Infantry, remained as a bridgehead force for ALENCON and extended from the SARTHE RIVER North to the CARROUGES- [Page 3] SEES Road. At 1800 the 357th Infantry at the earnest plea of the CG 2nd French Armored Division, moved their right flank Company westward along the CARROUGES-SEES Road into CARROUGES itself to assist the French in the protection of that town. This Company reported upon its arrival that no enemy resistance or threat existed.

During the night of 15-16 August the left flank elements of the 359th Infantry received a considerable amount of Artillery fire but reported no physical contact with the enemy. In the early morning reports were received of considerable enemy activity in the North of the FORET DE GOUFFERN and shortly after noon, A Company of the 359th Infantry, which was maintaining the roadblocks at LE BOURG ST LEONARD received a sharp attack by a superior enemy force of Infantry with Tanks and Artillery support. The weight of this attack forced A Company South and East of the town. A platoon of tanks was immediately dispatched to the site. After the first onrush, the German attack subsided and within 2 hours A Company was able to fight its way back to the southern portion of the town. At 1730, again backed by considerable artillery and a tank company, the Boche, in definitely determined battalion strength, renewed the

attack with greater fury. B Company 359th Infantry which had been in Battalion Reserve was moved up to the left of A Company to support this Company and 3rd Battalion 359th Infantry alerted for movement. Division directed the 2nd Battalion 358th Infantry to secure the FORET DE PETITE GOUFFERN and to continue to the crossroad immediately West of LE BOURG ST LEONARD. The Assistant Division Commander proceeded to LE BOURG ST LEONARD, to coordinate the elements of the two regiments. Before the reinforcements could become effective, the renewed German attack again forced A Company out of the town and threatened to envelop that Company on both flanks. Prompt and aggressive action, however, on the part of the supporting tanks and 1st Battalion Command Group neutralized the left enveloping force while the arrival of the 2nd Battalion at its appointed place secured the West flank of the 1st Battalion 359th Infantry. Heavy fighting continued until dark, and then quickly subsided. The 1st Battalion then reestablished itself within the town.

Meanwhile, elements of the VII Corps, in particular, the 3rd Armored Division had come abreast of the 357th Infantry to the West and permission was secured from XV Corps to establish CT 7 in the new Division area. CO CT 7 was directed to move 1 Battalion immediately to MARMOUVILLE prepared to relieve the 2nd Battalion 359th Infantry and to move remainder of CT 7 at dawn 17 August to the area recently occupied by 358th Infantry. Simultaneously, 358th Infantry was alerted for movement to vicinity ALMEMECHES.

To the Northeast of the Division's position lay the town of GACE on the slopes of a hill mass, which completely dominated the area to the North and Northeast. With the approval of the Army Commander, the Division had initiated plans and reconnaissance during the day for an [Page 4] attack on 17 August to secure this terrain feature. The assault was to be made by the 359th Infantry committing initially 1 Battalion. As a prelude to the attack, 358th Infantry was alerted to relieve during the night of 16-17 August those elements of 359th Infantry in the LE BOURG ST LEONARD area. These plans were never put in the execution.

At 2300 the XV Corps relinquished command of the 90th Infantry division and 2nd French Armored Division and a Provisional Corps composed of these two divisions and the 80th Infantry Division (to join later) was constituted under the command of General Gaffey, (Third Army Chief of Staff). This Corps was given the mission of attacking on order to the Northwest to seize and secure TRUN. The 90th Division was to attack to the North to seize OMMael and the high ground Northeast of CHAMBOIS, to secure a bridgehead for the passage of armor. The Division plan contemplating the main effort to be made by the 358th Infantry (less 2 Battalions) attacking on the right of 359th Infantry from an LD at EXEMES. 359th Infantry initially with 2nd Battalion 358th Infantry attached, was to complete occupation of LE BOURG ST LEONARD and to continue the attack to HILL 129 Southwest of CHAMBOIS.

At dawn 17 August the Bosch renewed his attack against A and B Companies 359th Infantry at LE BOURG ST LEONARD. It had become apparent the day before that we were faced with something different than the disorganized resistance encountered in the previous campaign, which initiated at ST HILAIRE. This was a desperate and well coordinated German force in 2 Battalion strength, fighting savagely to maintain the shoulders of the gap through which the German 7th Army was fleeing. The area around LE BOURG ST LEONARD dominated the valley to the Northwest and provided observation over the entire escape route

leading through CHAMBOIS. By 0900, 2 Battalions 358th Infantry had moved into position at EXMES in preparation for the attack in the direction of CHAMBOIS, and had relieved company C 359th Infantry, garrisoned in that area. This relieved Company was immediately set in motion westward to join up with the remainder of their Battalion engaged at LE BOURG ST LEONARD. At the same time, the 3rd Battalion 357th Infantry initiated the relief of the 2nd Battalion and L Company 359th Infantry, the relieved elements moving by motor to the vicinity of LE PIN AU HARAS. The battle at LE BOURG ST LEONARD continued throughout the day. Contact was established between the 2nd Battalion 358th Infantry and 1st Battalion 359th Infantry just South of the town, about noon. But the Boche retained control of the town proper. At one time an attempted German envelopment temporarily cut off elements of B Company who held positions in the southern portion of the town. But effective work by the attached tanks and the movements of 3rd Battalion 359th Infantry to a position generally astride of the Y east of the town eliminated this threat. [Page 5]

At 1400 the 90th Division along with the 2nd French Armored Division and the 80th Infantry Division passed to the control of V Corps and First Army. The CG V Corps after surveying the situation, altered the Corps attack plan and postponed its execution until 180800. The revised plan was in substance as follows: the two Infantry Divisions, 90th on the right and 80th Division on the left, would attack to secure the line: high ground Northeast of CHAMBOIS to ARGENTAN inclusive. The 2nd French Armored Division was to remain in position protecting the left flank of the Corps. Juncture with elements 21st Army Group was anticipated in the vicinity of CHAMBOIS. The Division order directed the attack to be launched by 359th Infantry on the right and the 358th Infantry on the left while the 357th Infantry maintained the roadblocks within its sector of responsibility. As a preliminary to the attack, the 358th Infantry less 2nd and 3rd Battalions displaced to the North edge of the FORET DE PETITE GOUFFERN. The 3rd Battalion 358th remained in the vicinity LE PIN AU HARAS. 357th Infantry moved the remainder of the regiment to vicinity of NONANT LE PIN and assumed responsibility for the roadblocks at EXMES. E Company 358th Infantry rejoined its Battalion and the entire 2nd Battalion 358th Infantry was earmarked for return to regimental control on clarification of situation at LE BOURG ST LEONARD. CO 359th Infantry was directed to secure LE BOURG ST LEONARD by the midnight to guarantee a reasonable LD for the morrow's attack.

At 1800, the Germans, under the increasing pressure from our augmented forces, withdrew slightly to the North and Northwest and the 2nd Battalion 359th Infantry was passed through the 1st Battalion to mop up the town. By midnight, the 359th Infantry had accomplished its mission and was in complete control of LE BOURG ST LEONARD.

The division attack was launched on schedule the 180800. The 3rd Battalion 359th Infantry attacking Northwest, cross-country, from an LD on the LE BOURG ST LEONARD-EXMES Road, flanked the resistance on the LE BOURG ST LEONARD Road and made excellent progress aided by remarkable observation from the LD. 2nd Battalion 359th Infantry initially held its position at LE BOURG ST LEONARD, while the first Battalion continued reorganization in an area 2 km South of LE BOURG ST LEONARD. 1st Battalion 358th Infantry attacked North on the axis MEGUILLUME-ST EUGENIE with an initial objective of the latter town. It met considerable resistance along ARGENTAN-LE BOURG ST LEONARD Road and not until midday was it able to force entry into the FORET. The 2nd Battalion 358th

Infantry, less 1 Company, which remained at the crossroads it had been occupying, moved West astride of LE BOURG ST LEONARD-ARGENTAN Road to clear that road and prepared to follow the 1st Battalion. 3rd Battalion 358th Infantry was moved by marching to the north edge of the FORET DE GOUFFERN. Throughout the day, ground and air observation reported huge columns of vehicles moving Northeast across the Division front through ST LAMBERT SUR DIVES and CHAMBOIS. All agreed that these columns were Krauts moving out of the trap. Liaison officer from the Canadians had reported, however, that his elements were in CHAMBOIS and "No Fire" line [Page 6] which excluded ST LAMBERT and CHAMBOIS to us was restated by the Canadians when a radio request was sent to them for permission to fire on these two localities. The evidence of a fight on the TRUN-CHAMBOIS Road North of ST LAMBERT SUR DIVES was conclusive evidence that no friendly troops were in or near CHAMBOIS, and the Commanding General V Corps authorized the Division to shoot into that area. This was initiated with vehemence by 11 battalions of artillery with amazing results.

The 3rd Battalion 359th Infantry continued its advance, and by a wide employment to the Northwest, cut the LE BOURG ST LEONARD-CHAMBOIS Road midway between the two towns and causing great havoc among German personnel and equipment retreating into their very arms. The 2nd Battalion moved Northwest from LE BOURG to annihilate the Boche force at FOUGY while the 1st Battalion, still in regimental reserve, moved up to replace the 2nd Battalion in the town, the control of which was the first key in the closing of the gap.

The 1st Battalion 358th Infantry made good progress towards ST EUGÈNE until stopped late in the day by an enemy group astride the road. The poor visibility in the damp, dense woods, heightened by the thick smoke from the timber set ablaze by our WP made accurate appraisal of hostile strength and dispositions and control of our forces difficult and definitely slowed the prosecution of the attack. As the Division picture unfolded, it became apparent that additional punch on the right of the Division would afford the greatest measure of success and consequently the 3rd Battalion 358th Infantry passed to Division control and was moved to the Y east of LE BOURG ST LEONARD. 1 Company of this Battalion was placed on Hill 137 to control the RJ there and to protect the right rear of the 359th Infantry.

The close of the day's fighting found the 90th Division halfway to its objectives, with sufficient reserves trying to punch through on the morrow. Artillery and the British Air had had a field day in the pocket.

V Corps ordered continuation of the attack on 19 August to assigned objectives and attached to the 90th Division, one Combat Command of the 2nd French Armored Division. The missions of the 358th and 359th Infantry remained the same, with the latter prepared to capture CHAMBOIS on order. 3rd Battalion 358th Infantry was directed to attack to the North on right of the 359th Infantry to seize the high ground Northeast of CHAMBOIS and cut the exit roads from that town. General Le Clerc, CG 2nd French Armored Division with Colonel De Langlade, whose CC was to be attached, arrived at Division Headquarters late in the evening. The mission presented for Colonel De Langlade and agreed to by his Division commander, was to attack North [Page 7] from EXMES, block the road leading East from CHAMBOIS and assist the 3rd Battalion 358th Infantry in securing its objectives; thereafter it was to protect the right flank of the Division.

3rd Battalion 358th Infantry advanced with speed on 19 August and had cut the road leading East from CHAMBOIS by midmorning. K Company was pushed aggressively onto the high ground Northeast of CHAMBOIS where it controlled the road leading Northeast from that town. It soon set an ambush and had destroyed 12 tanks in a matter of half an hour. L Company soon joined them and between them they captured and killed Krauts by the score, as they came out of CHAMBOIS. Recognizing this serious threat to their line of retreat the Boche attacked the third Battalion from both flanks and forced the right of the Battalion backward. In general, however, the Battalion stood firm and continued its work of destruction. Tanks were sent to assist this unit along with some additional TDs and this situation was restored. The German continued to counterattack until late in the evening, but was completely repulsed. The aggressive action of this Battalion was a material factor in the rapid closing of the gap and resultant wholesale destruction of the German force left in the pocket.

The 3rd Battalion 359th Infantry advanced toward Hill 129, but was initially unable to seize that Hill because of friendly fire on it by the Allied Forces to the Northwest. After a radio message to the British had secured a "No Fire" line, the 3rd Battalion was able to continue. En-route it destroyed numerous tanks and captured and killed truckloads of Infantry who thought their avenue of escape was safe. The 2nd Battalion 359th Infantry, after occupying FOUGY without resistance, was redirected on CHAMBOIS. Crossing behind the 3rd Battalion, it fought its way North to control the southern half of the town. Again friendly artillery fire from our Allies prevented complete occupation. This Battalion also created widespread damage and destruction to German personnel, vehicles and tanks. 1st Battalion 359th Infantry advanced Northwest from LE BOURG ST LEONARD along the left of the regimental zone of action, mopping up the eastern edge of the FORET DE GOUFFERN and occupying the high ground North of the FORET. 1 Composite Company of Engineers was dispatched to garrison LE BOURG ST LEONARD.

The 1st Battalion 358th Infantry advanced through the woods without opposition and captured ST EUGÉNIE. From this area it was also in a position to raise havoc among the retreating Germans. This Battalion continued the attack to the West to capture LE BON MENIL and by dark was on the high ground dominating the town but not in physical possession of it. Meanwhile the 2nd Battalion 358th Infantry had advanced through the woods to hold ST EUGÉNIE.

CCL of the 2nd French Armored Division secured OMM AEL and pushed a patrol to FREENEE on the right flank of the 3rd Battalion 358th Infantry but did not hold this ground in force. [Page 8]

3rd Battalion 357th Infantry had been moved to vicinity of Hill 137 in position to support the 3rd Battalion 358th Infantry and CO 357th Infantry was alerted to be prepared to take over the 3rd Battalion 358th Infantry for further operations in that zone. 3rd Battalion 358th Infantry was passed to control the 357th Infantry when communications were established late in the day. When second counterattack developed against the 2nd Battalion 358th Infantry, L Company 357th Infantry was moved to vicinity of LE FEL and attached to 3rd Battalion 358th Infantry.

At the close of the day's operations, the Division had substantially occupied all portions of its assigned objectives. It had captured nearly 5000 prisoners and killed a considerable but undetermined number. It had captured or destroyed hundreds of German tanks, vehicles and artillery pieces. It had made junction with the Polish Reconnaissance elements in vicinity of CHAMBOIS. The Artillery, reinforced by five (5) Corps Battalions, had plastered the escape area from dawn to dark and aided by magnificent observation, had effected wholesale destruction.

The 20th of August, the day planned for the consolidation of the Division's position developed to be one of the most momentous in the Division's history. Shortly after daylight, as the 3rd Battalion, 359th Infantry was consolidating its position on the Northwest slope of Hill 129, it was struck in the fire-covered gap between the two leading companies by a column of tanks and Infantry in halftracks. It was not in any sense an attack but rather a last desperate attempt to break out to safety on the part of the Boche. A portion of this column did break through the murderous hail of fire leveled upon it by Tanks, TDs, Artillery, AT guns and the organic weapons of the 3rd Battalion, bounced off the left of the 2nd Battalion, which further cut down its original strength, ran into L Company of the 357th Infantry which further mauled it and the 3 remaining halftracks were sniped at in passing by the Regimental Command Group of the 357th Infantry. The 2nd Battalion 359th Infantry completed the conquest of CHAMBOIS against heavy but sporadic resistance. 773rd TD Battalion moved into position to support in depth the zone of the 359th Infantry and the regimental position was consolidated. CHAMBOIS throughout the day continued to be the hotspot and veritably the coffin corner for the cornered Krauts. During the day, the Polish, in contact with 2nd Battalion 359th Infantry in CHAMBOIS were cut off from their current unit, and were resupplied by the 90th Division.

1st Battalion 358th Infantry captured LE BON MENIL while 2nd Battalion 358th Infantry mopped up FORET DE GOUFFERN.

The 3rd Battalion 358th Infantry consolidated its position Northeast of CHAMBOIS only 3rd Battalion 357th Infantry remained in supporting position behind it. 2nd Battalion 357th Infantry, motorized, was passed to Division control and was moved along [Page 9] LE BOURG ST LEONARD-ARGENTAN Road on the left flank of the 358th Infantry from which point it established contact with right regiment of the 80th Infantry Division and mopped up the FORET DE GOUFFERN along Division boundary. Subsequently it was moved in an assembly area South of 3rd Battalion 357th Infantry.

On this day the Polish in contact with the 2nd Battalion 359th Infantry and 3rd Battalion 358th Infantry linked up with their Division to the North of CHAMBOIS and the gap was closed.

The result of the operations for the day will forever stand as an imposing record. The Division maintained and improved defensive organization on assigned objectives, forming contact with 80th Infantry Division on its left and the Polish elements on its right. It withstood with negligible casualties, continuous pressure on the part of the enemy. It inflicted terrible casualties in both personnel and equipment on remnants of the 7th German Army, took 5500 prisoners, destroyed 150 tanks and a miscellany of 4000 vehicles and killed or wounded more than 4000 Germans. It resupplied and evacuated wounded and prisoners of our allies with whom

contact had been made at CHAMBOIS.

August 21 brought the end of the pocket. Throughout the day the destruction continued. It was strictly in the nature of mop-up operations as all pressure ceased and the Germans remaining, continued mass and individual surrender. Two German Field Hospitals were evacuated through our lines to continue operations under Army control.

Late that day, arrangements were made for the relief of our units by the British 50th Division.

On 22 August, the relief was initiated and completed and the Division infiltrated to assembly positions South of ARGENTAN-EXMES Road. The campaign had ended and the Division was alerted for movement to the East.

The campaign which began with the advance North from LE MANS and culminated with the juncture of American and British forces North of CHAMBOIS will forever be regarded as one of the most brilliant episodes in the Battle of France. The 90th Division, initiating the campaign in a support role, subsequently became the motivating factor in the success of the scheme. In the first 3 days the Division closely followed and in effect pushed the 2nd French Armored Division, consolidating the French gains and successfully sealing the escape route through ALENCON and through SEES. After relieving 5th Armored Division Northeast of SEES, it was not content to remain [Page 10] passive, but immediately initiated plans to rapidly close the narrowing gap. It stood firm against the repeated attempts of the Deutschland Regiment to open up LE BOURG ST LEONARD as an escape exit and beat that unit to its knees. With the control of LE BOURG ST LEONARD secured it utilized this point as a pivot and swung rapidly to the Northwest, outflanking the resistance on the LE BOURG ST LEONARD-CHAMBOIS Road, captured CHAMBOIS and the high ground to the Southwest and Northeast. From these positions, it set the greatest ambush of the war and aided by effective leadership and aggressive action by all units maintained that ambush against all counterattacks. The Division Artillery for 4 straight days capitalizing upon excellent observation, the magnificent work of its ground and air observers and the splendid organization developed in anticipation of the course of the action, delivered murderous fire on the pocket area causing untold destruction and lowering the German morale to and below the breaking point; unquestionably the Artillery was largely responsible for the resulting mass surrender.

In a period of 4 days, the Division took over 13,000 prisoners, killed or wounded 8000 Germans and destroyed 1800 horses, freeing 1000 more.

The matériel box score, based on an incomplete inventory, is as follows:

- Tanks-220
- SP Artillery Pieces-160
- Towed Artillery Pieces-700
- AA Artillery Pieces-130
- Halftrack vehicles-130
- Motor Vehicles-5000
- Wagons-2000

Areas of Ammunition in Miscellaneous Dumps of which time prevented inventory.

(Included upon these vehicles were valuable technical equipment of all descriptions, including high-powered radio and cryptographic sets, mobile ordnance shops, medical laboratories and surgical instruments, the importance of which to our technical intelligence service has not yet been completely estimated.)

If the Division had not been held back for over 24 hours in attack on CHAMBOIS the results would have undoubtedly been greater.

All this the Division accomplished as the cost of 600 casualties and a loss of 5 tanks, 2 AT guns and 6 vehicles for the entire campaign.

McLAIN
COMMANDING
OFFICIAL:
STILWELL
G-3
[Page 11]

PART III

SEES to REIMS

23 AUGUST

The Division spent this day in rehabilitation of personnel and equipment, while outposting a sector of the Corps assembly area with a minimum of force. V Corps headquarters initiated its displacement to the PARIS area to take command of the troops designated to liberate PARIS.

24 AUGUST

Division remained in assembly area continuing rehabilitation and training. At 1200, Division was alerted to send an advance party to XX Corps Headquarters in anticipation of movement to their control on or about 26 August. Representative of Division Headquarters proceeded to MILLY to make preparatory arrangements with XX Corps.

25 AUGUST

Advance party left at 1000 for XX Corps area. 166 trucks reported to the Division for this movement. Further instructions from higher headquarters indicated that Division would pass to the control of Third Army at LA HARTE BERNARD and continue movement East to an assembly area in the vicinity of FONTAINEBLEAU. The day was spent on completion of all preparations for the movement the following morning.

26 AUGUST

Division initiated movement to FONTAINBLEAU. Division with its normal attachments crossed IP at SEES at 0600. March Group I crossed IP at 0600. March Group II crossed IP at 0631. March Group III crossed IP and 1000. March Group IV crossed IP at 1203. March Group V crossed IP at 1420. March Group VI crossed IP 1550. March Group VII crossed IP at 1800. Insufficient trucks available to motorize more than 2 Combat Teams, and consequently CT 9 initiated its movement by shuttling. 2nd Battalion was moved on the 712th Tank Battalion as far as MONTMIRAL while the 3rd Battalion moved on the organic kitchen trucks. By the night, March Groups I, II, III and IV had closed in assembly area. March Group V was still enroute. March Group VI had closed in temporary assembly area West of CHÂTEAUDUN while CT 9 had closed all but the 1st Battalion in assembly area vicinity MONTMIRAIL. 1st Battalion awaiting transportation remained in original location. CT 8 (March Group II) after closing was ordered by Corps to move North across SEINE River to establish bridgehead for the Crossing at FONTAINBLEAU and MONTERAU. [Page 1]

27 AUGUST

At 0100, 90th Division received instructions to move early on 27 August to assembly position in the area MAISON-ROUGE CHENOISE-JOUY-NE-CHATEL-GASTINS leaving bridgehead force over the SEINE River crossing until relieved by XX Corps Headquarters. Division was further alerted for an attack to the Northeast late 27 August. Instructions were issued to CT 7 reinforced by the 345th Field Artillery Battalion to move by motor at 0800 to outpost Division assembly area. CO 712th Tank Battalion was ordered to assume command of force consisted of Company D of his unit, 90th Reconnaissance unit to precede CT to screen its movement. (While columns of the 7th Armored had traversed portion of this area, the extent to which it had been cleared was not known).

March Group V closed assembly area at 0330. Screening force and CT 7 initiated their movement per schedule but were considerably delayed because of change of priorities on the bridge at FONTAINBLEAU. At 1015, the Division was directed to send a force to DONNEMARIE to wipe out pocket of resistance reported in that area. 3rd Battalion 358th Infantry, which was bridgeheading MONTERAU, was designated for this task while 1 Company of 2nd Battalion was dispatched to replace them. CT 7 and 3rd Battalion 358th Infantry had accomplished their mission without incident at 1600. March Group VI closed FONTAINBLEAU at 1430. It was regassed and was redirected to move to Division assembly area. At 1645, Division directed that 1 Battalion 358th Infantry be retained as bridgehead force over the 4 crossings and the remainder of the Regiment moved to its assigned portion of assembly area. It closed these locations of 2200.

Entire Division, less 2nd and 3rd Battalion 358th Infantry, closed in assembly area at 280200. 2nd Battalion 358th Infantry was released to the Division at 272200 and was scheduled for movement to the Division area at daylight 28 August. 3rd Battalion 358th Infantry was retained at DONNEMARIE under Corps control.

28 AUGUST

Present Corps mission was the establishment of the bridgehead centered around REIMS and the seizure of crossings over the AISNE River further to the North. 7th Armored Division operating in multiple columns over the entire Corps zone initiated its movement North at 271400, to seize crossings of the MARNE and AISNE Rivers, respectively. 5th Infantry Division was to closely follow the 7th Armored Division on the right of the Corps, capture REIMS and occupy its portion of its bridgehead line. 90th Division assigned to the mission of closely following 7th Armored Division on the left of the Corps, assisted the 5th Infantry division in the capture of REIMS and finally occupied its portion of the bridgehead line. At 0300, Division field order for the execution of the Corps mission was issued to subordinate units. The plan in brief was as follows: CT 7, providing the left flank security of the Division was to move by shuttling in two columns. CT 9 on the right to move by shuttling in one column, followed by CT 8. Remainder of Division Trains to displace on order by all available routes. Units initiated their movement at 1000 and by midafternoon had closed upon the 7th Armored division. 3rd Battalion 357 Infantry crossed the [Page 2] MARNE at CHATEAU THIERRY and relieved units of the 7th Armored Division guarding the bridge thereat. CT 9 closed vicinity of DORMANS and made preliminary preparation for the construction of a bridge at that location. All units of the Division closed North of MONTMIRAIL-VIELS-MAISON by dark. Orders were issued for the continuation of the advance on 29 August.

One Combat Command of the 7th Armored Division was across the MARNE River North of CHÂTEAU THIERRY. Elements of the Armored on other routes were blocked for want of bridges. 5th Infantry Division was at the line of the MARNE with its advance temporarily stopped because of the absence of crossing sites. 9th Infantry Division on the right flank of the adjacent VII Corps, was one day's march behind.

29 AUGUST

CT 7 and 358th Infantry initiated their movement at 0730, across the MARNE River at the CHÂTEAU THIERRY-MAZY bridges, respectively. The advance of CT 9 was to be initiated upon completion by the Engineers of an infantry support bridge at DORMANS. This bridge was completed in 1430. The advance of all elements of the Division was slowed by 7th Armored columns to the front. 357th Infantry by passing the armor rolled Northward to occupy march objectives at FISMES-PONTAVERT and GUIGNICOURT on the final bridgehead line. Their march on this day was a model of aggressiveness. 358th Infantry, moved by organic transportation only, had reached their march objective vicinity of TRIGNY by nightfall. CT 9 considerably delayed by bridging activity over the MARNE, closed in vicinity of CUEUX by dark. Meanwhile 7th Armored Division reached the AISNE River on the left of the Corps zone and had partly encircled REIMS, while one CT of the 5th Infantry Division reached Southern outskirts of REIMS.

30 AUGUST

At 0200 XX Corps issued warning order for movement eastward from REIMS to secure of VERDUN and bridgehead over the MEUSE River. Advance was to be made by the 7th Armored Division followed by the 5th Infantry Division, while the 90th Infantry Division,

pending its reversion to XV Corps, was to occupy and protect the REIMS bridgehead line. CT 9 initiated movement by marching and shuttling to occupy the line NEUCHATEL-ST LOUPE and reached these positions at 1300. 358th Infantry moved to assembly area vicinity VILIER-S-FRANQRUX. Division CP displaced to FORT BRIMONT, opening there at 1500. Occupation of REIMS bridgehead was completed at 1500. At 2100, 90th Division took control of REIMS and made plans for re-disposition the following day for the occupation of the complete bridgehead line.

31 AUGUST

358th Infantry was moved by marching to a position Northeast of REIMS and occupied that portion of the bridgehead line formally in the zone of the 5th Infantry Division. The advance of the 9th Infantry Division to the Northeast covered [Page 3] the zone of the 357th Infantry and that Regiment was alerted for movement 1 September to reserve position in rear of 358th Infantry. CT 7 was placed on 2 hours alert status for movement to the East as Corps Reserve.

No definite instructions reached Division concerning reversion to XV Corps and contingent plans were laid for movement to rejoin the XX Corps. Meanwhile Division entered on a limited training and rehabilitation program

McLAIN
COMMANDING
OFFICIAL:
STILWELL
G-3
[Page 4]