

HEADQUARTERS VIII CORPS

APO 308, US ARMY,
20 JULY 1944.

SUBJECT: Report After Action Against Enemy.

TO : The Adjutant Gen., United States Army, Washington, DC

THRU : Commanding Gen., First United States Army, APO 230, U.S. Army.

1. In compliance with the letter Headquarters First United States Army, File No. 319.1/401 (C), Subject: Action Against Enemy, (C3) AR 345-105, the attached report covering the action of the VIII Corps against the forces of the German Army on the Contentin Peninsula, Normandy, France, is submitted. The report covers the period 15-30 June 44.

2. Map references are to G.S., G.S. 4250 France, Scale 1:50,000. Time is indicated in British Double Summer Time.

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The advanced echelon of Headquarters of the VIII Corps landed in FRANCE over UTAH BEACH, on the 14th and 15th of June 1944. Because of the desire of the Commanding General, FIRST UNITED STATES ARMY, to have an additional corps headquarters available on the continent as soon as possible after D-Day, and because the decision was made after the troop lists were compiled, only a skeletonized force could be phased into the lift supported by the available shipping. Consequently the headquarters echelon consisted of about one half of the personnel of the General Staff Sections, Artillery, Surgeon, Quartermaster, Signal and Engineer Sections. The exception to this was the G-3 Section, which came over with about 75% of its personnel. Accompanying the echelon was a minimum amount of personnel from the Headquarters Company and MP Company, a part of the 59th Signal Battalion and a battery of the 12th Artillery Observation Battalion. An Advance Party consisting of three officers headed by the Corps Chemical Warfare Officer preceded the advanced echelon, arriving with the 9th

Division. The work of this advance party proved invaluable in preparing for the reception of the headquarters.

Shortly after arrival of the leading elements of the headquarters, a command post was established at BLOSVILLE (T369924) and opened at 151200B. At this time the Corps became operational with the mission of protecting a portion of the South flank of the VII Corps, along the line LES FEVRES-LA MAISENTRIE-LA SABOTTERIE, while that Corps pressed its attack north towards CHERBOURG.

On the Corps front as initially established, the enemy is believed to have had the 6th Parachute Regiment, an OST Battalion, and elements of the 17th SS Panzer Grenadier Division. When the Corps took over the line across the peninsula, enemy forces included a comparatively intact 265th Division, the 77th and elements of the 91st Division, in addition to scattered smaller units.

Troops attached to the Corps initially consisted only of the 101st Airborne Division, with attachments. This division had suffered relatively heavy casualties in its dropping early on D-Day and after that in its move south securing the exits to causeways 3 and 4 from UTAH BEACH, disrupting enemy communications and destroying pockets of resistance. The division's strength at the time of its attachment to Corps was between 60 and 70 per cent of its committed strength. In the battle for CARENTAN, which was taken 12 June, it overcame organized enemy defenses along the road from STE. MERE EGLISE to CARENTAN. This road runs through inundated areas, canalizing the advance of the 101st; there were heavy engagements at each of the four main bridges north of CARENTAN. The enemy withdrew approximately a mile to the south west of CARENTAN when elements of the 101st entered the northwest part of the town. On the morning of 15 June an enemy force, which included five or six tanks, counterattacked and fought its way into the northwestern outskirts of the town before it was driven off.

For the remainder of the period as the 101st Airborne Division was assigned to the Corps, the division occupied and continued to improve defensive positions approximately two miles southwest of CARENTAN. The division front was in an arc approximately seven miles long, facing generally southwest. It was bounded on the east by the intersection of the river FAUTE [TAUTE] and the CANAL DE VIRE ET FAUTE [TAUTE] and on the west by the village of LES FEVRES. Swamps on both flanks limited the enemy's possible avenues of approach. Minefields were laid in the division defense zone, extending across the area between the swamps on either flank. These were laid mainly by the 300th Engineer Combat Battalion of the 1110th Engineer Group, which was attached to the Corps on 16 June. They consisted of deliberate minefields and double-apron fence on the most likely approaches and hasty minefields elsewhere. The area defended by the Corps at the beginning of its operations is shown on Map A.

When it became known that the enemy had some armor on our front and identifications from the 17th SS Panzer Grenadier Division were made, Combat Command "A" of the 2nd Armored Division was attached to the 101st to stiffen its

antitank defenses. It was relieved on 16 June, except for one battalion of the 66th Armored Regiment, which remained in attachment.

To the north, considerable progress was being made in the VII Corps sector. On 16 and 17 June, both the 82nd and the 9th Divisions had secured bridgeheads across the DOUVE River -- the 82nd just south of ST. SAUVEUR LE VICOMTE and the 9th to the north near STE. COLOMBE. While the 82nd took up defensive positions facing south, and the 9th sent two regimental combat teams to the west coast of the peninsula, separating the German forces. This penetration separated elements of the German 77th Division, which was attempting to escape to the south. One combat team of the 9th passed through the 82nd and crossed the DOUVE at the bridgehead established by the latter division. The 9th turned north and, with the 79th and 4th Divisions to the east started the rapid advance toward CHERBOURG.

On 19 June, the 90th Division and the 82nd Airborne Division were attached to the Corps and the mission of the Corps was expanded to cover the entire rear of the VII Corps.

The Corps now took over the defense of the line extending from the TAUTE River, south of CARENTAN, to PORTBAIL on the West Coast. The line of defense generally extending along the inundated areas of the DOUVE River and its tributaries. On 19 June, the 357th RCT of the 90th Division was moved to the line ST. LO d'OURVILLE-ST. DE PIERRE PONT. The 82nd Airborne was assigned to the sector from ST. SAUVEUR DE PIERRE PONT to BAUPTTE where its patrols contacted the 101st Airborne. On 20 June, the remainder of the 90th Division relieved the 82nd Airborne from the sector expanding from PRETOT to BAUPTTE and also took over from the Airborne Division the responsibility for the defense behind the inundated area from ST. SAUVEUR DE PIERRE PONT to the junction of the DOUVE and the estuary running through the PRAIRIES MARECAGEUSES (T228921). The disposition of the VIII Corps units as all 20 June are shown on Map B.

In order to take advantage of the confused state of the enemy caused by the penetration to the west, and to shorten the defensive line held by the VIII Corps, an attack was planned to secure the line LESSAY-LA COUTRIE. The 90th Division, making its main effort on its right was to make a double envelopment around the Hills 121 and 131. The 357th RCT (90th Division) which was on the westernmost part of the line was to take off from the line ST. LO d'OURVILLE-ST. SAUVEUR DE PIERRE PONT and meet the remainder of the division south of LA HAYE DU PUIITS. The 82nd Airborne Division was to make the secondary effort, departing from a line BOIS DE LIMORS-PRETOT and capture Hills 121 and 131 from the east. This operation would have pinched out the 82nd Airborne Division and given them a much-needed rest. The 101st Airborne was to maintain its defensive line during this attack. The date of the attack was set for the 22nd of June. On 21 June, this attack was postponed for 24 hours and, on the following day, for an indefinite period. The reason for the postponement was a severe storm which for almost 72 hours from 20-22 June prevented landing of supplies in any quantity over the beaches, reducing the Army's ammunition stock level to a point where it

was not considered adequate to support both the attack on CHERBOURG and the VIII Corps attack.

The abandonment of this plan was a disappointment, for each day of delay in the attack to the south gave the enemy a golden opportunity to reorganize his forces, receive reinforcements from BRITTANY and prepare defensive positions in front of us.

On 26-27 June, the remainder of the forward echelon arrived, bringing with it the much-needed balance of the 59th Signal Battalion and Company A, 511th Military Police Battalion. The remainder of Headquarters and Headquarters Battery, VIII Corps Artillery, did not arrive at this time, as the ship on which this unit was being transported was damaged by a mine or torpedo, and had to put back to ENGLAND.

Operations for the remainder of the month of June consisted of maintaining the defense and the regrouping and build-up of forces to carry out the First Army plan for the next phase. This plan provided for a coordinated attack to the south with four corps abreast. The main effort of the Army was to be made on the west with the VIII Corps.

The date on which this attack could get under way depended upon the speed with which VII Corps could eliminate the decreasing enemy resistance in CHERBOURG and in the east and west tips of the peninsula. 3 July was finally settled as the date of attack. Upon the accomplishment of the CHERBOURG mission and release by VII Corps, VIII Corps was scheduled to receive the 79th and 4th Infantry Divisions, plus artillery and other supporting units. Elements of the VII Corps were well into the town of CHERBOURG on 26 June and two days later, all resistance there had ceased.

The turn-around and regrouping for the VIII Corps attack began even before the mopping up of all enemy resistance was completed. The 79th Division started its move south on 27 June and at midnight, 29 June, took over the sector previously held by the 357th Regimental Combat team of the 90th Division, on the Corps right flank. Meanwhile, the 101st Airborne Division on 27 June had been relieved by the 83rd Infantry Division of responsibility for the defense of the area on the corps left flank, southwest of CARENTAN, and had moved to an assembly area near ST. SAUVEUR LE VICOMTE. Upon the closing of the 79th Division in its new area, the 101st Division on 29 June was relieved from VIII Corps control and moved to the vicinity of CHERBOURG in First Army reserve. The 357th RCT moved across the 82nd Airborne Division area and into the 90th Division sector. In place of the 4th Division, the 8th Division was assigned to the Corps. This division was expected to arrive over the beaches on 3 July and upon arrival would go into Corps Reserve in the vicinity of MONTEBOURG.

At 1500, on 28 June, the Corps CP was moved from BLOSVILLE to the vicinity of LES HANTES VENTS (T 223979), north of ST. SAUVEUR LE VICOMTE.

At the close of the period, 30 June, the dispositions of the core were as shown on Map C.

Conduct of 82nd and 101st Airborne Divisions -- it has not been my observation or pleasure before to see in action American organizations which measure up to the fighting efficiency of the 82nd and 101th Airborne Divisions. These units are officered by young men imbued with the offensive spirit and possessed with high qualities of leadership. The enlisted personnel are well-trained and conduct themselves in combat with a vicious fighting attitude. While attached to the VIII Corps, these units set an example as first-class fighting troops, the extent of which may well serve as an example to which other units in the Army may strive to reach.

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