AMERICAN BLITZKRIEG: COURTNEY HODGES AND THE ADVANCE TOWARD AACHEN (AUGUST 1 – SEPTEMBER 12, 1944)

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This is an analysis of combat operations of US First Army under the command of Courtney Hodges, between August 1 and September 12, 1944, with an emphasis upon 1st, 4th, 9th, and 30th Divisions. However, other formations are necessarily discussed in order to maintain context. Indeed, many historians have failed to emphasize the complex interdependent nature of these efforts, and the traditional narrative has been distorted by inadequate situational awareness.

This study argues that the army’s operations were exceedingly difficult, resulting in approximately 40,000 casualties over a six week period. Although historians claim that the Germans were essentially defeated by the end of July, and that the Allied advance was subsequently halted by logistical difficulties, the official combat records clarify that logistical shortages were a tertiary factor, as the enemy remained capable of strong resistance.

Consequently, defensive efforts were the primary factor hindering the advance, in conjunction with deteriorating weather conditions, rugged terrain, and surprisingly severe traffic congestion. Although this was mobile warfare, military theorists have overestimated the effectiveness of mechanization and underestimated the potential for antitank defenses.

Ultimately, this study asserts that First Army was the primary American combat formation, and historians have exaggerated the importance of George Patton’s Third Army. Therefore, in order to understand an American way of war, the combat operations of First Army deserve far more attention than they have previously received. This narrative thus emphasizes forgotten battles, including: Tessy, St. Sever, Tete, Perriers, Mayenne, Ranes, Flers, Mace, Elbeuf, Mantes, Corbeil, Sevravan, Mons, Cambrai, Philippeville, Dinant, and Aubel.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

This is a study of First Army’s combat operations, under the command of Courtney Hodges, who was appointed on August 1, 1944. Hodges replaced Omar Bradley, who was promoted to the command of Twelfth Army Group. This study ends on September 12, with the army halted just kilometers from Aachen, which was not occupied until October 21. First Army thus incurred approximately forty thousand casualties, during an advance of more than six hundred kilometers. Why wasn’t Aachen readily occupied? Was this due to a failure of command, a logistical crisis, or a successful defense?

This analysis is based primarily upon the daily G3 operational reports from First Army and its subordinate formations, which are stored at the National Archives in Maryland. Additional primary sources include the official unit histories, the First Army diary, Twelfth Army Group’s daily situation map, various memoirs, and material archived at the Military History Institute in Pennsylvania and the Combined Arms Research Library in Kansas. Tragically, the operational reports are steadily deteriorating and quite literally falling apart. It is thus my sincere hope that this research will convince someone that these records have significant value, and that funds should be allocated so that they can be preserved.

Beginning on July 25th, First Army began advancing, moving south from St. Lo toward Vire, Villedieu, and Mortain. Subsequently, they continued toward Mace and Mayenne, and then northeast toward Paris, Rouen, and Melun. Afterwards, they proceeded through Soissons, Cambrai, and St. Quentin, crossing the Belgian border between Tournai and Hirson. Finally, they moved east and occupied positions between Hasselt and Aachen, extending further south into Luxembourg.
This advance was continuously opposed by German Seventh Armee, which was reinforced by elements of First Armee, Fifteenth Armee, and Fifth Panzer Armee. Over a period of six weeks, the fifteen divisions of First Army would thus engage more than forty divisions, including: 47th, 48th, 49th, 84th, 89th, 91st, 176th, 243rd, 266th, 275th, 276th, 277th, 325th, 326th, 331st, 343rd, 344th, 347th, 348th, 352nd, 353rd, 363rd, 708th, 711th, 712th, 2nd Fj, 3rd Fj, 5th Fj, 6th Fj, 17th Lw, 18th Lw, 15th PzG, 60th PzG, 2nd Pz, 9th Pz, 21st Pz, 116th Pz, 130th PzL, 1st SS, 2nd SS, 4th SS, 7th SS, 9th SS, 10th SS, 12th SS, and 17th SS. Although these enemy formations incurred heavy casualties, their combined strength was substantial.

Organization of First Army

The emphasis here is upon four American infantry divisions: 1st, 4th, 9th, and 30th. These were the primary formations of First Army, and they also kept the most thorough records. However, this text also discusses other infantry divisions, including 2nd, 5th, 28th, 29th, 35th, 79th, 80th, and 90th. Likewise, this text emphasizes three armored divisions: 2nd, 3rd, and 5th.1

It is necessary to subdivide these divisions, as they were actually a group rather than a single entity. Therefore, the reader must understand that each infantry division contained three regiments, and each regiment contained three battalions, with a total of four companies per battalion (or twelve companies per regiment): A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I, K, L, and M. On average, 87 percent of all combat casualties were incurred by these companies, which experienced cumulative casualty rates approaching and even exceeding 100 percent.2

One should carefully consider the tremendous firepower of these formations. As the basic element of operational maneuver, each battalion contained more than eight hundred infantry. These were organized into three rifle companies per battalion, with three rifle platoons per company. Each rifle platoon contained approximately forty infantry armed with semi-automatic
rifles, plus ten grenade-launchers and three light machine-guns. Each company also had a weapons platoon and an administration group, armed with additional grenade-launchers, submachine guns, six light machine-guns, two medium machine-guns, a heavy-machine gun, five rocket-launchers, and three light mortars. Each battalion was reinforced by a weapons company, either D, H, or M, armed with grenade-launchers, eight medium machine-guns, a heavy machine-gun, six rocket-launchers, and six medium mortars. Furthermore, the battalion included a headquarters group, once again equipped with grenade-launchers, rocket-launchers, machine guns, and a platoon of three pieces of 57mm antitank artillery. Although the battalion was technically not motorized, they were assisted by twenty-two jeeps, and eighteen trucks.

There were over three thousand infantry within each regiment, which included a headquarters company, a 57mm antitank company, a 105mm cannon company, a recon platoon, and various attachments. There were thus nearly fifteen thousand troops within the division, which also included an artillery regiment, an engineering battalion, a medical battalion, a mechanized reconnaissance company, and additional detachments.

In all, armed with more than ten thousand semiautomatic rifles, a single division was also equipped with approximately two thousand grenade-launchers, a thousand light machine-guns, six hundred rocket-launchers, four hundred machine-guns, two hundred submachine-guns, more than a hundred pieces of artillery, more than a hundred mortars, and eventually two dozen flamethrowers. The division would also be assigned a thousand trucks, five hundred jeeps, two dozen boats, a dozen armored vehicles, and ten observation aircraft. Furthermore, multiple tank and tank-destroyer battalions were routinely attached to each infantry division, with six dozen tanks per tank battalion, plus additional vehicles. The tank-destroyer battalions were of varying composition, containing either self-propelled or towed antitank artillery. Ultimately, in
conjunction with the army’s overall casualties, the strength of these divisions suggests the overall severity of enemy resistance. Quite simply, it took a great deal of firepower to clear German defenses.³

As noted, by the end of August, First Army also included three armored divisions: 2⁰, 3⁰, and 5⁰. These formations were formally composed of two armored regiments, and one armored infantry regiment. However, 2⁰ and 3⁰ Armored Divisions were heavy divisions with six tank battalions, and 5⁰ Armored Division was a light formation with just three battalions. Typically, these divisions would employ informal taskforces, which were assigned to combat commands: typically either CCA or CCB, although sometimes CCR (reserve). Meanwhile, there were three cavalry groups, 4⁰, 102⁰, and 113⁰. Each group contained two squadrons, which were essentially mechanized infantry battalions, reinforced by light tanks and self-propelled artillery. In Napoleonic terms, these groups were akin to hussars, emphasizing infiltration, screening, and reconnaissance. Meanwhile, far from being knightly cuirassiers, the armored divisions operated more like dragoons, with tanks employed as horse artillery. Of course, the traditional role of heavy cavalry belonged to the air forces.⁴

First Army's ground formations were routinely shifted between four corps: 5⁰ (Leonard Gerow), 7⁰ (Joseph Collins), 15⁰ (Wade Haislip), and 19⁰ (Charles Corlett). The army was directly supported by 9⁰ Tactical Air Command (Pete Quesada). Meanwhile, First Army was part of Twelfth Army Group (Omar Bradley), operating alongside Third Army (George Patton), and these formations frequently exchanged both divisions and corps. Likewise, Twelfth Army Group was part of the United Nations Allied Expeditionary Force, operating alongside Twenty-First Army Group (Bernard Montgomery), which contained British Second Army (Miles Dempsey) and the Canadian First Army (Harry Crerar).
As these adjacent commands routinely supported one another, under the Supreme Allied Commander (Dwight Eisenhower), this text provides necessary context by discussing the general course of operations along either side of First Army. Indeed, until August 1, First Army had been part of Twenty-First Army Group, and they would be reattached on December 20. We must therefore recognize that the Allied armies were part of a fluid and dynamic structure, and they were not rigidly segmented.5

As First Army advanced, Third Army moved south through Granville and Avranches, branching west toward Brest and southeast toward Mans. Subsequently, their eastern elements occupied Orleans and Chartres, continuing northeast toward Metz, whilst the western formations besieged Brest. Meanwhile, Second Army advanced south through Aunay and Flers, east toward the Seine between Vernon and Vaudreuil, and then northeast toward Amiens and Brussels. Finally, operating between Second Army and the coast, the Canadian Army moved east from Caen toward the Seine between Rouen and Havre, continuing northeast toward Calais.

Historiographic Overview

Although a great deal has been written about the Second World War, surprisingly little is known about combat operations. Of course, there are many books about strategy and tactics, culture and genocide, weapons and technology, leadership and sacrifice. However, combat involves specific units operating at precise moments amongst obscure terrain features: roads, rivers, towns, villages, ridges, fields, factories, railroads, streams, islands, and forests. Understanding these complex events can be quite daunting, as one must not only understand questions of doctrine and administration, but one must also become familiar with the terrain.

Unfortunately, whereas historians have been able to provide detailed geographic narratives for such nineteenth-century engagements as Gettysburg and Waterloo, it has become
increasingly difficult to process the complexity of modern warfare. Consequently, the
operational history has been severely abstracted and the precise details remain surprisingly
obscure for even the professional researcher. As James Carafano has written, modern historians
have failed to “fully and systematically” analyze this subject, and it is necessary to replace the
“deficient” traditional narrative with a “disciplined” and “rigorous” study.6

A brief summary of the traditional narrative clarifies just how little information is readily
available about this subject. For example, at the most basic level, collegiate surveys tend to skip
directly from the invasion of Normandy on June 6, to the occupation of Paris on August 25, to
the German counteroffensive in Belgium on December 16. Although First Army is central to this
narrative, the formation is rarely mentioned.

Such histories typically present the war as a product of socioeconomic determinism,
during which the Germans are overwhelmed by anonymous “waves of invading troops.”
Supposedly, “the American capitalist system and the extraordinary freedoms enjoyed by
Americans create the uniquely American individualism and adaptability that produces
exceptional [combat] performance.” The American army thus defeated socialist imperialism with
wholesome American virtues, thereby creating a new global economy which was “economically
prosperous and politically resilient.” From such a perspective, there is little reason to learn the
sordid details of combat, as these distract from the inevitable victory of Anglo-American culture
and the “rational exploitation of modernity.”7

As Richard Overy stated within Why the Allies Won, “Factory for factory, the allies made
better use of their industry…” Overy referred only vaguely to an irresistible "rising tide" which
swept aside the exhausted enemy. Consequently, he did not directly mention First Army during
his discussion of the fighting in August, as the war was already won by overwhelming American
strength, epitomized by the "fast mobile columns" of George Patton’s Third Army and the endless bombardment of "innumerable" Allied aircraft. He briefly mentioned the German counteroffensive at Mortain, but simply declared that the enemy made no progress. Supposedly, the enemy was “no longer a fighting force” and therefore these combat operations were of trivial significance. Therefore, according to Overy, the campaign was not ended by heavy resistance, but because the Allies chose to halt for logistical and administrative purposes.\(^8\)

However, as Peter Mansoor has noted, “material superiority alone is an insufficient explanation” for the course of events, and historians must make a more substantial effort to understand the military as a complex organization which seeks to occupy narrowly defined objectives at specific moments in time. Organization, geography, and chronology are thus critical components of an effective narrative.\(^9\)

Unfortunately, specific details have been thoroughly neglected by many historians, who routinely seek to simplify this profoundly complex subject. Consequently, precise data is extremely difficult to find, and even harder to verify. For example, within Peter Darman’s seemingly exhaustive chronology, one learns only that elements of First Army were at Argentan on August 19, French 2\(^{nd}\) Armored Division was at Paris on August 25, and elements were at Tournai on September 3. Surprisingly, Darman didn’t even bother to include the engagement at Mortain, which began on August 7, and he only indirectly indicated the subsequent situation at Argentan. Likewise, neither Darman nor Overy acknowledged the significant engagement at Mons, which began on September 3.\(^10\)

John Keegan’s *World War II* provides more detail about German forces during this period, but barely acknowledges the existence of First Army. For example, Keegan patiently listed the enemy formations which counterattacked at Mortain, but said essentially nothing about
the defending formations. Instead, Keegan emphasized the blitzkrieg of Patton's Third Army, which supposedly began on July 25, even though Third Army did not exist until August 1. Obviously, such errors tend to inflate Patton's reputation. Subsequently, after the battle of Mortain, Keegan’s advance did not pause until halted by logistical difficulties.\(^{11}\)

Similar accounts include Thomas Zeiler’s *Annihilation*, which briefly mentions the fighting around Mortain and Falaise, after which First Army crossed the Seine and was shut down by logistical problems. This narrative wrongly places Patton at Mortain, implying that the battle was fought by Third Army. Meanwhile, Russell Weigley’s *The American Way of War* states that the Allied advance was highly mobile until halted by logistics. Likewise, Gerhard Weinberg’s *A World at Arms* simply notes that the Americans pushed through the German positions, advancing with "division after division" until halted by supply limitations. Echoing these accounts, Janusz Piekalkiewicz’s *Der Zweite Weltkrieg* states that there was a battle near Mortain, 4\(^{th}\) Division occupied Paris, and First Army advanced toward Aachen until halted by logistical *versorgungsprobleme*. Indeed, the US Army’s Chief of Military History, James Norell, stated emphatically that the advance was halted by the "tyranny of logistics." Historians have thus established a consensus that the Allies were halted by a supply crisis, whilst the defeated enemy remained incapable of significant resistance.\(^{12}\)

This traditional narrative does not gain much detail, even when one consults books which focus specifically upon operations in Western Europe, during the autumn of 1944. For example, one might examine Chester Wilmot’s *The Struggle for Europe*. This account states that First Army advanced toward Mortain during early August, shielding the advance of Third Army further west. During the subsequent battle of Mortain, 30\(^{th}\) Division made a stubborn defense, with assistance from 4\(^{th}\) Division and 3\(^{rd}\) Armored Division. A few weeks later, 4\(^{th}\) Division
occupied Paris against what Wilmot wrongly described as token resistance. Meanwhile, Wilmot acknowledged that 2nd Armored Division moved northwest toward Elbeuf, although he neglected to mention that four other divisions supported this effort: 28th, 30th, 79th, and 5th Armored. Finally, as the enemy positions were supposedly shattered, First Army advanced with apparent ease through Soissons, Mons, and Tournai, until halted by petrol shortages.\textsuperscript{13}

Likewise, one can examine \textit{Victory in the West} by Lionel Ellis. Here, the story is almost identical: First Army advanced against a "broken-ended" defense, with the enemy receiving far more attention than the Americans. Eventually, unspecified American forces defended Mortain, although the ineffective German effort was a mere "parody." Eventually, First Army resumed advancing toward Paris, and thus the campaign had been won. Curiously, the German defensive effort was described as an abject failure, and yet Ellis concluded, “There was to be much heavy fighting on the way.” How exactly was a shattered and demoralized enemy able to somehow continue the war? As Ellis explained, logistics was the controlling factor.\textsuperscript{14}

The general theme here is really quite simple. During August, the Allies advanced against relatively insignificant resistance. There was some scattered fighting, but the German situation only worsened and the Allies gained momentum. In September, almost inexplicably, the advance was suddenly halted. Shortly thereafter, heavy fighting spread across the entire front, and the advance remained firmly halted for several months, after which the Germans began advancing. However, this paradoxical ending poses an obvious question: How could an unstoppable advance falter so miserably?

Since we supposedly know that the Germans were defeated and incapable of resistance, the traditional conclusion has been that a logistical crisis delayed the advance. Somehow, this brief pause allowed the enemy to miraculously improve their defensive capabilities. How could
this be? Indeed, since German armaments production was fifty percent higher in 1944 than in 1942, despite strategic bombing, the apparent conclusion is that hundreds of factories simultaneously finished production at the precise moment that the advance was delayed. Consequently, whole divisions materialized out of thin air! Obviously, this reductio ad absurdum isn’t rational, and we must look for an additional factor. Is it possible that the perception of success in July and August was actually due to a lack of awareness that the enemy had dramatically increased their economic output? If so, this would suggest that Germany was capable of sustaining substantial resistance for much longer than anyone had anticipated.15

If this hypothesis is true, then First Army must have experienced surprisingly heavy resistance. Unfortunately, employing secondary sources, there is very little one can learn about First Army or the strength of German resistance. Of course, there are a few specialty texts. For example, Anthony Tucker-Jones has written *Falaise: The Flawed Victory*, but this work primarily emphasizes the German experience and barely mentions First Army. Ultimately, Tucker-Jones portrayed an enemy which was completely defeated and largely ineffectual. Is this an accurate portrayal, or is this simply how the demoralized enemy saw themselves? Meanwhile, David Hogan has written *A Command Post at War*. However, this detailed narrative emphasizes First Army’s headquarters from an administrative perspective, such that combat operations are necessarily abstracted. Ultimately, this text emphasizes the exponential complexity of First Army’s administrative effort, but provides little explanation of the operational situation.

The best secondary source, which explicitly discusses First Army’s combat operations, is Mark Reardon’s *Victory at Mortain*. However, Reardon only described a portion of First Army’s southern flank, during a period lasting just a few days. Nevertheless, this is an excellent work, which acknowledges that First Army's advance had not "unhinged" the German defensive line.
Indeed, whereas historians have emphasized the successful Allied advance, very little attention has been paid to the enemy’s equally successful defensive effort. Unfortunately, as Reardon states, this subject has thus been overlooked and there are distressingly few books which explicitly describe these combat operations.16

One is thus forced to utilize the official histories, of which the only one readily available is Martin Blumenson’s *Breakout and Pursuit*, written more than fifty years ago. However, Blumenson’s narrative begins in July of 1944, and he subsequently emphasizes Third Army, such that less than a quarter of the text is relevant here. Ultimately, Blumenson wrote a strategic overview, which provides only a generalized discussion of combat operations. With regard to First Army, Blumenson essentially stated that the "unrealistic" German defenses were "ripped" open by the "magnificent" advance. Such descriptive phrases appear authoritative, but they are not grounded in factual detail. Blumenson wrongly echoed the views of wartime correspondents, rather than those of First Army's officers.17

Although Blumenson’s account is considered to be a definitive work, it only provides a cursory overview of these combat operations. For example, Blumenson summarized the efforts of 4th Division, between August 1 and August 5, employing merely five hundred words. Of course, this is incredibly detailed when compared with other texts, which typically fail to provide any concrete details whatsoever. For example, John McManus vaguely summarized this same effort within *The Americans at Normandy*, “It took the Yanks three days to slug their way south… The advance was steady but slow… The tanks shot up anything in front of them. Units captured high ground… as quickly as possible…. American firepower blasted St. Pois…”18

Unfortunately, neither author wrote about the failed advance toward Panier and Etoile, nor did they mention the heavy counterattack at Menardiere, or the sharp ambush at Lanier. They
thus ignored the struggles for St. Cecile, 213, 290, and 329. Although Blumenson briefly discussed the envelopment of St. Pois, noting the importance of 211, he neglected the ambush at Coulouvray and the near disaster on 232. By ignoring such details, both authors have taken a complex operation and wrongly portrayed it as a relatively simple effort.

Furthermore, both authors failed to emphasize the severe intensity of German resistance. Indeed, for McManus, his primary source was not combat records, but instead the memoir of George Wilson, who commanded a platoon within 22nd Regiment’s E-Company. However, this formation was in reserve, and Wilson explicitly stated, “We missed the fighting…” Meanwhile, although Blumenson acknowledged resistance, this statement is overshadowed by a celebratory theme which emphasizes a rapid advance and a flanking maneuver conducted “without firing a shot.” In contrast, First Army's records state that veteran formations were “beaten down” by the “most devastating” defensive fire.19

MacManus ended his account by describing the troops of 4th Division drinking apple cider and relaxing “to their heart’s content.” Meanwhile, Blumenson concluded by triumphantly stating that 8th Regiment was ready to repel a counterattack on August 5. However, considering that the enemy overran the positions of 1st Battalion, it seems clear that this exhausted regiment was not ready. Nevertheless, Blumenson continued with his victorious motif, claiming that the thousands of shells fired that morning were used to hasten the German retreat, when they were actually required to halt an aggressive enemy advance. Indeed, the staff of First Army specifically identified this incident as an ominous indicator that the Germans were not withdrawing.20

By routinely emphasizing a victorious motif within their narratives, many historians have thus failed to convey the grim reality of an extremely unstable situation. In order to properly
understand such combat, one must ultimately consider whether war is a heroic test of manhood and patriotic vigor, or is it an almost mathematical exercise in the efficient application of force against measurable resistance? In other words, is generalship more like football or chess? Are soldiers truly an "army of one," or are they necessarily subordinated to an overarching and merciless plan of operations? Although we want war to be a dramatic personal struggle, within which the individual triumphs amidst fiery chaos, is this really the truth?

Unfortunately, as Adrian Lewis has noted, Americans have come to see football and capitalism as indicative of warfare, within which competitive individual attributes are supposedly the key to personal success. However, as Lewis also noted, there is a significant gap between reality and this idealized depiction. Indeed, in both sports and economics, teamwork is arguably far more important than any individual action.21

Nevertheless, coming from what one British historian has described as a "juvenile" culture which glibly insists upon the heroic importance of the individual, American historians routinely ignore difficult details, preferring to unnecessarily dramatize their personalized and oversimplified narratives. Particularly, when compared with their British peers, Americans are thus extremely anecdotal and their writing exhibits an almost childish "longing for adventure." Such authors seek to entertain their audience with the glory of war, and they invariably avoid complex data which suggests the difficult reality of mass attrition. As the official history of 19th Corps states, these combat operations appear as if seen through a "kaleidoscope," and they are poorly understood because “the public mind… wants the ultimate simplification.” Ultimately, such efforts produce a patriotic myth, within which the war is merely a dramatic background, rather than an object of rigorous incremental study.22
Because of this tendency to embrace generalizations, Lewis correctly observed that Americans routinely confuse concepts such as mobility and firepower, with genuine achievements which actually fulfill battlefield objectives. Indeed, when one speaks of specific geographic objectives, suddenly the narrative of the campaign becomes less rapid, and the fighting appears incredibly violent. As Joseph Balkoski has thus stated, “Combat for American soldiers in World War II was far harsher than most people realize…”

Tragically, with limited knowledge, most Americans remain unable to fathom the sheer magnitude of this conflict, and they fail to understand that even a relatively easy phase of the war was actually quite difficult. Of course, part of the problem has been that there is no WWII memorial comparable to that for the Vietnam War, such that the average person has never considered just how truly momentous this global conflict was. However, an equally pressing problem is that American historians have simply failed to examine their own combat records, and likewise the populace has failed to maintain personal family histories. Consequently, as a culture, Americans have developed a grim view of the war in Vietnam, but they retain an almost nostalgic yearning for the 'good' Second World War.

Perhaps the most influential work on this war has been Steven Spielberg’s film Saving Private Ryan. The average American was astonished by the violent scenes of carnage, which raged for a half hour at the start and end of the film. However, within two hours, the cavalry arrived, the objective was secured, and the enemy was soundly defeated. Most importantly, Private Ryan was not only rescued, but he was also taught a valuable lesson about personal responsibility and what it means to be a man. Far from an apocalyptic tragedy, the war is thus portrayed as a coming of age experience.
As shown by Spielberg’s idealistic conclusion, the American narrative of Normandy ends quite suddenly with the dramatic advance of tanks and fighter-bombers, followed by a brilliant pursuit of the routed enemy. Likewise, within Franklin Schaffner’s *Patton*, this phase of the war is presented with scenes of cheering underscored by victorious music. For Americans, the Cobra offensive which began on July 25 is emphatically a great success, with motorized American troops roaring past grateful civilians. There is thus little awareness that the enemy maintained heavy resistance.

**The Gesamtschlacht**

Although this is not the place to discuss the events of July, it is readily apparent that the German line was not broken on August 1. If it had previously been broken, it was thus fixed very quickly. Indeed, at the start of August, Blumenson acknowledged that First Army “seemed to be standing still.” Consequently, there had not been a decisive strategic breakthrough, despite claims to the contrary. By August 5, the situation was actually deteriorating, and the troops were exhibiting extreme battle weariness. Subsequently, although the enemy had withdrawn, pulling their flank southeast from Avranches toward Mortain, they suddenly lunged forward with one of the most powerful counteroffensives of the war. That’s just not something a defeated army is capable of doing.²⁴

Although contemporary journalists described the pursuit of a doubly and then triply defeated enemy, whilst patriotic historians have portrayed the campaign almost as a parade, the Germans repeatedly demonstrated considerable defensive capability. Although they withdrew, they did so slowly, stubbornly, and tenaciously, these being the very words used by the troops of First Army. They thus described their enemy as pugnacious, determined, and fierce. Repeatedly pinned down under heavy fire, there was almost no sense of pursuit. Whenever the advance did
gain momentum, the Germans were consistently able to halt, delay, ambush, and disrupt progress. This campaign was thus like a chess game, where one player is clearly losing, and yet the game continues for several tense hours with surprisingly aggressive play by the defending player. Quite simply, the war was not yet over.

Bradley’s memoir acknowledges that American officers were astonished at the continuing ferocity of German resistance, which consistently defied expectations. Even after the extreme carnage of mid-August, the enemy maintained strong delaying forces. At the start of September, the supposedly panic-stricken enemy nearly overran two divisions. Along the Meuse, they mauled a third division. Afterwards, the enemy firmly halted the Allies at Antwerp, Arnhem, Aachen, Metz, and Belfort. Finally, in December, they managed a powerful counteroffensive.25

The advance toward Aachen was a war of movement, but it was also a war of attrition with all the glamor of Passchendaele or Vietnam. Advancing through fields and forests, toward villages and towns, the troops of First Army encountered harassing fire from machine-guns, snipers, artillery, and tanks. Before them, the roads were routinely blocked by minefields, whilst hidden observers directed a continual bombardment. At dusk, enemy aircraft would strafe and bomb, disappearing into the darkness before Allied fighters could respond. At night, German infantry would probe the lines, infiltrating and enveloping. Shortly after midnight, there might be a fierce counterattack, as halftracks dismounted fanatical assault troops. Elsewhere, the enemy would mysteriously disappear, only to suddenly ambush an advancing patrol.

According to Russell Weigley, this advance was notable because the Allies advanced without pause. More than anything else, it was thus a triumph of the American lifestyle, motorized and on the move. In reality, the advance was firmly halted nearly every single day,
and it was more like a mobile form of trench warfare, fought between independent taskforces struggling over every conceivable axis of advance. Ultimately, Weigley compared the American advance with that of Ulysses Grant, during the American Civil War. However, as Weigley observed, during the most active phase of Grant’s operations, he fought five clearly definable battles in nineteen days. In contrast, First Army was fighting multiple battles every single day, and they were consistently halted by enemy resistance. Consequently, the Allies fought one large sustained battle, rather than a series of independent battles.26

Although it cannot be denied that American Civil War was increasingly tending toward continuous and dispersed operations, what happened in 1944 was on a wholly different level. Indeed, whilst the origins of modern warfare can be found in campaigns from Virginia to the Crimea, the exponential expansion of modern warfare is truly revolutionary and thoroughly overwhelming. The essential difference is that the narrowly defined battlefield has been replaced by an ambiguous and extensive frontline, which increasingly extends in all directions. Unfortunately, most historians are unable or unwilling to describe this complex process. Meanwhile, publishers are unwilling to reproduce the necessary maps, whilst readers become impatient with the tedious names of obscure villages and streams.

According to First Army’s neglected official history, this campaign was “the most unconventional imaginable.” Indeed, they advanced across hundreds of kilometers, alternately facing west, east, north, and south. Like the simultaneous Soviet offensive which began in June of 1944, or the German offensives in 1914, 1918, 1941, and 1942, the Allied advance was proceeding across a vast continental frontage, facing continual resistance. This was genuine total war, what German theorists referred to as a gesamtschlacht.27
As Michael Geyer has explained, “The gesamtschlacht combined diverse battlefields and partial battles into an integral operation, in which military actions no longer consisted of maneuvers that narrowed down the space of an operation to an actual battlefield and [no longer] culminated in a final and decisive battle.” Consequently, rather than engaging in pitched battles, as historians typically suggest when they talk of the battle of Mortain or the battle of Falaise, the Allied armies instead experienced fluid combat operations which involved “many possible points of concentration.”

Courtney Hodges and George Patton

The initial inspiration for this research was a brief biography of Hodges, composed by Stephan Wishnevsky. Browsing the Library of Congress, Wishnevsky was surprised that nobody had yet written a biography about this general, who commanded the primary American combat formation during World War II, and subsequently remained in command until 1949. Indeed, Wishnevsky could locate only a single unpublished thesis, within which Benjamin Miller observed that Hodges was distinguished and yet largely forgotten. As Wishnevsky correctly surmised, this neglect has been a major historic oversight.

In contrast, George Patton has received the adulation of millions for his supposedly brilliant command of Third Army. Carlo D’Este has even written a biography subtitled: *A Genius for War*. Why has so much attention been given to this individual? In the opinion of Belton Cooper, who served with First Army’s 3rd Armored Division, the answer to this question can be summarized in a single word: flamboyance. Whereas Hodges never sought publicity, Patton went out of his way to attract attention, and he thus became the legendary hero upon which Americans have based their mythological narrative.
Fortunately, Patton’s undeserved reputation is increasingly being discredited. As Harry Yeide has noted, Patton’s importance has been grossly exaggerated and lacks validity. Yeide thus stated emphatically that Patton was merely "above average", competent but nothing more. Likewise, John English has observed that Patton’s legend has "eclipsed reality", which is unfair to the memory of his peers. Meanwhile, according to John Rickard, Patton struggled to accept reality, and exhibited a fundamental “inability to reconcile his established notions of how battles should be conducted with the type of battle demanded.” Even Martin Blumenson, who has primarily promoted Patton's fame, was finally forced to concede that Patton had an "unrealistic" and sometimes "delusional" view of reality, and that he only played a "subsidiary" role during the war. Quite simply, as Omar Bradley wrote within his memoir, Patton had a tendency to ignore important orders, he habitually exaggerated, and he could seldom be bothered with important details. Bradley pointedly described Patton as an observer, rather than as a participant in the Normandy campaign.31

In contrast to Patton, who deliberately portrayed himself as a foul-mouthed martinet, Hodges was “spare, soft-voiced… retiring… almost anonymous.” A correspondent observed that Hodges “speaks quietly, almost deferentially… He does not give voice to his thoughts easily.” Another reporter wrote, “Hodges just sits, listens, and interrupts only to ask a question…” An article thus portrays Hodges quietly studying a map, “The situation seldom changes… He is never colorful. He is no floor-pacer, order barker, or get-me-this shouter.” Other journalists were not so lucky, and Hodges repeatedly refused requests for interviews, merely stating that he was far too busy with the war. Indeed, Hodges was so adverse to media attention, that Eisenhower eventually intervened and ordered Hodges to meet with a representative of *Stars and Stripes.*32
Seeking to find some quote which I might use to express the mind of Hodges, I found myself unable to procure anything substantial. Unfortunately, most of his limited writings were burned after his death. Indeed, Wishnevsky acknowledged his despair at the laconic nature of a general who wrote more about hunting than anything else. Subsequently, examining the records of Twelfth Army Group, I was enthusiastic to finally discover the transcript of a meeting at which Hodges was present. Scanning the document, I was dismayed to discover that Hodges did not speak once. At some point, Bradley turned toward Hodges and specifically asked his opinion, “Courtney?” Hodges presumably shrugged and gestured toward one of his subordinates, who answered the question for him.33

By attempting to discuss Hodges, one is thus presented with an enigma, which Wishnevsky compared to the planetoid Pluto. Indeed, astronomers first detected this object indirectly, by examining its gravitational pull upon Uranus. Similarly, we can only gain an understanding of Hodges by considering his impact upon others. Unfortunately, Patton considered Hodges to be “realy a moron” who did “nothing,” and Bruce Clarke (who served under Patton) stated that Hodges was “less than mediocre.” According to David Hogan, who reflects this traditional view, Hodges lacked imagination, was uninspired, engaged in excessive micromanagement, and his operations were repeatedly mishandled.34

Likewise, the esteemed Russell Weigley paid almost no attention to Hodges within Eisenhower’s Lieutenants, apparently because Hodges was the “reverse of a strong military commander… the model of a rumpled, unassertive, small-town banker.” Similarly, Max Hastings ignored Hodges within Overlord, because Hodges was a man of “limited imagination and self-effacing personality.” In considering such comments, one cannot help but wonder why this incompetent milquetoast was ever allowed to command an army!35
Furthermore, one cannot help but notice how Hodges is repeatedly described with such phrases as unassertive and self-effacing, as if these were fundamental character flaws which prevented him from being a competent commander. Such comments suggest that the reputation of Hodges has suffered due to an overt discrimination against introverts, which is generated by a hyper-macho military culture biased toward bullying extroverts. Indeed, after attending West Point for a year, Hodges suddenly quit and decided to enlist. Supposedly, he said this was because he didn’t understand West Point’s approach to geometry, but there has been some speculation that he was avoiding incessant hazing. Indeed, the very word "approach" suggests that it was the methodology, rather than the content, which he found objectionable.

The traditional notion of a military bearing is exemplified by the Meyers-Briggs temperament of the extroverted ESTJ guardian, whereas Hodges appears to have been an introverted ISTP artisan. The difference is stark, like that between Norman Schwarzkopf and Colin Powell. Indeed, Schwarzkopf went to West Point, and Powell did not. Are introverts not welcome there? Doesn’t the military need both personality types? Are introverts forced to go above and beyond, in order to obtain the same respect which is simply given to extroverted "ring knockers"? Of course, both Hodges and Powell were able to overcome such discrimination, but didn’t they deserve an equal chance to build their career upon the same solid footing as someone who graduated from the academy? More importantly, didn’t their country deserve that?

Unfortunately, as Christopher Lane discussed within Shy, introversion has become increasingly seen as a sign of personal weakness, and such individuals are routinely ostracized, ignored, and bullied by their extroverted rivals. Similarly, Susan Cain’s Quiet notes that American culture has increasingly come to associate professional worth with outward displays of extroversion, and this is especially true of the military. Repeatedly, psychological studies have
confirmed that individuals who talk more are somehow seen as more intelligent, although there is no actual correlation between excessive vocalization and intelligence. Ultimately, as Jörg Muth has observed, the “relentless harassment” of students at West Point has become a “sacred cow” which consistently generates a “mediocre” command culture. Although the academy’s football coaches have recognized that this leads to the loss of star athletes, they seem less aware that this also leads to the resignation of potentially valuable officers.36

Therefore, if Patton’s difficulties at West Point should be reevaluated in the context of a dyslexic who deserved special attention from his instructors, then the situation of Hodges should also be reconsidered. Is it possible that Hodges actually did understand geometry, and simply failed to argue with instructors who confused silence with ignorance? Meanwhile, Courtney’s elder brother, Sam, believed that it was “amusingly probable” that Hodges was victimized by Patton, who also began attending West Point in 1904. Certainly, something dramatic happened in December of 1904, and Hodges somehow received twenty-four demerits within a single day. Afterwards, he apparently wouldn’t talk about it, except with one individual who hinted to Sam that hazing was at the core of the issue. Coincidentally, also in December, Patton deliberately faked an illness in order to avoid having to take his math exams. It seems plausible that there was thus some interaction between Hodges and Patton. Were they in the same math class?37

Certainly, Patton was hardly above hazing, and he was formally disciplined by Eisenhower after the infamous incident in Sicily, during 1943. Indeed, Patton’s family had a history of alcoholism, and as a child he attacked a flock of turkeys, many of which were killed during a reenactment of the Hundred Years War. As an adult, Patton suffered from depression, and at times he drank with “almost suicidal excess.” Externalizing his depression through anger, it is not difficult to imagine how such an individual might have acted, within the excessive
fraternity culture of West Point. Certainly, as Patton struggled academically, we know that he had several physical altercations with his roommate. Although Blumenson and D’Este have gone to great lengths to portray Patton sympathetically, as a misunderstood dyslexic, this doesn’t hide the fact that Patton was a self-admitted bully who deliberately irritated “virtually everyone” and harassed others simply because he could not control his own violent temper. As Patton wrote in his diary, “Am not very popular… I will show and make them feel how infernally inferior they are.”

According to Douglas MacArthur, hazing at West Point was severe, violent, and uncontrolled. Subsequently, although MacArthur became the commandant of West Point and attempted to address these problems, Colonel Steven Hammond noted in 1990 that “much opportunity and great potential for abuse” has remained, as “previous attempts at reform failed because they attacked the symptoms of abuse, not the cause.”

Indeed, nothing will change until the military acknowledges the existence of different learning and leadership styles, which are equally valid and cannot be properly nurtured and developed by a standardized approach. Quite simply, some individuals are capable of effective combat leadership, but they do not respond well to unnecessary abuse from tyrannical superiors, nor will they tolerate an instructor’s obsessive attention with blatantly unimportant details, nor will they engage in excessive physical conditioning which permanently damages the human body. By permitting such irrational hazing, the military’s has failed to incorporate the talents of a large percentage of the population, and it seems that they nearly lost Hodges.

Surely, although a confident and magnetic personality may motivate troops, there is far more to effective generalship. Fortunately, Bradley recognized that Hodges possessed considerable skill, as a competent administrator who could address his command with “infinite
care.” Specifically comparing Hodges with Patton, Bradley insisted that Hodges was far more capable of addressing administrative and logistical concerns, and he was also better qualified to command intricate combat operations. Indeed, whereas others have emphasized that Hodges was modest and unostentatious, Bradley instead saw Hodges as “serious” and “dependable.”

Nevertheless, going out of their way to twist the narrative in favor of Patton, most historians have scorned Bradley’s wisdom. For example, John McManus has described Bradley as an aging individual with a “mediocre mind ill-suited to high command.”

By denigrating both Bradley and Hodges, historians have systematically neglected the experience of First Army. Bradley thus noted that the “almost anonymous” First Army “bore the brunt” of an extended campaign against Seventh Armee, whilst Patton merely “skirted” the edge of the battlefield. First Army took twice as many casualties, and yet journalists emphasized Third Army because they wrongly believed that Patton’s dramatic movement was indicative of brilliance. However, Yeide has observed that Patton’s efforts amounted to “empty glory,” as Third Army was merely advancing through terrain which the enemy had abandoned. As Bradley explained, Patton greatly exaggerated the significance and potential of Third Army’s advance, and both journalists and historians have wrongly allowed this distortion to monopolize the traditional narrative.

Ultimately, as 4th Division's Lieutenant George Wilson wrote, “A wild, mad, exciting race seemed to be on to see which army could gain the most ground in a single day… Patton [was] the hero of the day… While our First Army usually made about the same distance, we were not mentioned; or, if anything was said, it was usually hidden on a second or third page… we resented the neglect.” Although he subsequently experienced the brutal Hürtgenwald and Ardennes campaigns, Wilson stated that Hodges was “efficient” and “never received near the
credit he deserved.” He concluded that Hodges was “just as good” and “certainly equaled” Patton. Similarly, Lieutenant Belton Cooper stated within his memoir that “more than any other army commander,” Hodges had “steady judgment.”

The Invisible First Army

Considering these issues, the journalist Hal Boyle wrote an editorial in 1946, which noted that many of First Army’s accomplishments were being unfairly attributed to Third Army, because of Patton’s “flair for personal publicity.” Therefore, Boyle reminded his readers, “It was the First Army that spearheaded into Normandy... captured Cherbourg... broke the German defensive crust at Saint-Lo... took Paris... first entered Germany... captured the first German city, Aachen... first crossed the Rhine river... [and] made the longest armored march in history.” Nevertheless, historians have continued to fawn over Third Army, which has steadily marched into what the 3rd Armored Division Association has described as “true fantasyland.”

Likewise, General Walter Robertson (2nd Division) wrote, “The need for a more authentic and comprehensive history of this period has become evident…” As Robertson stated, these operations were “epoch” and their study has profound importance for both professional soldiers and the public. Therefore, heeding Boyle’s advice to “thumbtack the old battle maps back on the wall,” historians must carefully consider these events.

Unfortunately, very little is known about the many difficult battles which First Army fought during this period: Vire, Villedieu, Etoile, Tessy, Laurier, Margueray, St. Sever, St. Cecile, St. Pois, Gathemo, Boult, Hardonnierre, Perriers, Brecy, Juvigny, Adelee, Tove, St. Barthelemy, Tete, Romagny, Mortain, Barenton, Ger, St. Fraimbault, St. Loup, Aron, Segre, Domfront, Couterne, Andaine, Sauvagere, Briouze, Ranes, Fromentel, Chambois, Brezolles, Verneuil, Nonancourt, Evreux, Elbeuf, Evequemont, Jambville, Fremainville, Condecourt,
Champrosy, Corbeil, Sevran, Mitry, Meaux, St. Mard, Belleville, Nanteuil, Senlis, Crepy, Cotterets, Vervins, Landrecies, Cambrai, Bavay, Bettignies, Riez, Macon, Philippeville, Givet, Heer, Hastiere, Blaimont, Libramont, Roche, Eben-Emael, Dalhem, Aubel, Thimster, Plombieres, Preuswald, Eynatten, Eupen, Verviers, Hargnies... These fierce engagements were sandwiched between Normandy and the Hürtgenwald, between St. Lo and Arnhem, between episodes 3 and 4 in *Band of Brothers*, and they have been largely forgotten.

However, by examining the neglected combat records, it has become quite clear that First Army fought a very difficult and complex campaign, whilst journalists and historians have wrongly glorified the relatively insignificant role of George Patton. These records also clarify that there was no strategic breakthrough, there was no dramatic breakout, and there was no triumphant pursuit. Instead, what First Army faced was a mobile defense, and with “grim excitement” they were thus committed to an “almost continuous assault” against a seemingly endless series of strong defensive positions.\(^{45}\)
CHAPTER 2

ENVELOPING VIRE

At the beginning of August, First Army occupied a concave line extending northeast from Villedieu toward Torigni, and bulging northwest around German positions at Tessy. West of Villedieu, Third Army’s 8th Corps held a line extending toward Granville, moving south toward Avranches. Northeast of Torigni, Second Army was advancing toward the A84, between Guilberville and Caen, whilst the Canadian Army held the Allied flank at Caen.

Previously, since June 6th, First Army had sustained 103,433 total casualties. Subsequently, between August 1 and 3rd, First Army incurred an additional 4489 combat casualties, as they enveloped the forest of St. Sever, west of Vire. Furthermore, they would incur more than a thousand additional non-combat casualties. Although the records do not readily clarify the chronological distribution of these non-combat casualties, we do know that between August 1 and September 12 they were incurred at an average daily rate of 0.21 percent, amounting to more than three hundred individuals per day. Of these casualties, approximately 50 percent were due to illness, 30 percent were psychological, and 20 percent were accidental injuries. With regard to Third Army, the average daily wounded in action rate of First Army was approximately 30 percent higher.1

During this initial phase of operations, the bulk of First Army would clear Tessy and Villedieu, advancing toward the A84 between Guilberville and Villedieu. Subsequently, they continued further south, toward the D924 between Villedieu and Vire. Eventually, along the western flank, 19th Corps managed to reach the D924. However, along the eastern flank, 5th Corps was delayed by extremely heavy resistance, and their positions were thus bent northward between Landelles and Etouvy. Fortunately, further east, British 8th Corps managed to continue
advancing, with 11th Armoured Division occupying positions east of Vire. Meanwhile, along the western flank of First Army, 4th Division occupied Villedieu and continued advanced southeast toward St. Pois. Further west, 1st Division moved south of Villedieu, and then advanced southeast toward Mortain.²

During these operations, 2nd Armored Division operated northeast of Villedieu, whilst 3rd Armored Division moved south of town. Although the traditional notion of blitzkrieg involves the advance of concentrated and supposedly unstoppable tank formations, these divisions were instead dispersed into four separate and divergent combat commands. Consequently, 1st Division operated with 3rd/CCA (Colonel Hickey), whilst 4th Division was paired with 3rd/CCB (Colonel Boudinot). According to Collins, this deployment created “balanced infantry-armored” taskforces, and the tanks were directly subordinated to the infantry.³

Throughout this period, resistance was consistently heavy, particularly at Tessy and amongst the extensive minefields between Villedieu and Vire. Further west, 4th Division faced large numbers of tanks, supported by infantry and artillery. Likewise, 1st Division encountered strong delaying forces, behind which the Germans were massing tanks. It thus became increasingly clear that the German lines had not been broken. Instead, the Germans had successfully refused their western flank, which swung southeast from Coutances and was soon firmly established between Vire and Mortain.

Although historians have insisted that there was a decisive strategic breakthrough during late July, and contemporaries certainly encouraged such a perception, a careful reading of the primary sources reveals that the Cobra offensive had been a very limited success. Certainly, after more than two thousand aircraft bombed the German positions, a tactical breakthrough was inevitable. However, Collins subsequently acknowledged that he was disappointed by the slow
progress of 7th Corps, and he was particularly surprised by the tenacious German defense of Marigny. Likewise, his subordinates were shocked and discouraged by their unexpectedly heavy casualties. By July 27th, the Germans were successfully withdrawing and the opportunity for a breakthrough had clearly passed. As James Carafano has thus noted, there was no “spectacular success” and there had only been a potential breakthrough, rather than a genuinely impressive accomplishment.4

On July 28th, Collins likewise observed that there had not been a breakthrough, due to extensive minefields and stubborn resistance, behind which the Germans were able to withdraw. Meanwhile, Collins, Hodges, and Patton all witnessed the severe traffic congestion near Coutances, which scrambled and further delayed the advance. Afterwards, Gerow optimistically suggested that victory had been achieved by 7th Corps, and that 5th Corps might thus occupy Vire. Upon hearing this, Hodges simply laughed and promised to give Gerow’s divisional commanders two bottles of brandy apiece, if they managed to merely reach Tessy. Of course, 5th Corps failed to reach this wholly unrealistic objective.5

Ultimately, although both journalists and historians have claimed that Seventh Armee was shattered by the Cobra offensive, the troops of First Army would not have agreed, as their situation simply “did not look easy.” Of course, it can’t be denied that a significant victory had been achieved. Indeed, the Germans had withdrawn in order to avoid a breakthrough, and consequently the Allies gained space along the western flank. Nevertheless, First Army still faced six enemy divisions which were supported by elements of five additional divisions. Subsequently, the Germans were thus able to maintain strong resistance along an “unbroken defensive line.” Unfortunately, historians are far too eager to celebrate the break out from
Normandy, and they thus forget that three Allied armies remained mired within the Norman bocage.  

August 1

On August 1, newspapers reported that the battle was “raging in full force” as a “whirlwind offensive” extended toward Avranches. Journalists thus emphasized the dramatic advance of Third Army, and largely ignored the savage resistance which faced First Army. Indeed, the contrast between these two armies is quite profound. Whereas the Germans were “running as fast as they could” from the advance of Third Army, further east the enemy was actually counterattacking.

During the day, 7th Corps advanced south from Villedieu, in order to protect the advance of Third Army. By thus creating a mobile “barrier against interference from the east,” First Army greatly facilitated Patton’s advance. Leading this effort, 1st Division bypassed Villedieu and advanced south toward the See. Meanwhile, 4th Division advanced southwest from Percy toward Villedieu, whilst 9th Division was concentrated at Percy.

Concurrently, 19th Corps operated northeast of Percy, where 28th Division’s 112th Regiment faced bitter combat along 210. A medic later recalled that a nearby soldier was hit by a German shell, “It never exploded, but it severed his head which then rolled down the hill.” To the northeast, 29th Division cleared the D277 between Villebaudon and Tessy, whilst 30th Division occupied Tessy. Here, the situation was particularly difficult, as 275th Division was strongly supported by aggressive counterattacks from 2nd Panzer Division. General Quesada thus drove to the front, and inquired why the advance was not proceeding more quickly. Much to the bitter amusement of nearby infantry, he was nearly killed when a German shell struck his jeep.
Subsequently, General Gerhardt had the vehicle’s remnants gift-wrapped and returned to Quesada’s headquarters.⁹

Within the adjacent zone of 5th Corps, 2nd and 35th Divisions cleared the area between Tessy and Guilberville, where 3rd Fallschirmjäger had established thick defenses. Meanwhile, 326th Division was known to be moving into positions along the eastern flank, arriving from the zone of Second Army, whilst 352nd Division occupied positions along the western flank. During the previous day, there had been fierce fighting southeast of Torigni, and one battalion commander thus reported, “I have no water, I have no chow, I have no batteries for my radio… My men are dead dog tired… I have been given an order to attack. I am about to comply with this order.” Subsequently, 2nd Division reported stiff resistance, after which the Germans simply “displaced to the next favorable ground.” Meanwhile, along the army’s eastern flank, 5th Division held a reserve position between Guilberville and St. Martin, where they maintained contact with Second Army.¹⁰

As First Army thus advanced toward the southeast, Third Army’s 8th Corps moved south from Granville through Avranches. Although this advance proceeded at an admirable pace, it cannot be denied that Third Army benefitted from the efforts of First Army, which consistently absorbed the strength of Seventh Armee. Indeed, as Martin Blumenson has noted, Third Army would subsequently advance through an area which had been largely drained of German troops, many of which were redeployed against First Army.

In stark contrast to the situation at Avranches, Second Army’s 8th and 30th Corps were positioned along the eastern flank of First Army, where 15th and 43rd Divisions faced “continual probing attacks” from 21st Panzer Division, northeast of St. Martin. Fortunately, the Germans were forced to withdraw by the advance of 11th Armoured Division and the Guards Division,
which cleared stiff resistance south of St. Martin. One must thus recognize the profound difficulties which also faced Twenty-First Army Group, such that Third Army was truly a tertiary force.\textsuperscript{11}

\textit{30\textsuperscript{th} Division}

After nearly fifty days of continuous combat, this exhausted division had already endured a “sustained nightmare.” Nevertheless, the fighting was not over. Indeed, shortly after midnight, German aircraft bombed 120\textsuperscript{th} Regiment and 4\textsuperscript{th} Division’s nearby 22\textsuperscript{nd} Regiment, after releasing flares which illuminated the exposed infantry. This lasted for fifteen minutes and primarily involved butterfly anti-personnel ordnance. Fortunately, the bombardment was not as effective as that conducted simultaneously against 1\textsuperscript{st} Division, although a medical detachment incurred many casualties.\textsuperscript{12}

At dawn, 117\textsuperscript{th} and 120\textsuperscript{th} Regiments advanced southeast from Opac toward Tessy, whilst 119\textsuperscript{th} Regiment was held in reserve enjoying “doughnuts and girls” (along with calvados brandy). Originally, 117\textsuperscript{th} Regiment was to make the primary effort, advancing along the western flank, whilst 120\textsuperscript{th} Regiment advanced southeast through Fervaches, clearing the Vire north of Tessy. This was a normal deployment, as these triangular formations would typically advance with two leading elements, one of which would make the primary effort, whilst the third was retained in reserve. However, as 117\textsuperscript{th} Regiment became bogged down by extensive minefields, 120\textsuperscript{th} Regiment was instead ordered to crack the “tough nut,” whilst 117\textsuperscript{th} Regiment was reduced to a secondary role.\textsuperscript{13}

Concurrently, the advance was supported by elements of 29\textsuperscript{th} Division and 2\textsuperscript{nd}/CCA, which were approaching Tessy from the west, moving along the D13. After passing through Beaucoudray, 66\textsuperscript{th} Armored Regiment split in half, with 1\textsuperscript{st} and 2\textsuperscript{nd} Battalions continuing east
toward Tessy, whilst 3rd Battalion moved north through Chevry and approached Tessy from the northwest. However, as they reached the town, two tanks were destroyed by enemy rockets, one hit a mine, and a fourth was disabled by antitank artillery. Meanwhile, 2nd Panzer was simultaneously moving south from Moyon. Consequently, German heavy tanks were soon firing upon the flank of 3rd Battalion, which thus lost a total of sixteen tanks. Indeed, by the end of the day, 3rd Battalion reported that they had lost 105% of their tanks since July 25th. Meanwhile, 1st and 2nd Battalions were delayed by intense antitank fire which caused numerous casualties amongst the supporting infantry.14

Within 120th Regiment, 1st Battalion made the primary effort, supported by 3rd Battalion, whilst 2nd Battalion remained in reserve at Raoult. In turn, 1st Battalion’s primary effort was made by B-Company, which spent most of the day advancing a single mile through an area which was fiercely defended. Before long, they found themselves pinned down by machine-gun and artillery fire. At this point, assistance should have been available from 743rd Tank Battalion. However, although the infantry were able to pass through the minefields with relative ease, the tanks were unable to proceed. Consequently, B-Company found themselves isolated and under increasingly heavy fire. This situation must have been quite frustrating for Captain Howard Greer, who was wrongly informed that the area had already been cleared by elements of 2nd/CCA. Subsequently, as a battalion commander in October, Greer would be wounded during an operation in which he personally destroyed two German tanks.15

With B-Company halted by heavy defensive fire, the focal point of the entire division was soon reduced to a single individual who advanced alone. This was the wonderful Private Carlos Ruiz, who apparently vaulted a hedgerow and killed the crew of a German machine-gun. Afterwards, B-Company was able to resume advancing, although they were halted once again,
this time by an antitank cannon. Meanwhile, “burp gunners” were positioned along adjacent hedgerows, where they were firing with submachine-guns. Reacting quickly, B-Company charged toward the German skirmishers and overwhelmed them. Subsequently, Private Lonnie Groves crawled forward under “continuing direct fire” and eliminated the cannon by firing several rifle-grenades. Meanwhile, a German shell hit the headquarters of 3rd Battalion, killing seventeen troops including the distinguished operations officer, Captain James Smith.\textsuperscript{16}

Later that afternoon, when B-Company finally reached Tessy, they were fighting house by house along a hot road, under flanking fire from German positions located across the river. At one point, Private Francis Kimmel advanced alone and eliminated another cannon. Subsequently, B-Company was counterattacked and forced to withdraw from town, until a platoon of tanks finally arrived as reinforcement. Shortly thereafter, A-Company also arrived, and 1st Battalion thus cleared Tessy. However, the fighting was still not over, as the enemy remained along the heights east of the Vire, from which they continued firing with small-arms, mortars, and artillery. Meanwhile, friendly P-47s bombed the American troops in Tessy.\textsuperscript{17}

\textit{9th Division}

During the day, this division completed their ongoing redeployment, from a reserve position southwest of St. Lo. Previously, 60th Regiment had thus arrived west of Percy, where 2nd Battalion was already operating alongside 4th Division’s 8th Regiment. Much like 30th Division, 9th Division had not yet recovered from the murderous combat conditions encountered over the past week. Nevertheless, they were now expected to advance through strong resistance from 363rd Division and elements of 2nd Fallschirmjäger, which were supported by extensive minefields and the 394th Sturmgeschütz Brigade.\textsuperscript{18}
One should reflect for a moment upon the incredible difficulty associated with merely bringing a division forward to the front. For example, the records of 47th Regiment stated that they were supported by ninety-six additional trucks, such that it took approximately five hours to move a distance of twenty kilometers, after which they finally concentrated north of Percy, at Maupertais. Indeed, the mobility of an infantry division was dependent upon an awful lot of vehicles. However, sufficient quantities were frequently not available. Meanwhile, even when large numbers were procured, the inevitable result was severe traffic congestion. Consequently, it was not possible for 9th Division to move all three regiments simultaneously, and it was not until midnight that 39th Regiment was finally concentrated northwest of Percy, at Hambaye.19

4th Division

This formation’s objective was to advance south from Percy, and occupy Villedieu from the north. Some idea of 4th Division’s previous experience can be gained from the memoir of George Wilson, who was a lieutenant in 22nd Regiment. As a replacement platoon commander who arrived in France during mid-July, Wilson’s four predecessors had all become casualties, and the platoon had suffered casualties of ninety percent. By August 1, after the platoon was returned to full strength, they incurred another casualty rate of ninety percent, and Wilson thus described the fighting near Villebaudon as a “savage massacre.” During this phase of operations, lasting until August 3, 22nd Regiment was temporarily attached to 29th Division, where they were deployed between Percy and Tessy.20

As 8th and 12th Regiments moved south toward Villedieu, 9th Division would fill the gap at Percy. Meanwhile, 1st Division enveloped the southern outskirts of Villedieu, whilst 3rd/CCB advanced along the eastern flank of 4th Division. Ultimately, as the records note, Villedieu was “the key to the whole situation in western France... with its numerous highways radiating in
“every direction like spokes in a wheel.” This area was therefore defended by elements of 363rd Division, 116th Panzer, 130th Panzer Lehr, and 2nd SS.21

During the morning, 12th Regiment began moving south along the D453, from Roche toward Villedieu. Meanwhile, 3rd/CCB advanced southeast toward Etoile, along the D999. Shortly thereafter, German defensive fire firmly halted both efforts, with 3rd/CCB reporting that their original plan was thus impracticable. Consequently, the tanks were transferred around the western edge of Villedieu, along with 4th Recon and 12th Regiment’s 3rd Battalion. Afterwards, they began advancing into the area southeast of Villedieu, from within the zone of 1st Division. That evening, once the Germans finally began to evacuate the nearly encircled city, 3rd Battalion was able to enter from the southwest, whilst 2nd Battalion occupied positions northeast of town.22

Detailed records regarding 12th Regiment’s 2nd and 3rd Battalions are not readily available. However, the experience of 1st Battalion is better documented. At dawn, this battalion was ordered to envelop the northeastern edge of Villedieu, by advancing between the city and the German position at Etoile. Subsequently, moving southeast from Menardiere toward Beurrier, the plan was to continue further east and cross the D999, clearing positions south of Etoile at Panier. However, the leading A-Company was firmly halted at Beurrier, by defensive fire from German troops who held the ridge between Panier and Etoile. With A-Company thus facing heavy resistance, C-Company was also halted behind them, amidst a heavy interdictory bombardment. Indeed, from Panier, the Germans had excellent visibility over the American position.23

That evening, 1st Battalion was withdrawn back to their starting positions. Here, they suffered an additional thirty casualties when an extremely heavy bombardment was followed by a German counterattack which advanced through the exhausted A-Company and nearly overran
the battalion headquarters. Discussing these events, Private Abraham Greenholtz (42nd Artillery) later recalled, “Apparently there was a gap somewhere in the line...” Suddenly, an American tank exploded, “One man’s leg was blown off... one’s clothing was afire... another was hit but he managed to crawl... The fourth man [was] badly hit in the head...” After carrying this latter individual to a medical station, Greenholtz returned to endure the continuing barrage, during which he witnessed the destruction of an anti-aircraft battery. Although this bombardment eventually ceased, it was resumed shortly after midnight, inflicting additional casualties amongst both A-Company and the attached B-Company from 4th Engineer.24

Concurrently, further north, 8th Regiment’s 1st and 2nd Battalions fought defensive actions near Percy, whilst 3rd Battalion moved south. Attempting to clear the western edge of the D999, between Percy and Villedieu, 3rd Battalion soon encountered strongly entrenched positions extending southwest from Laurier toward Roche. The Germans had thus taken advantage of the fact that a wooded creek bottlenecks the terrain west of the D999, with only the D453 passing south via Roche. Although 12th Regiment had cleared Roche, the rest of this heavily mined area remained under German occupation. Consequently, L-Company was ordered to occupy Laurier.25

Incorrectly, it was believed that Laurier was not defended. Previously, 12th Regiment had encountered German troops here, and a platoon had therefore been positioned near the hamlet. Although that platoon had withdrawn, as 12th Regiment continued moving toward Villedieu, 8th Regiment believed that the platoon was physically occupying Laurier. Although untrue, this rumor was reinforced by elements of 4th Cavalry Group, which reported passing Laurier without encountering opposition, although they did receive mortar fire which was probably directed by German troops within the village. Subsequently, L-Company reconnoitered the position and
confirmed that the area was indeed occupied by American infantry. Acting upon this erroneous assumption, the company advanced carelessly and quickly became engaged in a sharp firefight, since Laurier was still occupied by the enemy.

After retreating, L-Company spent the night pinned down along the D999, listening to German vehicles moving south. Indeed, during this night, the Germans withdrew along a wide frontage between Tessy and Villedieu, and the aforementioned attack against 12th Regiment’s 1st Battalion was undoubtedly part of an effort to shield the western flank of this withdrawal. Plausibly, the German troops from Laurier were amongst those who fought at Menardiere, as these locations are only three kilometers apart.26

1st Division

Shortly after midnight, German aircraft bombed the division’s bivouacked columns, along the D38 between St. Denis and Gavray. After dropping illumination flares, the Germans inflicted approximately a hundred casualties. Seventy-five bombs thus hit near the headquarters, where twenty-five casualties were incurred, including both the air-support officer and Huebner’s aide. Meanwhile, the commander of 7th Artillery was also a casualty, along with nine of his subordinates. Likewise, 16th Regiment’s C-Company reported fourteen casualties. Indeed, according to the records, “No unit of the division went untouched.” Afterwards, as medics attempted to operate by starlight, the division remained immobilized for several hours, because the Germans had employed time-delay bombs, which it made it dangerous to move.27

In conjunction with the bombardment of 30th Division, this incident certainly defies the traditional narrative which asserts the overwhelming dominance of Allied air-superiority. Indeed, the incident understandably alarmed Hodges, who became concerned that his own headquarters might be similarly targeted. Therefore, he ordered his staff to disperse the large numbers of
vehicles which surrounded the army headquarters, as these were a “dead give-away” for German observers.28

Once 1st Division resumed advancing, the leading role was played by 26th Regiment, operating along the eastern flank. This formation was ordered to bypass the southern outskirts of Villedieu, and then continue south toward Brecey and the See. By dawn, there was thus “quite a fight” within the railyard southwest of Villedieu, with A-Company being the principal force deployed here. Meanwhile, 3rd Battalion continued south along the D999, advancing through sniper and machine-gun fire. With 1st Battalion masking Villedieu, a gap thus developed between 1st and 3rd Battalions, and artillery fire was directed to temporarily cover this hole.29

Concurrently, 16th Regiment moved south along the division’s western flank, with 18th Regiment in the center. Further south, the infantry were preceded by 32nd Armored Regiment, under Colonel Leander Doan. Reaching Brecey at noon, Doan’s tanks continued against light resistance, and occupied the heights south of town. This effort is emphasized within the memoir of Collins, who describes the colonel driving through town, shooting with his pistol at surprised German soldiers who were apparently doing nothing to defend themselves. Although John McManus has taken this account literally, describing the scene as “surreal” and the “confused” Germans as “lazy,” one might question whether the enemy was truly overwhelmed.30

Indeed, after the leading tanks passed through Brecey, enemy infantry quickly reoccupied the town, and undoubtedly they had never even left. Consequently, there was subsequently a vicious engagement here, involving 36th Armored Infantry Regiment’s 3rd Battalion, which was supported by 703rd Tank Destroyer Battalion’s A-Company. Later, Lt.Colonel Carlton Russell acknowledged, “We did not really know what to do or what was going on…” Russell thus came “eyeball-to-eyeball” with a German soldier, before he suddenly realized that the objective was
not secure. This battalion commander thus found himself pinned against a burning jeep, grappling with a German soldier who successfully disarmed him. Fortunately, as one of Russell’s subordinates opened fire with a submachine-gun (only to be shot in the face), Russell somehow managed to flee.\textsuperscript{31}

Similarly, at Liege in September, light resistance was initially encountered, after which resistance suddenly hardened. Likewise, the situation at Wallendorf was almost identical, and there were identical problems at Cambrai, Coulouvray, Valenciennes, Juvigny, Bettignies, and Heer. Consequently, it seems as if the Germans were routinely happy to let the leading columns blitz forward, so that they could ambush subsequent formations. Therefore, even though an advance may seem rapid, this does not necessarily imply that a breakthrough has been genuinely achieved, or that the enemy has been overwhelmed.

Although the traditional narrative describes motorized formations racing along, sweeping through the remnants of their defeated enemy, the reality was that 16\textsuperscript{th} Regiment’s C-Company spent the day hiking a total of forty kilometers. Meanwhile, 18\textsuperscript{th} Regiment’s 2\textsuperscript{nd} Battalion reported that although they were provided with ample transportation, the roads were severely congested. Furthermore, the continual threat of ambush meant that a walking patrol had to precede the unarmored trucks, and the advance was thus delayed. Even such precautions did not prevent considerable difficulty. Indeed, 26\textsuperscript{th} Regiment’s advance headquarters was ambushed at Cherence-le-Heron, where they were following 1\textsuperscript{st} Battalion. Three German tanks suddenly cut into the middle of the column, followed by infantry who seized prisoners and destroyed several vehicles.\textsuperscript{32}

Ultimately, by the end of the day, 26\textsuperscript{th} Regiment occupied a line facing east from Villedieu toward Brecey, whilst 18\textsuperscript{th} Regiment occupied Brecey itself, with 16\textsuperscript{th} Regiment
extending along the See west of Brecey. Meanwhile, the bulk of 3rd/CCA was divided into three battalion components, and positioned along the D999 between Villedieu and Brecey, with additional elements south of town. Although Brecey was subsequently turned over to Third Army, this critical river crossing was thus secured by First Army.33

August 2

On August 2, 5th Corps crossed the Vire, which flows westward between Campeaux and Tessy. Along the western flank, 35th Division’s 137th Regiment faced considerable resistance, as they cleared the heights opposite Tessy. Advancing at dawn, these troops had received little rest, as the enemy counterattacked during the night. Meanwhile, along the eastern flank, 5th Division had secured a bridgehead across the Souleuvre, clearing positions south of the forest of Eveque. This division was now withdrawn north toward Torigni, in order to make room for the rear of 8th Corps. Indeed, “appalling congestion” had been reported at Caumont. Subsequently, 15th Division moved through the area previously held by 5th Division, whilst 11th Armoured Division cleared Etouvy, and the Guards Division encountered stiff resistance from 21st Panzer Division at Montchamp and Estry. The records note that although this area had thus been overrun, large numbers of German infantry remained, such that there were “recurrent outbreaks of fighting,” whilst 9th SS Division counterattacked between Montchamp and St. Martin.34

Concurrently, in the center of 5th Corps, 2nd Division proceeded south toward the Vire at Campeaux. They soon encountered heavy fire, as 3rd Fallschirmjäger Division occupied a “vastly superior” position, extending along the forested hills south of the river. Meanwhile, additional enemy troops were positioned north of the river, where they ambushed the advancing columns with machine-guns and rockets. Here, Private Julian Gonzalez was cited, after he advanced alone and “ferociously” eliminated an enemy position near Courbe. Likewise, Private Joseph Elwell
was cited for clearing paths through a minefield, whilst under continuous fire from a machine-gun. Subsequently, as infantry waded across the river, a smokescreen was employed so that 2\textsuperscript{nd} Engineer Battalion could construct a bridge, although they still faced continuous incoming fire. Finally, once tanks were thus across the river, Colonel Chester Hirschfelder (9\textsuperscript{th} Regiment) directed the advance. Twice, the tanks stalled before intense antitank fire, and Hirschfelder went from vehicle to vehicle, personally giving orders to the crew. Later that evening, Elwell volunteered to go on a patrol, during which he was shot and killed.\textsuperscript{35}

Further west, within the zone of 19\textsuperscript{th} Corps, 2\textsuperscript{nd}/CCB moved southeast from Percy, but they were halted northwest of Margueray, by extremely heavy fire from heavy tanks and entrenched antitank artillery. Approaching Chefresne, the reconnaissance company of 67\textsuperscript{th} Armored Regiment thus lost five armored cars. Various tank platoons were subsequently dispatched in an attempt to reach the objective, but they could not find a way through the enemy’s defensive line, which was based within a thick layer of hedgerows. Indeed, satellite photos confirm that the area has an especially thick belt, with as many as four hedgerows within a hundred meters. In order to destroy a single enemy tank, H-Company soon lost five of their own. Meanwhile, with the tanks unable to proceed, the supporting infantry from 28\textsuperscript{th} Division began retreating, and the combat command was thus halted several kilometers from their objective. Indeed, the situation was quite grim, with 28\textsuperscript{th} Division reporting more than seven hundred casualties, after an advance of less than half a kilometer. Meanwhile, further south, 4\textsuperscript{th} and 9\textsuperscript{th} Divisions continued clearing positions near Villedieu, whilst 1\textsuperscript{st} Division reported severe resistance between Breccey and Mortain.\textsuperscript{36}

In contrast, advancing several dozen kilometers with relative ease, Third Army continued south from Avranches, with 4\textsuperscript{th}/CCB reaching Rennes whilst 6\textsuperscript{th} Armored Division approached
Dinant. Unfortunately, assuming that the success of Third Army was indicative of the situation facing First Army, newspapers reported that German resistance was “breaking all the way.”

30th Division

Now designated as the 19th Corps reserve, this formation thus defended Tessy, whilst 137th Regiment cleared the eastern bank. Although this was a relatively quiet period, the division was still bombarded by German artillery. Likewise, the history of 119th Regiment thus states, “The Luftwaffe still paid us his nightly visit and rocked us to sleep.”

9th Division

During the morning, this formation began advancing southeast toward St. Sever and Gathemo, with their initial objective being the D975 between Villedieu and Margueray. Of course, it was necessary to maintain a continuous frontage, and since 4th Division was advancing due south from Percy toward Villedieu, 9th Division ordered 47th Regiment to fill the resulting gap. This was done by moving south from Maupertais to Laurier, and then southeast toward the eastern flank of 8th Regiment, at Colombe.

Upon passing through Colombe, 47th Regiment’s 1st Battalion endured an increasingly heavy bombardment, after which they encountered tanks, infantry, and minefields. Consequently, the advance soon stalled, and the regiment was halted south of Colombe. Although the records of 60th Regiment are not as well preserved, they advanced from Percy and moved along the northeastern flank of 47th Regiment. Facing stiff resistance, this regiment was also halted, northeast of Colombe. Meanwhile, 39th Regiment advanced behind 60th Regiment, occupying a reserve position at Huberdeire.

Without further information, one might simplistically imagine that 60th Regiment occupied a line extending northeast from Colombe. However, we know that 2nd Battalion was
actually concentrated along a half kilometer of frontage, two kilometers east of Colombe, within a small forest northwest of the D485/975 junction. Presumably, the frontage of 3rd Battalion was similarly concentrated. We should thus imagine a regimental position as a grouping of ellipsoid battalion eggs, with intervals in between, rather than as a straight and continuous line.41

4th Division

Shortly after midnight, 8th Regiment was bombarded by approximately fifty German aircraft. As the records suggest, the Germans apparently used this bombardment to cover their ongoing withdrawal. Subsequently, 8th Regiment advanced against scattered resistance, reaching the area northwest of Colombe. Here, they remained halted until the arrival of 47th Regiment, after which they were shifted west of Villedieu. Afterwards, 1st Battalion was temporarily attached to 3rd/CCB, along with 2nd Battalion (which had been attached shortly before midnight). Indeed, 3rd/CCB needed these reinforcements in order to defend their positions southeast of Villedieu, where the infantry of 2nd SS had been reinforced by the tanks of 116th Panzer Division’s 16th Panzer Regiment, such that at least twenty American tanks were destroyed near Cecelin. Meanwhile, having been released by 29th Division, 22nd Regiment began to occupy positions north of Villedieu, although this was not completed until after midnight.42

During the morning, 12th Regiment’s 1st Battalion occupied Villedieu, relieving 3rd Battalion. Avoiding the German position at Panier, 1st Battalion instead moved west across the Sienne, and then south into the city. Subsequently, their headquarters was established southeast of the Maison de l’Etain, whilst infantry occupied the Monts Sarcelles. During this advance, A&C-Companies incurred casualties from the continuing bombardment. Meanwhile, 3rd Battalion advanced northeast, moving along the ridge through Panier and toward Etoile. Having been outflanked, the Germans promptly withdrew from this area.43
As for 12th Regiment’s 2nd Battalion, they advanced south of Villedieu, and then southeast toward St. Cecile. Here, they were ambushed by German infantry within the village, and by artillery and tanks which were entrenched upon 213. Consequently, two of the leading American tanks were destroyed. Meanwhile, machine-guns pinned down F-Company, and the battalion commander ordered a withdrawal. Afterwards, 2nd Battalion moved south along the D999, with G-Company approaching 213 from the west, whilst the rest of the battalion continued further south. By nightfall, 2nd Battalion thus held positions southwest of 213, which remained occupied by the enemy.44

1st Division

At dawn, 18th Regiment crossed the See and advanced south, toward the D5 between Coquelin and Embranchement. Subsequently, 16th Regiment pivoted southeast, occupying the D999 between Brecey and Embranchement, whilst 18th Regiment moved east, toward 238 and Reffuveille. These efforts were supported by 3rd/CCA, which penetrated through a “sparkling rain of tracer bullets,” approaching St. Barthelemy and Romagny. Although McManus has claimed that the Germans did not manage “anything remotely close to a coherent defense,” the records clearly state that the enemy maintained a vicious presence northwest of Mortain, where they occupied a centralized position between Reffuveille and Juvigny.45

Before long, 18th Regiment encountered elements of Third Army’s 357th Regiment, which was advancing from the southwest toward 238. 1st Division quickly informed 18th Regiment that “those people are to be stopped.” This was not because of some irrational prestige-driven race to occupy the objective, but because German artillery had the road zeroed and could thereby inflict heavy casualties upon the jammed up infantry. Indeed, progress was already severely delayed by congestion, with the situation exacerbated by the difficult terrain.
Subsequently, with apparent exasperation, the headquarters of 1st Division ordered that the tanks of 3rd/CCA should be thrown off the roads, in order to allow the infantry vehicles to proceed. Afterwards, having finally cleared 238, 18th Regiment was attacked by American P61 Black-Widows. With some tragic irony, the infantry had been explicitly warned against mistaking these for enemy aircraft.46

Concurrently, 26th Regiment advanced east from Brecy toward Cuves, where they intended to turn south and cross the See. However, the regiment’s leading elements were soon "shot up," and the advance was thus halted. Subsequently, it was determined that a bridge was available west of Cuves, at Crens, but the leading 1st Battalion remained pinned down. Therefore, it became necessary for I-Company to be deployed as reinforcement, after which 1st Battalion finally cleared Crens. However, no further progress was made, and the river was not crossed. Ultimately, the divisional history thus states that the Germans retained “effective organization” which allowed them to generate “increasing opposition.”47

August 3

On August 3, General Kean was awarded the Distinguished Service Medal, for his “untiring efforts” as the army’s chief of staff. One should thus take a moment and truly consider the incredible amount of detail which had had to be continuously analyzed every single day. Indeed, this text represents only a fraction of the operational activity, which was accompanied by intelligence reports, logistical data, personnel concerns, and an overwhelming amount of bureaucratic and administrative paperwork. Indeed, as David Hogan has noted, the staff of First Army followed a strenuous schedule, during which they accomplished a great deal.48

During the day, 4th Division continued toward St. Pois. Meanwhile, German resistance apparently collapsed before 19th Corps, which thus advanced seven kilometers toward the D81,
between St. Sever and Landelles. However, this was not because the Germans were defeated, but rather because they were tightening their defensive position. Indeed, 116th Panzer Division had thus been relocated to St. Pois, whilst 2nd Panzer was moved further south to St. Hilaire.

Nevertheless, upon reaching St. Sever, 2nd/CCB still encountered strong resistance from German infantry who were operating within minefields, whilst the roads were blocked by piles of timber. Meanwhile, it began to rain, and mud thus became an increasing problem as the tanks attempted to go around these obstacles. Eventually, approaching St. Sever from the north, 67th Armored Regiment’s 1st Battalion was stymied by a destroyed bridge. Diverting eastward through Sept-Freres, they were then halted by a minefield. Finally, after a path was cleared, the leading platoon commander moved three hundred meters and was knocked out by antitank fire.49

Concurrently, 5th Corps established a line extending east from Beaumesnil toward Etouvy, facing heavy resistance from 275th Division and 3rd Fallschirmjäger. 2nd Division reported numerous “small, well-situated enemy positions,” from which German observers maintained a consistent bombardment. During this effort, Major Lloyd Ptak was thus fatally wounded by shrapnel. Refusing to allow himself to be immediately evacuated for urgent medical attention, Ptak instead remained on the battlefield and ensured the advance was continued.50

Simultaneously, Third Army continued to fan out across Brittany, occupying Mauron (west of Rennes) and Derval (south of Rennes). As for Second Army’s 8th Corps, which was facing tougher resistance, 11th Armoured Division and the Guards Division held defensive position, facing a series of counterattacks. Meanwhile, protected by the tanks, 15th Division gradually cleared remaining pockets of resistance. From here, the front veered sharply northeast, where 30th Corps advanced toward Aunay and the forest of Buron. However, 10th SS Division counterattacked, successfully forcing 7th Armoured Division to withdraw, whilst 43rd Division
made no progress. Indeed, the Germans continued to hold a strong position around Mont Pincon, south of Aunay.  

Ultimately, headlines screamed, “Americans Dash for Rennes, Nazis in Flight,” “War May End Soon,” and “Start of Great Retreat as Near Rout Develops.” Indeed, the Germans were supposedly withdrawing so rapidly that First Army was actually having trouble locating the enemy, whilst the forest of St. Sever was already bypassed. With hindsight, we know that these predictions were grossly premature, although their enthusiasm continues to cloud the traditional narrative. For example, although 4th Division supposedly “swept” toward St. Pois, the reality of their situation is revealed by the operational records. Meanwhile, considering that newspapers consistently underestimated the strength of German resistance, one cannot help but wonder about the extreme situation near Caen, where the enemy was reportedly making a fanatical defense. It thus seems quite clear that the Germans were holding firm along their eastern flank, and slowly pivoting with their refused western flank.  

30th Division

During the day, this formation began a two-day period of reorganization, rest, and training. Meanwhile, 119th Regiment’s 2nd Battalion was temporarily attached to 2nd/CCA. Paired with a tank battalion, this formation thus participated in the advance toward Vire. Subsequently, on the evening of August 6, 2nd Battalion was halted west of Vire, after incurring heavy losses. Along the southern flank, only a single E-Company platoon managed to reach the edge of town, before being forced to withdraw. On August 7, the advance was unsuccessfully resumed. Afterwards, the surviving members of 2nd Battalion were said to have “a strange look in their eyes, and renewed hatred for the enemy.”
During the early morning, 47th Regiment was shifted southwest, into the zone of 4th Division. At dawn, 3rd Battalion moved east toward 203, which was occupied shortly thereafter. Subsequently, they continued through Beslon, after which 1st and 2nd Battalions occupied positions between St. Maur and St. Aubin. Although the Germans had already withdrawn from this area, several minefields were encountered.54

Concurrently, 60th Regiment also advanced. Unfortunately, it seems impossible to know exactly what their intended objective was, but it is clear that they never reached it. Instead, as they approached the railroad which runs between Villedieu and St. Sever, they encountered determined resistance and were thus halted southwest of Courson. As for 39th Regiment, they placed two battalions in reserve near Margueray, where they were expected to defend the corps boundary, and the D975 between Guilberville and Villedieu. Meanwhile, 1st Battalion was deployed further south.55

Glancing at a map, examining the records, and applying some deductive logic, we can reasonably conclude that 47th Regiment’s 1st Battalion positioned a company along the D463 (southeast of St. Maur), with a second company along the D924 (south of St. Aubin), and a third company within hedgerows northwest of the D301/524 junction. These widely separated positions were apparently intended to disrupt any German advance along the D924, moving northwest from St. Sever toward Villedieu.

Had the Germans continued, they would have subsequently encountered 2nd Battalion, which was concentrated between St. Aubin and the D924, within the forest southeast of the D304. Further back, 3rd Battalion occupied a reserve position at Beslon. Finally, the regimental headquarters was located near the D552/975 junction, which could serve as a gathering point for
reinforcements from 60th Regiment. Although the Americans were advancing, this layered deployment shows that they clearly anticipated a counteroffensive and maintained a considerable defense in depth.  

4th Division

During the morning, 8th Regiment’s 1st and 3rd Battalions advanced through St. Laurent, operating with 3rd/CCB and occupying defensive positions between Cuves and St. Pois. Rather than pursuing a defeated enemy, their primary concern was to prevent the “debouchment” of German troops from St. Pois. Subsequently, crossing the See at Cuves and moving along the southern bank, additional defensive positions were established southeast of St. Pois. Meanwhile, 2nd Battalion was positioned northeast of St. Pois, on 232, and temporarily attached to 12th Regiment.

Shortly after midnight, 12th Regiment’s 1st Battalion was relieved at Villedieu by elements of 22nd Regiment. Subsequently, 1st Battalion received seventy replacements, which certainly indicates the number of casualties which had recently been inflicted. During the afternoon, they then moved southeast along the D33, following 3rd Battalion toward Chevalerie. However, traffic was congested by a taskforce from 3rd/CCB, which was moving northwest along this same road, apparently withdrawing from antitank defenses at St. Pois. Meanwhile, German troops still held 290, less than a half kilometer from the D33. Enemy observers were thus able to maintain a persistent bombardment throughout this area.

Faced with these difficult conditions, several of the battalion’s drivers eventually turned around and returned to Villedieu, along with their cargoes, and it thus “took some time” to concentrate 12th Regiment. Eventually, that evening, 1st Battalion advanced toward 329, north of Chevalerie. After an initially rapid advance, they were halted by heavy defensive fire and forced
to withdraw. Meanwhile, 3rd Battalion was held in reserve, presumably between Chevalerie and 290.\textsuperscript{59}

Concurrently, 12th Regiment’s 2nd Battalion advanced north toward 213 and St. Cecile, which the Germans had abandoned. Afterwards, they turned around and advanced southeast, clearing the area northeast of the D33. That evening, they were ambushed north of Coulouvray, after the leading platoon crossed a bridge. The battalion was thus halted and forced to find another route. Meanwhile, seeking to recover several fatalities, a jeep approached the bridge whilst displaying a Red Cross flag, but one of the occupants was nevertheless killed by defensive fire. However, a German medic soon crossed the lines bearing an apology, and the Americans were allowed to recover their dead. Subsequently, 2nd Battalion cleared 290, presumably with assistance from 3rd Battalion. Afterwards, they moved toward 232, where they relieved 8th Regiment’s 2nd Battalion.\textsuperscript{60}

Finally, 22nd Regiment spent the day eliminating resistance which remained in the rear of 8th and 12th Regiments. Afterwards, they occupied reserve positions between Cecelin and Coulouvray. Eventually, after 12th Regiment’s 2nd Battalion moved toward 232, 22nd Regiment’s 2nd Battalion moved forward and occupied 290. Within his memoir, Lieutenant Wilson thus recalled establishing defensive positions along a ridge facing east. Entrenching his platoon along an extended frontage, Wilson felt “very vulnerable” and was disturbed by the inadequate training of his inexperienced subordinates.\textsuperscript{61}

\textit{1st Division}

During the morning, 18th Regiment advanced east from Embranchement toward Juvigny, with support from 32nd Armored Regiment. The records of 2nd Battalion do not portray an easy advance, “The battalion was ordered to move on foot... across mountainous country, thickly
wooded... Rain and darkness made control extremely difficult.” Indeed, this was “extremely broken terrain.”62

Advancing east along the D5, 1st Battalion reported stubborn resistance, although they passed through Juvigny and continued southeast toward Mortain. However, the Germans soon reoccupied Juvigny, and 1st Battalion was thus forced to turn around. Subsequently, with support from 3rd Battalion, there was a brisk firefight during which several American tanks were destroyed.63

Despite these delays, 18th Regiment cleared Juvigny by noon, and 3rd Battalion moved east toward St. Barthelemy, whilst 1st Battalion returned toward Mortain. However, during the afternoon, increasing resistance was encountered from elements of 2nd Panzer Division. The presence of this formation had not been anticipated, and situation maps incorrectly indicated that it was still near St. Sever.64

Following 18th Regiment’s advance through Juvigny, 16th Regiment fanned out on either side of the D5. Consequently, 3rd Battalion moved south of the D5 and occupied 234. Meanwhile, 1st Battalion hiked north from the D5 toward Adelee, and then proceeded east. By midnight, this battalion was thus engaged between Juvigny and Tove. Finally, 26th Regiment advanced southeast from Cuves, continuing east through Adelee. Once again, the advance was delayed by an “unusual” degree of traffic congestion. Furthermore 1st Battalion was halted by a heavy bombardment, after which M10 tanks were brought forward to engage an 88mm artillery battery. Nevertheless, congestion remained severe and little progress was made.65

Later that evening, evidence began to increasingly suggest that the Germans were intending to fight for Mortain. 3rd/CCA thus engaged two heavy tanks. Meanwhile, 18th Regiment reported that 1st Battalion had occupied the ridgeline east of Mortain, but that their
position was being counterattacked. Consequently, although traditional narratives describe the battle of Mortain as beginning on August 7, it seems that the struggle had already begun.

Ultimately, with hindsight, the advance toward Mortain was deceptively easy, although it wasn’t really all that easy. There is thus some parallel here with the German advance in 1942, when the Germans were able to advance toward Stalingrad with surprising rapidity, only to be halted and counterattacked. One might also compare this situation with the Allied advance into Tunisia, which the Germans halted along rugged terrain, before counterattacking along the southern flank.

Indeed, history is full of dramatic yet failed movement, such as that of Lee toward Gettysburg, Napoleon toward Moscow, MacArthur toward the Yalu, and Alexandros toward the Punjab. During the Vietnam War, the United States Army was frequently able to advance, with what outcome? Quite simply, although theorists have fetishized speed and mobility, it is naïve to pretend that advancing is indicative of operational success, or that the failure to advance indicates a defeat. As Clausewitz wrote, the act of advancing exhausts the offensive army which invariably experiences a “state of crisis,” at which point the defender has the crucial advantage of initiative. He thus stated, “We consider it a chief disadvantage of the attack that we are afterwards reduced through it to a very disadvantageous defensive.”

Supposedly, according to McManus, the Germans did not realize what was happening. However, with two panzer divisions already redeployed on either side of Mortain, the staff of 1st Division concluded otherwise. Indeed, the Allies were losing the initiative, and it was not First Army which was threatening to envelop Seventh Armee, but instead it was Seventh Armee which suddenly had an opportunity to penetrate the extended center of Twelfth Army Group. Although historians have traditionally described the German offensive as a foolish and
unpredictable bolt out of the blue, manufactured solely by the irrational mind of Adolf Hitler, the staff of 1st Division was becoming gravely worried about this “obvious” threat. Their fear was that the Germans had merely coiled like a defensive spring, which might soon unleash a “punishing blow.” This is exactly what happened. ⁶⁷

Summary

Between August 1 and 3rd, 30th Division fought a major engagement at Tessy, after which detachments were dispatched toward Vire. Concurrently, 9th Division advanced south from Percy and cleared the area east of Villedieu, proceeding through minefields which were well defended by tanks and infantry. Meanwhile, 4th Division cleared Villedieu, operating under an almost continuous bombardment within which the enemy launched several counterattacks. Finally, 1st Division faced considerable resistance as they advanced south of Villedieu, with significant engagements at Brecey, Cuves, and Juvigny.
CHAPTER 3
REDUCING THE ST. SEVER SALIENT

Between August 4 and 7th, First Army incurred 3519 combat casualties, as they eliminated the German salient west of Vire, which was based around the forest of St. Sever. Encompassing twenty square kilometers, this is part of an archipelago of wooded terrain, extending toward Aachen and the Hürtgenwald.

Unfortunately, as Anthony Clayton has recently argued via Warfare in Woods and Forests, historians have largely neglected to understand the importance of these unglamorous positions, which seem unimportant when compared with prominent hills and major towns. However, within such rugged terrain, the Germans routinely concentrated troops and supplies, which were hidden from aerial observers. Collins thus explained, within his memoir, that forests were a “major obstacle” which the Germans could use as a “base from which to counterattack.” Meanwhile, due to the range of modern artillery, these fortified positions could not be simply bypassed. Indeed, hidden within the forest of St. Sever, German artillery controlled a thousand square kilometers, firing as far as Tessy, Villedieu, Vire, Brecey, and Juvigny.¹

Therefore, 9th Division was tasked with clearing the forest, whilst 28th and 29th Divisions continued advancing further east, through the seemingly endless hedgerows. Meanwhile, 4th Division proceeded toward St. Pois, whilst 30th Division was redeployed from Tessy to Mortain, so that 1st Division could then advance from Mortain to Mayenne. Surprisingly, despite this extension of the front by fifty kilometers, the Germans were still not enveloped, as they had already extended their own flank toward Laval.

Historians have traditionally portrayed this phase of operations as a triumph of American industrialism, “the machinery was now in motion.” Such narratives emphasize that the American
military was “designed to reflect, more than anything else, one dominant characteristic of American life – mobility…” These accounts thus focus upon the rapid advance of Third Army, which symbolizes frontier independence and the American way of life. One might thus claim that whereas the other armies were bogged down by stale European modes of combat, Patton was able to think outside the box, and he brilliantly innovated his way around the German army. Unlike the other generals who were blinded by the tradition of Passchendaele, Patton was instead a “master of operational battle command” who seemingly understood what Basil Liddell-Hart has described as the indirect approach‘ avoiding frontal assaults in favor of flanking maneuvers which “swept round and past” the enemy defensive line.2

However, although Third Army advanced from Avranches toward Laval, this was not a genuinely significant achievement. As Bradley observed, Patton “conquered a lot of real estate and made big headlines” but he technically failed to occupy his “primary objective” at Brest. Meanwhile, Third Army’s extended position was a severe liability, and First Army was fortunately able to shield Patton’s exposed flank from German interference. Indeed, on several occasions, the “warring roaring comet” was asked if he worried about his flanks, “No worries… I can’t be bothered… Forget this goddamn business of worrying about our flanks…”3

Although such statements are typically used to show the brilliance of Patton’s “bold approach to war," during which he supposedly blitzed through bypassed positions “like crap through a goose," the reality is that Third Army was completely insulated from the bulk of German strength. Indeed, although Patton wrote that he was now in “the biggest battle I have ever fought," he really wasn’t in the battle at all. Therefore, although Liddell-Hart claimed that Patton’s advance was a “continuous strategic bypassing” which “menaced” the distraught German commanders, and his sweeping maneuvers thus “triumphed where assault had been
repeatedly baffled," such claims ignore the reality of heavy combat. As Montgomery noted, the “main business” remained between Mortain and Caen. Quite simply, Patton did not advance because he outmaneuvered the enemy, but rather because the enemy was already engaged against three other armies. We must therefore attribute Patton’s “dazzling” success to the other army commanders, rather than attributing their success to Patton. Indeed, Hitler specifically ordered Seventh Armee to operate “without regard” for the bulk of Third Army.⁴

August 4

By August 4, it was increasingly apparent that the Germans were shifting their strength westward, from the zone of Twenty-First Army Group. Consequently, 2ⁿᵈ Division began to encounter greater resistance near Vire, despite the advance of Second Army’s 8ᵗʰ Corps. At Couloncues, less than five kilometers from Vire, Private Lawrence Georgeatos was cited for rescuing two wounded troops under heavy fire, after which he eliminated a German machine-gun and was then fatally wounded.⁵

To the southwest, “scant progress” was made by 2⁸ᵗʰ and 2⁹ᵗʰ Divisions, which faced equally heavy resistance along the D295, northeast of St. Sever. This fighting was characterized as a contested advance through layered minefields, within which the Germans had entrenched infantry who were supported by artillery and roving tank patrols. Although historians have insisted that the advance in July led to a breakout from the Norman hedgerows, 2⁸ᵗʰ Division nevertheless reported that they were still advancing through “hedgerow hell” under a continuously heavy defensive bombardment. Nevertheless, 11⁵ᵗʰ Regiment managed to occupy Clinchamps, whilst 11⁰ᵗʰ Regiment and 2ⁿᵈ/CCB cleared St. Sever.⁶

Advancing from Courson, one of 6⁷ᵗʰ Armored Regiment’s tanks was destroyed, when the Germans detonated four mines which flipped the vehicle over. Subsequently, five more tanks
were destroyed by enemy fire, and Colonel Thomas Roberts was killed whilst advancing to direct artillery fire. This tragic incident serves as a reminder of the need for a careful review of the traditional narrative, as Donald Houston’s seemingly authoritative history places this incident on August 5. Such subtle mistakes are surprisingly common regardless of the author, due to what Houston described as the “sadly lacking” preservation of critical documentation. Meanwhile, approaching the forest of St. Sever, 82nd Reconnaissance Battalion’s C-Company was ambushed, taking fifteen casualties. Concurrently, 2nd/CCA advanced southeast from Beaumesnil toward Vire. Approaching Choisel they lost five tanks, after being ambushed by German tanks entrenched along the ridge which lies to the southeast. That evening, continuing toward the city, 66th Armored Regiment encountered German tanks “camouflaged in houses.”

Concurrently, Third Army’s 330th Regiment began their attack upon St. Malo, some fifty kilometers from the critical area of Mortain. Following Third Army westward, newspaper headlines thus emphasized the advance toward Brest, where the Germans were supposedly withdrawing in a “mad flight” which was assuredly “fruitless.” Unfortunately, historians have transposed such victorious depictions eastward, leading to a false belief that the Germans were routed along the frontage of First Army.

As for Second Army, the situation remained static along the frontage of 8th and 30th Corps. Here, despite reinforcement from 15th Division, the Guards Division was unable to clear the “well organized strongpoint” at Estry. Meanwhile, there was hard fighting as 43rd Division attempted to advance from Jurques toward Odefontaine. However, 12th Corps was suddenly able to advance, as the Germans began making a “definite withdrawal.” Was this because the Germans were defeated? No, instead, Hitler had ordered a withdrawal from Evrecy toward Thury, in order to tighten the front, “The front between the Orne and the Vire will mainly be held
by infantry… The armored formations which have up to now been employed… must be released and moved complete to the left wing."9

At this time, the staff of First Army wrongly believed that the Germans were thus concentrating within the zone of 19th Corps, in order to defend Vire. This is why journalists wrongly believed that Seventh Armee had been outflanked. However, the Germans were actually massing further south, near Mortain. Although First Army thus erred in their interpretation of events, journalists went even further, claiming that the supposedly outflanked Germans were “pulling out of the whole salient.” Instead, although the Germans were certainly withdrawing from the forest of St. Sever, First Army’s records clarify that a veritable wall of minefields firmly blocked any attempt at pursuit.10

According to newspapers, the advance of Third Army was a more significant achievement than the entire Normandy campaign. Irritated by such grandiose claims, Montgomery asked a journalist with obvious sarcasm, “When will the war end?” Nevertheless, newspapers continued to exaggerate German weaknesses, claiming that St. Pois and Vire had already been occupied, that Brest was about to surrender, and that both 2nd and 116th Panzer Divisions had been drawn into a trap. The Allied effort was thus portrayed as an unstoppable juggernaut, easily overwhelming the floundering and bewildered Germans, who were supposedly “collapsing all the way to Caen.”11

Unfortunately, far from retreating in disarray, the Germans were steadily withdrawing whilst preparing a powerful counteroffensive. Indeed, First Army noted that their own positions were over-stretched and vulnerable. As the official history states, “We had a problem…”12

Unfortunately, by emphasizing an exaggerated success, historians have neglected to tell the true story, which was one of profound difficulty.
After resting during the day, this formation was attached to 5th Corps and ordered east toward Campeaux. However, there was little room to maneuver north of Vire, and that evening they were instead ordered to join 7th Corps, at Mortain. Subsequently, this would allow 1st Division to move toward Mayenne. Unfortunately, the southern front was mistakenly believed to be “comparatively quiet,” and the troops had no expectation that they would soon experience “one of the most dramatic crucial battles” of the war. Indeed, although 30th Division was warned that the situation was becoming precarious, it later became a “constant regret” that this was not made more clear.\textsuperscript{13}

Why did First Army suddenly extend its frontage, seventy kilometers southeast of Avranches? Considering the significance of the subsequent battle for Mortain, historians have paid very little attention to this pertinent issue. Indeed, when Hodges knew that the Germans were concentrating against him, why did he weaken his own flank, in order to advance into the area assigned to Third Army? The apparent answer, as indicated within the memoirs of Bradley and Collins, is that Patton failed to properly advance 90th Division, so that they could defend the northern flank of Third Army’s eventual advance through Laval.\textsuperscript{14}

According to the traditional narrative, Patton should not be blamed, as he had been directed toward Brest and could not disobey his orders. Indeed, John McManus has stated emphatically that Eisenhower and Bradley thus prevented Patton from moving east. However, on June 30\textsuperscript{th}, Montgomery stated quite clearly that after seizing Avranches, only 8\textsuperscript{th} Corps should proceed into Brittany, and that “plans must now be prepared” for the rest of Third Army to occupy Mayenne and Laval. This basic theme was reiterated on July 10\textsuperscript{th} and July 29\textsuperscript{th}. Did the fastidious Bradley ignore these clear directives? Instead, according to Bradley, Patton ignored an
explicit order to prioritize a strong defensive position southeast of Avranches, “Dammit, George seems more interested in making headlines… than in using his head… We can’t take a chance on an open flank.” Bradley thus noted that Patton had directed 79th Division (15th Corps) to move west into Brittany, even though it was expected to move toward Laval.15

With regard to First Army, the primary problem appears to have involved 90th Division, moving southeast from Avranches toward St. Hilaire. Patton thus visited this division on August 2, and was apparently disgusted by what he described as a bunch of babies. Subsequently, Patton must have expressed concern about this “extremely dubious” division. Therefore, on August 3, Bradley instead ordered First Army to occupy the objective, although 90th Division was still expected to dispatch a preliminary taskforce. Afterwards, on August 5, Patton was directed to visit the headquarters of First Army, where Bradley clarified the new inter-army boundary.16

Unfortunately, these important details are ignored within the official history of 90th Division, which merely describes a “blitzkrieg of such power and speed, never imagined…” Subsequently, showing an obvious inferiority complex, the narrative emphasizes that this was “a force to be reckoned with… to respect, to avoid, and to fear.” Nevertheless, their advance had clearly stalled, and both 1st and 30th Divisions would subsequently endure the consequences. Indeed, the history of this campaign would have been very different if only First Army had been able to defend Mortain with two divisions, one of which would presumably have been positioned between Bion and Barenton.17

Ultimately, although we might thus find fault with 90th Division, we must also blame Patton. This was his division, and for whatever reason, he failed to achieve an assigned objective. This point must be stressed, since the traditional narrative exaggerates Patton’s legendary ability to motivate his troops, and yet here we can see a critical failure which had
significant repercussions. Indeed, one can excuse 90th Division somewhat, considering that they faced considerable resistance east of St. Hilaire. Therefore, what Patton should have done on August 4, was to personally supervise the prioritized advance of 15th Corps, so that he could report to Bradley that the situation was under control. Instead, he drove a hundred kilometers into Brittany, in order to visit 6th Armored Division. One must wonder whether this visit had any meaningful purpose. Certainly, both Bradley and Montgomery felt that Patton was foolishly focusing upon the operations of 8th Corps, when he should have instead focused upon the efforts of 15th Corps.18

9th Division

47th Regiment was ordered to envelop the western edge of the forest of St. Sever. During the morning, 1st Battalion thus advanced through minefields which were defended by scattered infantry, clearing the northeastern flank of 4th Division. By noon, they were occupying their objective on 273. Meanwhile, 2nd Battalion advanced toward 280, where E&F-Companies suffered heavy casualties during a German bombardment, whilst rockets destroyed an American tank. At this point, the advance was halted amidst fierce hand-to-hand combat, and the objective was not taken until G-Company was committed.19

Simultaneously, 47th Regiment’s 3rd Battalion advanced through the zone of 4th Division, in order to attack 283 from the west. Indeed, along the northern edge, this hill is shielded by a marshy forest within which the Germans were concentrated, and 3rd Battalion was thus directed to advance from the flank. Subsequently, after clearing stiff resistance, 3rd Battalion advanced southeast and occupied Gast, where they established a reversed L facing east along the D301, and extending southwest from Gast toward the hamlet of Bachellerie. Meanwhile, 1st Battalion
occupied the junction northwest of 283, whilst 2nd Battalion occupied the junction northeast of 283.²⁰

Concurrently, 60th Regiment advanced into the forest, although increasing resistance halted them along a line extending northeast from Contigny. Meanwhile, 39th Regiment’s 1st Battalion was ordered to occupy the area between Fontenermont and the forest. However, whilst approaching this area, 1st Battalion was blocked by traffic congestion. That evening, in an awkward attempt to relieve this congestion, Eddy received permission from Collins to initiate a “wide flanking attack,” during which 39th Regiment was moved through Brecey and redeployed within the zone of 1st Division. Consequently, by 03:00, 39th Regiment was southwest of Juvigny, and temporarily attached to 1st Division. Subsequently, they would advance northeast toward Perriers.²¹

4th Division

Shortly after midnight, 12th Regiment advanced to secure the eastern flank, between St. Pois and the positions which would be occupied by 47th Regiment. As noted previously, 2nd Battalion has been ordered to relieve 8th Regiment’s 2nd Battalion, along 232. At 02:00, as this relief was being conducted, both battalions were attacked from multiple directions. Particularly hard hit was 8th Regiment’s G-Company, which was “beaten down after a bitter skirmish.” Subsequently, B-Company was dispatched as reinforcement, and they also suffered significant casualties.²²

At dawn, following the withdrawal of 8th Regiment’s 2nd Battalion, the troops on 232 saw with dismay that they only held the side of the hill, and that the Germans were strongly entrenched along the crest. Indeed, this situation is thus reminiscent of that in December of 1942, at Longstop Hill in Tunisia. Meanwhile, although 232 provided observation over St. Pois, it was
overshadowed by German positions further east, where the forest of St. Sever reaches an elevation of 300 meters. Likewise, the enemy was also established further north, on 312, where observers were directing German artillery across the rear of 4th Division. Subsequently, although an attempt was made to clear 232, this advance “got nowhere” despite repeated efforts which were firmly halted by heavy fire.\textsuperscript{23}

12\textsuperscript{th} Regiment’s 2\textsuperscript{nd} Battalion was thus pinned down in an exposed position. Indeed, the regimental history describes this as some of the “most devastating artillery and machine-gun fire yet placed on the regiment.” Meanwhile, at some point during this day, a supply truck began moving south along the D33, toward St. Pois, and the driver was warned that the area ahead was occupied by the enemy. Nevertheless, this driver insisted that he had orders to supply friendly units within St. Pois, and apparently he had been informed that 8\textsuperscript{th} Regiment was inside the town. Therefore, he continued ahead unarmed, where he was presumably either killed or captured.\textsuperscript{24}

As for 12\textsuperscript{th} Regiment’s 1\textsuperscript{st} Battalion, they made a second unsuccessful attempt to seize 329, north of 312. However, by noon, the exhausted battalion was halted amidst a bombardment. Meanwhile, the battalion surgeon reported that an increasing number of the infantry were suffering from fatigue, particularly those who had been serving continuously since June. Indeed, the company commanders observed that their troops lacked an understanding of the obscure situation, and could discern no clear objective, such that they were increasingly demoralized. Fortunately, that evening, C-Company reported that they could hear the Germans withdrawing, and a “most effective” bombardment was therefore fired upon the German position.\textsuperscript{25}

Shortly before noon, 8\textsuperscript{th} Regiment advanced southeast toward 211, but was halted by heavy defensive fire. Subsequently, a series of air strikes proved ineffective as they missed their targets. Nevertheless, despite being heavily fatigued, 8\textsuperscript{th} Regiment advanced under heavy fire,
until Lt. Colonel Erasmus Strickland was wounded. Although the advance was temporarily halted, the troops were enraged and began demanding that their officers allow them to proceed, and the objective was thus occupied that evening. Meanwhile, during the afternoon, 22nd Regiment’s 1st and 3rd Battalions began advancing directly southeast, moving along the D33 toward St. Pois. Although they planned to envelop the objective, by advancing around the eastern edge of town, this was prevented by heavy fire from 232, and the advance was halted northwest of town.26

We thus have a situation during which intelligence reports stated that desperate and disorganized enemy formations were only capable of a limited defense with ineffective and depleted units, and yet such resistance was somehow sufficient to halt an entire division. Indeed, there is an anecdote within Bradley’s memoir, which seems rather appropriate here. Supposedly, a few weeks later, a division commander informed his subordinates that they were only facing second-rate opposition. Listening to this, a lieutenant sarcastically interrupted, “General, I think you had better put the [Germans] on your distribution list. They don’t seem to realize they’re as bad as all that.” Quite simply, although intelligence reports frequently, emphasized the inferior quality of German reserves, old men and boys, Mongolians and Russians, the reality is that such troops did defend themselves, and they were strongly supported by the artillery of 116th Panzer Division.27

1st Division

During the morning, 26th Regiment advanced north through Tove and toward Cherence, advancing against German tanks which were moving south until halted by antitank artillery. Indeed, it appears that 116th Panzer Division had withdrawn its tanks from St. Pois, where 4th Division was firmly halted by infantry formations. Consequently, these tanks were instead
directed southward, as the terrain is relatively flat along the See. Of course, this was yet another indicator that the Germans were concentrating against Mortain. As the records state, the Germans were thus “trying to break through.” Meanwhile, an enemy column was known to be approaching Mortain from the southeast. 28

During the day, 18th Regiment was engaged east of Mortain, where K-Company (attached to 1st Battalion) was credited with halting a German attack, after which the advancing infantry were trapped. As the regiment reported, “They are in a draw. To go from that position, they have to cross a field and we have them covered.” Subsequently, American artillery put on “quite a show” as they plastered this “pretty target.” However, the Germans continued to act aggressively, and that evening 3rd/CCA halted a series of additional counterattacks. Meanwhile, since 3rd/CCB was separated from 4th Division by the continued German presence at St. Pois, that combat command was also attached to 1st Division, such that 1st Division controlled essentially all of 3rd Armored Division’s combat formations. 29

Finally, 16th Regiment occupied the area of Reffuveille, Adelee, Juvigny, and Cherence, where they continued to engage scattered resistance. Along their southern flank, 4th Cavalry Group was engaged between Buais and Barenton. Further north, 1st Recon was employed along the See, where they were attacked by friendly aircraft. Ultimately, there was considerable uncertainty regarding the disposition of German forces throughout this area, and the records thus note that 16th Regiment’s A-Company was emplaced with one platoon facing southeast, whilst the rest of the company faced west. Indeed, despite Third Army’s legendary speed, 1st Division was actually well ahead of Third Army, as three German divisions (275th, 352nd, and 2nd Panzer) were delaying the advance of 90th Division. Consequently, 1st Division occupied an exposed salient, with a semicircular frontage of more than twenty kilometers. Indeed, when Hitler spoke
of the need to stop the “armored forces which have pressed forward,” he was referring to First Army and not Third Army.  

August 5

On August 5, the frontage of 5th Corps continued to decrease, between the convergent advances of 19th Corps and Second Army’s 8th Corps. Consequently, 5th and 35th Divisions were transferred to Third Army, leaving 5th Corps with just 2nd Division, which advanced several kilometers against light resistance from the withdrawing enemy. Ultimately, since August 1, 5th Corps had incurred nearly fifteen hundred casualties.

Further south, 19th Corps continued their tough advance, with elements of 29th Division and 2nd/CCA halted a kilometer west of Vire, along a heavily mined stream. Here, approaching the bridge at Martilly, fourteen tanks were destroyed and the road was firmly blocked, although journalists claimed that the town was already occupied. Subsequently, although the heights west of Vire were successfully occupied, the situation was rendered precarious by repeated counterattacks. Further west, 115th Regiment was engaged at Clinchamps, where a platoon from I-Company was apparently reduced to a single individual. Meanwhile, 28th Division advanced southeast from St. Sever, clearing the eastern edge of the forest and establishing a line extending southwest from St. Manvieu toward Boult. This effort was supported by 2nd/CCB, which reported very fierce resistance northwest of Boult. By the end of the day, 19th Corps reported that the infantry were becoming increasingly fatigued, whilst enemy resistance was steadily increasing.

Simultaneously, Second Army’s 8th Corps continued to occupy largely defensive positions east of Vire, although 3rd Division had been brought forward between 15th Division and First Army’s 5th Corps. Meanwhile, 30th Corps attempted to envelop Mount Pincon, with a
brigade from 43rd Division advancing from Auzouf toward St. Jean, where they were firmly halted by eight infantry battalions. Along the other flank, Third Army’s 6th Armored Division continued westward, approaching within fifteen kilometers of Brest. Meanwhile, 79th Division was approaching Laval, whilst a taskforce from 90th Division was reported at Mayenne.34

Unfortunately, journalists exaggerated the importance of Third Army’s advance toward Laval, and headlines thus declared “Americans Rush Unopposed Toward Paris.” This absurd narrative emphasized the "dashing" advance of Third Army, which nevertheless remained hundreds of kilometers from Paris. Meanwhile, German resistance had supposedly dissipated across Normandy, where First Army was apparently unable to locate the supposedly "missing" enemy.35

30th Division

As noted, on August 4, this division had been ordered to advance toward Mortain, and yet they still remained near Tessy. This delay was due to the inevitable administrative difficulties associated with shifting an infantry division laterally across the front. Nevertheless, after a meeting held on the evening of August 5, which was attended by Hodges and all three of his corps commanders, 30th Division was ordered to begin movement at once. Consequently, shortly after midnight, this complex maneuver finally began. Initially, this movement was ‘like a celebration’ amidst a crowd of cheering civilians, but subsequently the convoy was strafed.36

9th Division

During the morning, 47th Regiment’s 3rd Battalion advanced south from Gast, clearing the western edge of the forest, in order to ease pressure upon 12th Regiment. Eventually, after a rather slow advance, they thus secured a line extending northeast from 329. Meanwhile, 1st Battalion advanced through the 4th Division zone, clearing the area south of 329 and occupying
positions east of Chevalerie. Finally, in the rear, 2\textsuperscript{nd} Battalion occupied positions southeast of Contigny.\textsuperscript{37}

Concurrently, 60\textsuperscript{th} Regiment advanced through the forest, continuing southeast toward Boul. 1\textsuperscript{st} Battalion briefly secured this objective, but was forced to retreat by a German force which included five heavy tanks. Indeed, after withdrawing from Villedieu, 2\textsuperscript{nd} SS Division had been deployed here, along the northeastern flank of 116\textsuperscript{th} Panzer Division. Subsequently, in order to support 1\textsuperscript{st} Battalion, 3\textsuperscript{rd} Battalion occupied positions west of Boult, whilst 2\textsuperscript{nd} Battalion was positioned north of 1\textsuperscript{st} Battalion.\textsuperscript{38}

4\textsuperscript{th} Division

Although American troops had nearly surrounded St. Pois, the Germans refused to withdraw. Instead, at dawn, they overran 8\textsuperscript{th} Regiment’s 1\textsuperscript{st} Battalion. Although 8\textsuperscript{th} Regiment eventually restored their lines, this was no simple defense, and the regimental cannon and mortars thus fired more than six thousand shells, whilst additional support was provided by airstrikes.\textsuperscript{39}

Concurrently, 12\textsuperscript{th} Regiment’s 2\textsuperscript{nd} Battalion was also attacked, although this effort was repulsed with more ease. Subsequently, 1\textsuperscript{st} Battalion advanced north toward 329, in conjunction with 47\textsuperscript{th} Regiment’s 1\textsuperscript{st} Battalion, in order to eliminate artillery observers. Fortunately, the seizure of 329 was relatively effortless due to the artillery bombardment on August 4. Meanwhile, with the assistance of 42\textsuperscript{nd} Artillery, the rest of 12\textsuperscript{th} Regiment made a "power drive" toward 232, which the Germans successfully defended.\textsuperscript{40}

Ultimately, it was 22\textsuperscript{nd} Regiment which finally cleared St. Pois. With 12\textsuperscript{th} Regiment halted, 22\textsuperscript{nd} Regiment’s 3\textsuperscript{rd} Battalion advanced toward 232, which was finally occupied that evening. This gained space for 1\textsuperscript{st} Battalion to envelop the area northeast of town, after which
they advanced south along the eastern edge. Subsequently, 2\textsuperscript{nd} Battalion advanced from the northwest, with E-Company occupying the objective\textsuperscript{41}.

\textit{1\textsuperscript{st} Division}

Shortly after midnight, patrols from 4\textsuperscript{th} Cavalry Group reported that they were near Barenton, which the Germans were defending with mechanized infantry. Meanwhile, 18\textsuperscript{th} Regiment continued to engage advancing enemy forces near Mortain, and a German vehicle was destroyed after approaching a roadblock.

At dawn, having been temporarily attached to 1\textsuperscript{st} Division, 39\textsuperscript{th} Regiment advanced north from Juvigny through Tove, with assistance from 3\textsuperscript{rd}/CCB. Passing through Tove, 1\textsuperscript{st} Battalion moved east along the D79, and was soon engaged near the D33/79 junction. Meanwhile, continuing north through Cherence, the rest of the regiment was engaged along an arc extending from the D33 (northwest of Cherence) toward the D911 (northeast of Cherence). In the center, along the D55, airstrikes were ordered within a few hundred meters of the advancing infantry, where the enemy continued to occupy the forest.

During the afternoon, 1\textsuperscript{st} Battalion attempted to clear the Mont Furgon, northeast of Cherence, where they were pinned down. Subsequently, in order to bypass this troublesome position, 3\textsuperscript{rd} Battalion was extended northwest across the D33, in order to gain space for a resumed advance. However, the Germans soon counterattacked against the western flank, whilst 1\textsuperscript{st} Battalion remained engaged. This situation became quite serious, as 39\textsuperscript{th} Regiment failed to request artillery support, and 1\textsuperscript{st} Division therefore dispatched their own aerial observer. Presumably, this difficulty was caused because 39\textsuperscript{th} Regiment was not an organic element of 1\textsuperscript{st} Division\textsuperscript{42}.
By evening, there were several dozen German tanks operating northwest of Cherence, and airstrikes were therefore requested around the D33/173 junction. Unfortunately, this resulted in the bombardment of 2nd Battalion’s headquarters, and 39th Regiment requested that further support be terminated, although intermittent fighting continued. Later that night, the German attacks were renewed. Consequently, it seems that the success of 4th Division was only achieved because 116th Panzer Division was distracted by the advance of 39th Regiment.43

Concurrently, as 30th Division was expected to relieve 1st Division, 16th Regiment began advancing south toward Buais. Meanwhile, at Mortain, 18th Regiment was bombed by German aircraft which dropped a "heavy load" on 1st Battalion. Simultaneously, 26th Regiment reported that they were engaging elements of 2nd Panzer Division, near St. Barthelemy.44

Finally, 3rd/CCA moved southeast and screened the eastern flank of 16th Regiment. Approaching Barenton, a taskforce under Lt.Colonel Carlton Russell was soon halted by antitank artillery. Subsequently, attempting to cross a mined bridge, Russell dismounted and was wounded alongside several of his subordinates, when a previously unseen German cannon suddenly opened fire. Indeed, the Germans had cleverly camouflaged some thirty pieces of artillery, typically emplacing an 88mm cannon alongside two 20mm guns. Afterward, Captain Thomas Tousey took command and occupied the objective that evening, after the Germans withdrew.45

August 6

On August 6, Hodges was unsatisfied with the pace of 30th Division’s movement, which had been delayed for six hours by severe traffic congestion. Indeed, Hodges believed that the traffic situation was ridiculous, which for him was a “long held and frequently asserted conviction.”46
Concurrently, 19th Corps remained halted west of Vire, despite the fact that the city was nearly surrounded, with all roads under an interdictory bombardment. Attempting to lead this advance, 2nd/CCA managed only a half kilometer under heavy fire. Meanwhile, the tanks began to run out of ammunition, because German troops had enveloped them and blocked the supporting logistics train, whilst the entire area was saturated by enemy fire. Indeed, that evening, German tanks were operating within the rear of 2nd/CCA, destroying three tanks and several recovery vehicles. However, simultaneously, elements of 116th Regiment began to gradually infiltrate into Vire from the west, passing through a forested ravine and then proceeding through thick smoke caused by burning buildings and a continuing bombardment. Leading this effort, Major Charles Cawthon’s 2nd Battalion thus incurred casualties which included two company commanders, and the battalion’s executive officer. Meanwhile, the frontage of 5th Corps had been reduced to just a few kilometers northwest of town, where 2nd Division was halted within the area bounded by the D52 and D674.47

As for Third Army, which was having a “far easier time” than First Army, the principal fighting involved 83rd Division at St. Malo, whilst 5th Armored Division advanced east through Laval. Along the other flank, Second Army’s 8th Corps faced a strong counterattack northeast of Vire, near Burcy, where 10th SS Division had been redeployed from Aunay. Nevertheless, 30th Corps made little progress south of Aunay, although Mount Pincon was finally occupied despite heavy resistance which reduced one battalion to an effective strength of just sixty troops.48

Once again, newspapers boasted of Patton’s advance toward Paris, whilst emphasizing the "sensational" conquest of Brittany. Although the AP article included more than a thousand words celebrating the efforts of Third Army, the discussion of First Army was limited to a partial sentence, observing that the Germans were making desperate efforts to maintain a
"disintegrating" flank. In contrast, the First Army history states that continued German strength was "quite apparent."\(^49\)

9\(^{th}\) Division

At noon, 39\(^{th}\) Regiment was reattached to 9\(^{th}\) Division. Previously, attacking shortly after midnight, the Germans had penetrated C-Company position along the eastern flank, although the enemy eventually withdrew. Subsequently, at dawn, the advance was resumed by 2\(^{nd}\) and 3\(^{rd}\) Battalions, although heavy defensive fire delayed them until noon. Indeed, although many histories simplistically celebrate Patton’s advance as an end to the difficult bocage fighting, 9\(^{th}\) Division pointedly observed that they still faced very strong resistance within the hedgerows.\(^50\)

As 2\(^{nd}\) and 3\(^{rd}\) Battalions advanced, 1\(^{st}\) Battalion screened the eastern flank, with C-Company shifting from the southern flank toward the northern, so that the battalion remained in contact with the advancing line. Subsequently, B-Company occupied a reserve position behind C-Company, extending northwest toward 2\(^{nd}\) Battalion. Afterwards, with B/C-Companies facing northeast toward Brouains, A-Company advanced even further north and secured the D911. From here, the front extended northwest toward the D55, which was followed north until turning west toward the D173, south of Lingeard. Unfortunately, by continuing to advance northward, 39\(^{th}\) Regiment was now wide open for a counteroffensive from the southeast. Meanwhile, the situation was becoming problematic within the zone of 3\(^{rd}\) Battalion, where the headquarters was under fire from German artillery, whilst L-Company was pinned down by enemy tanks.\(^51\)

Concurrently, further north, 47\(^{th}\) Regiment’s 3\(^{rd}\) Battalion acquired the mortar and machine-gun elements of 1\(^{st}\) and 2\(^{nd}\) Battalions, and this force was concentrated within the forest of St. Sever, between Renouliere and Bois-Normand. Subsequently, 3\(^{rd}\) Battalion attempted to clear the southern portion of the forest, following a strong preparatory bombardment by
supporting artillery. Unfortunately, little progress was made against heavy resistance around the
tuilerie, north of the D282. Consequently, 3rd Battalion withdrew, and a second bombardment
was made, after which continued resistance once again halted them. Meanwhile, 1st Battalion
advanced southeast from 280, occupying the D39 at Talvandiere, between St. Pois and St.
Michel. As for 2nd Battalion, they were in reserve northwest of 3rd Battalion, whilst G-Company
was detached to secure 280.52

Finally, during the morning, 60th Regiment’s 2nd Battalion advanced toward Boult,
moving through 1st Battalion with assistance from 2nd/CCB. Simultaneously, from positions west
of Boult, 3rd Battalion made a converging advance toward the southeast. Initially, 2nd Battalion
met little resistance and successfully occupied the village, but subsequently they encountered
stiff resistance northeast of the D39/173 junction. Likewise, 3rd Battalion encountered strong
resistance, although they managed to occupy positions south of the D39, near Aubriere. Finally,
with the advance stalled, 1st Battalion was brought forward between 2nd and 3rd Battalions.
Afterwards, 60th Regiment ordered a heavy bombardment and continued east, toward Gathemo,
with 3rd Battalion presumably continuing to face south.53

4th Division

During the day, 8th and 12th Regiments mopped up St. Pois, with the city cleared for
traffic that afternoon. Meanwhile, 22nd Regiment’s 2nd Battalion advanced against slight
resistance and occupied Lingear, along the western flank of 39th Regiment. Subsequently, with
9th Division operating along the eastern flank, 4th Division was granted a “temporary release
from front-line duty.” Consequently, 12th Regiment was concentrated near Breccey, whilst 22nd
Regiment was concentrated north of Cuves. However, under the commander of 22nd Regiment’s
2nd Battalion, a composite battalion was formed by E, F, and K-Companies (reinforced by an
antitank platoon), which held a defensive line extending from 232 toward Lingeard. Ultimately, although 4th Division had thus advanced nearly twenty kilometers, the records observed, “The added gains did not at the time seem to compensate for the losses sustained,” whilst “fatigue had taken a heavy toll.”

30th Division

As noted, beginning shortly after midnight, this formation began moving from Tessy toward Mortain. Nine hours later, 117th Regiment relieved 26th Regiment at St. Barthelemy, and 119th Regiment occupied positions south of Adelee. Finally, 120th Regiment relieved 18th Regiment. Initially, 1st Battalion occupied 285, 2nd Battalion occupied 314, and 3rd Battalion deployed west of town. Subsequently, K-Company was positioned on 317 and attached to 2nd Battalion. Meanwhile, F-Company was split into platoons and they established roadblocks.

At 22:00, 3rd Battalion (without K-Company) moved toward Barenton, in order to relieve the aforementioned taskforce from 3rd/CCA, which was experiencing difficulty defending the town. Meanwhile, west of Mortain, C-Company occupied 3rd Battalion’s previous position. Subsequently, enroute toward Barenton, 3rd Battalion was strafed by nine rocket-bearing FW-190 Würgers, which inflicted fifty-three casualties. Simultaneously, at Mortain, elements of 120th Regiment were bombarded by Allied aircraft. Meanwhile, forty German aircraft strafed the columns of 1st Division. Finally, upon arrival, 3rd Battalion realized that the armored taskforce had withdrawn, and the Germans had reoccupied the objective. Consequently, they halted northwest of Barenton.

With hindsight, the departure of 3rd Battalion proved to be a critical error, as it left the southern flank of 30th Division unprotected. Clearly, Barenton should have been left to 3rd/CCA, whilst 30th Division concentrated around the primary objective at Mortain. Indeed, the
subsequent battle would surely have taken a very different course if only 3rd Battalion had been emplaced within Mortain, where they would have been able to greatly disrupt the German advance. Unfortunately, the division headquarters lacked an understanding of the obscure situation.57

1st Division

At dawn, 16th Regiment continued moving south toward Mayenne, via Buais and Gorron, followed by 18th and 26th Regiments. Meanwhile, in order to screen 1st Division’s advance from the northeast, 4th Cavalry Group established positions near Barenton and Teilleul, extending southeast toward St. Fraimbault and the Mayenne.58

After being relieved by 120th Regiment’s 2nd Battalion, 18th Regiment’s 1st Battalion was concentrated within an assembly area where they were attacked by German aircraft which “came in fast and flying low.” Subsequently, approaching Ambrieres, 1st Division experienced the joyous reception which has become a clichéd stereotype for this phase of the war. As 18th Regiment’s 1st Battalion thus reported, “Everyone was happy... Pleasantly enough, the trip turned out to be a triumphant march... On all sides the French populace, dressed in holiday attire...” However, this experience was soon marred by a series of sharp engagements.59

Although 1st Division had been officially dispatched to relieve Third Army’s 90th Division, 90th Division never arrived at Mayenne. Instead, a taskforce had been dispatched from Landivy, which included the bulk of 357th Regiment and 712th Tank Battalion. Arriving on August 5, this force had captured the bridge at Mayenne, under intense fire from 20mm and 88mm artillery, but they did not clear the area. According to John McManus, “by morning, the Germans were all gone.” However, although 357th Regiment soon left this area, the Germans maintained what 1st Division described as a “stone wall” of resistance.60
Subsequently, 18th Regiment occupied the area of Ambrieres, with 1st Battalion within the town, 2nd Battalion south of town (within the area formed by the confluence of the Mayenne and the Varenne), and 3rd Battalion along the heights northeast of town (across the river). Further south, 26th Regiment consolidated near Oisseau, with 3rd Battalion occupying St. Fraimbault. Meanwhile, 16th Regiment occupied the area immediately north of Mayenne, where they were counterattacked that evening. 61

With the division precariously deployed beyond First Army’s southern flank, 16th Regiment’s commander was understandably concerned, “I am committed completely... I don’t feel secure in any direction.” Indeed, the records of A-Company confirm that they were “spread out on a wide front.” Meanwhile, the adjacent C-Company reported six casualties during a German bombardment. Subsequently, 26th Regiment’s 1st Battalion was dispatched as reinforcement. 62

Further south, 79th Division was still advancing from Fougeres toward Laval, which left a large gap southwest of Mayenne. Consequently, with 708th Division still positioned near Laval, there was concern that German troops might infiltrate the rear of 1st Division. Therefore, a platoon from 1st Engineer was dispatched to occupy Chatillon. Of course, this was a precious expenditure of resources, as these troops were also tasked with clearing roads, filling craters, repairing bridges, and defusing mines, along a line extending fifty kilometers between Mortain and Mayenne. 63

Summary

Between August 4 and 6th, the exhausted 30th Division was redeployed toward Mortain, in order to extend First Army’s flank into the zone of Third Army. Concurrently, 9th Division struggled to clear the forest of St. Sever. Meanwhile, 4th Division fought a better engagement
between Villedieu and St. Pois. Finally, as 30th Division arrived at Mortain, 1st Division was shifted toward Mayenne.
CHAPTER 4
THE CRISIS AT MORTAIN

On August 7 and 8th, First Army incurred 3164 combat casualties, as they halted a major counteroffensive. Although historians simplistically describe this as an attempt to advance through Mortain, records clarify that heavy fighting took place along a much broader frontage. There were thus supporting counterattacks at Mayenne, Perriers, Gathemo, Vire, and across the frontage of Second Army.¹

Of course, the traditional narrative asserts that the ultimate German objective was Avranches. Indeed, there is a forested ridge between Bellefontaine and Avranches, and the Germans clearly hoped to establish positions along this ridge, thereby separating Third Army from the depots of Twelfth Army Group. Arguably, the ridge was far more important than Avranches itself, even though the ridge is almost never mentioned or shown on maps. Here, with the See flowing along their northern flank, the Germans would have been well positioned for a prolonged delaying action, whilst additional forces enveloped the increasingly desperate formations of Third Army and First Army’s 1st Division. Surely, the situation of 6th Armored Division would have rapidly deteriorated.

However, it is a simplification to state that the Germans were solely fixated upon a single objective. Certainly, they did not intend to extend a narrow corridor across thirty kilometers, with less than a kilometer of width between the ridge and the See. Meanwhile one should note that Third Army’s supplies were also being funneled through Brecey. Therefore, although Avranches was certainly a primary strategic target, there was a critical intermediary objective further east. If the Germans had reached this location, and they did come within five kilometers, their advance would have immediately gained tremendous potential.
After occupying Brecey, artillery would have bombarded the congested roads further west, thereby disrupting the logistics of Third Army. Meanwhile, German commanders could have continued west toward Avranches, but they might have also moved northeast toward St. Pois, or north toward Villedieu. Indeed, Hitler had clearly indicated that his subordinates should attempt to regain their positions at Vire and within the forest of St. Sever. Unfortunately, there weren’t any major Allied formations in reserve. Consequently, bypassing hasty roadblocks, isolated German tanks might conceivably have reached Coutances, whilst 4th and 9th Divisions were hastily withdrawn in order to refuse the flank of First Army. At least, this is what Hitler envisioned. Although a risky gamble, the potential gains were tremendous.²

Unfortunately, by depicting the German effort as a direct thrust fixated solely against Avranches, historians have lost sight of the larger battlefield, which stretched for a hundred kilometers northeast of Avranches. By portraying Patton as the protagonist and personal target of the German effort, historians have also failed to recognize that this was far more than an attempt to merely cut the lines of Third Army. Indeed, the advancing German formations were explicitly ordered to operate “without regard” for Third Army, focusing instead upon First Army. This was thus a determined effort to envelop the entire Allied flank, and the Germans would still have advanced even if Third Army had not existed.³

Of course, a dramatic success was unrealistic, at least without a panic reminiscent of Kasserine or Salerno. Nevertheless, the effort was quite threatening and it severely impacted the frontline combatants. Indeed, the Germans had been very realistic in their assessment of the probable outcome, and they still launched the attack because they recognized it would delay the Allied advance and thereby gain time for the construction of defensive positions elsewhere. One might thus compare this effort with that of a boxer throwing a punch. Although he hopes to
knock out the opponent, he is satisfied if the blow merely jars the enemy. Certainly, the Germans achieved that much.

August 7

On August 7, the German counteroffensive began shortly after midnight. Initially concentrated at Mortain, this offensive spread north toward Gathemo, with secondary efforts at Vire and Mayenne. Fortunately, the weather was excellent, and Richard Overy has thus argued that air-power was decisive.  

However, although one cannot deny the importance of airstrikes upon congested columns of vehicles, Eisenhower later stated that the effects were “not as great as the enthusiastic pilots reported.” Indeed, Mark Reardon has argued that the impact was considerably exaggerated, noting that only nine German tanks were confirmed to have been destroyed by airstrikes. Meanwhile, records indicate that many Allied aircraft were actually bombarding American positions.

Ultimate, artillery appears to have been far more effective. Consequently, some credit should go to Hodges, who ordered that the supply of 7th Corps should receive priority, at the expense of 19th Corps. Consequently, this decision certainly had an impact upon 29th Division, where the infantry were subjected to a systematic German bombardment. Meanwhile, advancing toward the positions of 84th Division at Gathemo, 28th Division’s 109th Regiment experienced extremely hard resistance, and 1st and 2nd Battalions were soon halted. Subsequently, Colonel William Blanton directed 3rd Battalion to advance southeast from Boult, but this formation was also pinned down. Apparently, elements of 2nd/CCA briefly occupied the town, but the supporting infantry were quickly forced to withdraw. That night, German tanks advanced from
Gathemo and counterattacked into the flanks of 2\(^{nd}\) and 3\(^{rd}\) Battalions, using searchlights to identify targets and thereby inflicting heavy casualties.\(^6\)

Within the zone of Second Army, the Germans also maintained a strong presence. During the night of August 6, the heavy tanks of 10\(^{th}\) SS Division overran positions belonging to 3\(^{rd}\) and 15\(^{th}\) Divisions. Subsequently, southwest of Aunay, 43\(^{rd}\) Division experienced hand-to-hand fighting at dawn, whilst 59\(^{th}\) Division was counterattacked north of Thury. At both locations, the Germans deployed additional heavy tanks. To the northeast, the Canadian army prepared to advance, doing so that evening against heavy resistance. Further south, Third Army was engaged at Laval, where 5\(^{th}\) Armored Division eliminated a single German infantry company. What had happened to the rest of 708\(^{th}\) Division? Had Patton thus defeated this formation? Unfortunately, the German infantry did not retreat east toward Mans, nor did they surrender. Instead, they shifted north, where they joined 9\(^{th}\) Panzer Division at Mayenne.\(^7\)

Unfortunately, completely misrepresenting this entire situation, newspapers claimed that the Germans were retreating in disorder and "tumbling back" amidst a general withdrawal. Once again, the focus remained firmly upon Third Army, which had supposedly smashed the enemy. Meanwhile, the only mention of First Army was a statement that isolated strongpoints near Mortain had been bypassed by the Americans, where the disorganized Germans were being eliminated "at leisure."\(^8\)

\(^{9th}\) Division

Shortly after midnight, German tanks could be heard moving west, from Bellefontaine toward Tove. Shortly thereafter, 26\(^{th}\) Artillery began to fire upon these targets, adjusting by sound. Indeed, 9\(^{th}\) Recon soon confirmed that 2\(^{nd}\) Panzer Division was advancing into the rear of 39\(^{th}\) Regiment, which was still facing north toward Perriers. Consequently, Lt.Colonel Van Bond
ordered antitank troops south toward Cherence and Tove. Meanwhile, the enemy enveloped one of 39th Regiment’s self-propelled howitzer platoons. Afterwards, the depots were overrun at Tove, and 26th Artillery thus lost contact with the regiment (as the artillery was positioned south of Tove).9

Seeking to block the German advance, K-Company moved south from Cherence toward Tove, along with the regimental recon platoon and various antitank troops. However, these reinforcements encountered heavy resistance and were forced to withdraw. By dawn, there was thus heavy fighting in Cherence, which was also defended by 2nd Armored Division’s 82nd Recon Battalion. Indeed, 2nd/CCB was now moving through St. Pois, having been fortuitously ordered south from St. Sever. Subsequently, after solidifying the lines of 39th Regiment, this combat command would cross the See at Gilbert, and then proceed toward St. Hilaire. Afterwards, they would advance into the German flank, passing through Barenton and turning north toward Ger. Since this movement had been ordered on the evening of August 6, at approximately the same time that 120th Regiment’s 3rd Battalion was redeployed to Barenton, it seems reasonable to conclude that the occupation of Barenton had been prioritized for this reason.10

Concurrently, 39th Regiment was also threatened along their northern front, by elements of 84th Division and 116th Panzer Division. Indeed, although historians have generally dismissed the efforts of 116th Panzer Division as ineffective, the Germans successfully exploited a gap between 1st and 3rd Battalions. Consequently, A-Company was forced to withdraw southwest, whilst the headquarters of 1st Battalion was deployed as an emergency reinforcement. Meanwhile, 2nd Battalion also faced a strong assault. Finally, 39th Regiment still had to deal with the fact that their communications had been cut along the D55. Indeed, 116th Panzer Division’s 24th Panzer Regiment would follow 2nd Panzer Division through Tove, continuing toward
Adelee, whilst elements of 156th Panzergrenadier Regiment were engaged in the fighting at Cherence. Subsequently, 39th Regiment was attached to 4th Division, so that they could be resupplied through St. Pois. Ultimately, we must conclude that the efforts of 116th Panzer Division were only a failure in the sense that they failed to equal the nearly decisive success of 2nd SS Division, which largely overran 120th Regiment.11

Naturally, the rest of 9th Division was ordered to assist 39th Regiment. By noon, 47th Regiment’s 2nd Battalion was thus advancing south of St. Michel. Meanwhile, 1st Battalion eliminated lingering resistance along the D39, northeast of Talvandiere, after which they occupied the heights southwest of St. Michel. As for 3rd Battalion, they occupied 280, which they prepared to defend against a conceivable German advance through St. Pois. Later that evening, as the situation clarified itself, 1st Battalion moved forward to relieve 2nd Battalion, which then advanced southeast along the D941, toward Perriers. Eventually, F-Company thus held 47th Regiment’s most advanced position, extending north from Soudaire. Finally, 3rd Battalion was redeployed southwest of St. Michel.12

Further east, advancing at dawn, 60th Regiment continued toward Gathemo against initially heavy resistance. The enemy gradually withdrew, although they continued to occupy Gathemo. By midnight, 60th Regiment had thus consolidated positions north of Perriers. Ultimately, by the end of the day, 9th Division reported that they had incurred nearly nine hundred casualties since August 1.13

4th Division

During the night, 8th Regiment was concentrated southwest of 211. Shortly after midnight, they were strafed and bombarded. Subsequently, it was learned that the Germans were advancing toward Tove. In this way, the scheduled rest period for 4th Division was “rudely
shattered” as their positions were now endangered. Indeed, there was considerable concern that the Germans might attempt to advance northwest toward St. Pois and Villedieu, thereby outflanking 4th Division.14

During the morning, 8th Regiment established blocking positions along the See, between Gilbert and Cherence. 3rd Battalion’s position at Gilbert was particularly important, as this was used by 2nd Armored Division during its redeployment southward. Essentially, the position was an oval, stretching from two kilometers north of Gilbert, to a half kilometers south. Further north, I-Company held a reserve position upon 211, where 1st Battalion was also deployed. Meanwhile, 3rd Battalion maintained contact with elements of 39th Regiment, at Cherence.15

From a doctrinal perspective, the elongated deployment of 3rd Battalion is significant, since we might otherwise assume that the regiment was attempting to maintain a linear perimeter based along the See, or perhaps a smaller hedgehog position. Instead, there was once again a deep layered defense, based upon the road network, and anchored upon 211. Although subject to infiltration along the flanks, such deployments were clearly designed to present advancing vehicles with numerous roadblocks.

Further west, 22nd Regiment’s B-Company established a similar position, extending south of Cuves. Likewise, 12th Regiment took defensive precautions. However, that afternoon, 12th Regiment was attached to 30th Division and ordered to move south “as fast as possible... without delay.” Unfortunately, heavy traffic delayed this movement, with 1st Battalion unable to move until that night. Meanwhile, an effort was made to investigate the situation south of the See, by dispatching 8th Regiment’s F-Company along the southern bank, moving westward from Cherence toward Gilbert. Almost immediately, this abortive mission was halted by heavy resistance.16
Concurrently, 22nd Regiment’s composite battalion continued to hold positions east of St. Pois, extending southeast from 232 toward Lingeard. During the preceding night, F-Company thus repulsed two German attacks toward Lingeard. These efforts actually emanated from within the zone of 39th Regiment, where enemy detachments had broken through. Consequently, 22nd Regiment’s C-Company was brought forward, supported by two platoons of tanks, and this force attacked into the zone of 9th Division. By noon, they had advanced approximately a half kilometer, moving from Lingeard toward 230. Subsequently, C-Company made contact with elements of 47th Regiment, which was advancing south from St. Michel.17

During the day, 4th Division’s artillery rendered assistance to 30th Division, including a ninety minute bombardment along the D79, east of Adelee. This was directed by aerial observers and approximately thirty German vehicles were reportedly disabled. Meanwhile, a taskforce under Lt.Colonel John Welborn was formed, containing elements of 70th Tank Battalion, 801st TD Battalion, 4th Recon, and 4th Engineer. Subsequently, this taskforce screened the roads between Cherence-le-Heron and Brecey, extending east toward Cuves. Ultimately, although not needed, this deployment provides further insight into how the division was prepared to deal with the plausible contingency of a German advance toward Villedieu. Presumably, as the Germans advanced through a series of roadblocks along the D999, this taskforce would have withdrawn toward the D33.18

30th Division

Having just arrived at Mortain, this formation was understrength by a thousand personnel, and they were disoriented by a lack of maps and their preparations for an intended advance toward Domfront. Consequently, they were not properly organized for defense. Unfortunately, shortly after midnight, 2nd SS Division began enveloping Mortain, with infantry
approaching from the southeast, and tanks from the northeast. This was described within the records as a regulation pincer movement which nearly resulted in the complete disintegration of 30th Division.\(^{19}\)

The first reports of an attack were received at 01:25, after 120th Regiment’s 2nd Battalion heard German troops firing small-arms. Twenty minutes earlier, the division had received a warning from 7th Corps, but this was not yet passed on, and the attack achieved a tactical surprise. Consequently, 120th Regiment was nearly overrun, whilst enduring a heavy bombardment from tanks and artillery, with airstrikes conducted by both German and Allied aircraft. Unfortunately, as the ridge east of Mortain is forested, 2nd Battalion was thus exposed to numerous tree-bursts.\(^{20}\)

Some sense of the early fighting comes from Lieutenant Joe Reaser, who commanded K-Company along the northern flank of 2nd Battalion. Reaser emphasized that all three of his platoon commanders were inexperienced replacements who had arrived on August 5. Subsequently, they were surrounded and attacked from all directions, by German stormtroops equipped with machine-guns and flamethrowers. By dawn, K-Company’s casualties thus exceeded ten percent. Likewise, Lieutenant Ronal Woody was commanding G-Company, which suffered fifty percent casualties within twenty-four hours. Ultimately, the situation became most critical along the southwestern flank, where German troops occupied a forested knob north of the D487. Complicating this situation, there were no doctors and scarcely any medical supplies, such that the wounded endured “the greatest of privation and pain.”\(^{21}\)

It appears that G-Company was initially located within the forested area south of 314, across the D487. With German troops advancing from the southwest, G-Company soon withdrew north, past the hamlet of Aubrils, eventually joining the rest of the battalion along the
ridge. Of course, not every member of G-Company managed to escape. Six members instead fled south toward Bion. Meanwhile, Sergeant Crowe suffered a severe leg wound, which became gangrenous during the five days he subsequently spent alone on the battlefield. At one point, two German soldiers discovered Crowe, and to their credit they brought a doctor. Unfortunately, there was little that could be done, and Crowe was left to his fate. Although one might portray this as a callous act, it undoubtedly saved his life, since he would not have survived as a prisoner.22

With 2nd Battalion under attack and G-Company withdrawing, Colonel Hammond Birks (120th Regiment) ordered C-Company to reinforce the southwestern flank of 2nd Battalion. However, before C-Company was in position, German troops were already enveloping the northern flank, thereby threatening to surround C-Company. At this point, Lt.Colonel Eads Hardaway (2nd Battalion) ordered C&F-Companies to join the position on 314. Curiously, however, although his battalion thus converged upon 314, Hardaway did not move his headquarters, which remained within Mortain. At 07:00, being undoubtedly frustrated with this situation, Colonel Birks explicitly advised Hardaway to join his battalion, but unfortunately this did not happen.23

According to Captain Reynold Erichson (F-Company), it was a misty and dark morning, such that his company made it through Mortain, and nearly all the way up the ridge, before they encountered any Germans. Clearly then, it was possible for Hardaway to have gone with F-Company. Instead, Hardaway waited for Erichson to complete this movement, and then he inexplicably ordered Erichson to return and protect the headquarters! Attempting to comply, Erichson was nearly surrounded, after which he fought his way back to the ridge, under a very
heavy bombardment. Upon returning to 2\textsuperscript{nd} Battalion, Erichson took command of the position, which remained under constant pressure.\textsuperscript{24}

Further emphasizing that it would have been possible for Hardaway to reach the ridge, is the fact that Captain Delmont Byrn (H-Company) also completed this same journey for himself, shortly after the attack began. Later, Byrn boldly returned to the headquarters site on August 8. Upon discovering that the staff had disappeared, Byrn was able to safely return to his company. Subsequently, he established a communications lane which allowed the otherwise isolated companies to maintain contact within the rugged terrain. Meanwhile, Hardaway spent the next two days hiding in the basement of a house, where he was unable to communicate due to insufficient radio batteries. Eventually, on the morning of August 9, the Germans arrested Hardaway and his staff (although six individuals escaped).\textsuperscript{25}

During the early morning of August 7, whilst Hardaway lingered indecisively within his headquarters, the leading German infantry continued west toward Romagny, thereby attempting a larger envelopment of 120\textsuperscript{th} Regiment. Shortly thereafter, the regimental recon platoon approached Romagny, where they were ambushed. During this fighting, Private Ralph Estevez volunteered to drive a jeep and evacuate several wounded troops. Doing so, he was wounded by an explosion, although he continued driving and saved his passengers, only to die of his own injuries. Reportedly, only two individuals thus escaped. Subsequently, two German tanks came within three hundred meters of the regimental headquarters, which was located between 285 and Romagny. One of these was destroyed by Private Joe Shipley (a telephone operator), whilst the other apparently withdrew.\textsuperscript{26}

Fortunately, the headquarters of 30\textsuperscript{th} Division reacted quickly. At 03:00, 117\textsuperscript{th} Regiment’s 2\textsuperscript{nd} Battalion (Lt.Colonel James Lockett) was therefore attached to 120\textsuperscript{th} Regiment
and ordered to reoccupy Mortain. This order was given despite the fact that 117th Regiment was also under attack, with German infiltrators closing within "touching distance." Indeed, the headquarters of Lt. Colonel Walter Johnson was nearly overrun, where three enemy tanks were destroyed, whilst artillery and rockets bombarded the area. The situation became particularly dire for 1st Battalion, where approximately fifty tanks inflicted more than three hundred casualties, although Lt. Colonel Robert Frankland reportedly shot a tank commander with his pistol. Meanwhile, Sergeant Harold Sterling held off an advancing infantry platoon for an hour, alongside just four other individuals. Concurrently, 823rd TD Battalion’s B-Company lost seven tanks, with nearly a hundred casualties.\textsuperscript{27}

Further south, 119th Regiment’s 1st Battalion (Major Robert Herlong) was ordered to advance toward Romagny, with 743rd Tank Battalion’s D-Company. However, by dawn, this advance was “stopped cold” and 117th Regiment’s supporting 2nd Battalion was also unable to advance any further than the western outskirts of Mortain. Indeed, 1st Battalion was unable to clear Romagny until the evening of August 11. Nevertheless, the limited advance of these battalions was seen as a minor success which allowed the escape of scattered elements from 120th Regiment, whilst providing tenuous contact with the critical roadblock north of Mortain, at Abbaye Blanche.\textsuperscript{28}

The heroic position at Abbaye Blanche contained 120th Regiment’s F-Company (Lieutenant Tom Andrews), supported by tank-destroyers and antitank troops. This force was subsequently credited with the destruction of at least twenty vehicles, including six tanks. According to Blumenson, the defenders may have destroyed as many as forty vehicles, although Blumenson appears to have conflated this position with that on 285.\textsuperscript{29}
Indeed, most of the German armor simply bypassed Abbaye Blanche, after which they encountered 120th Regiment’s 1st Battalion upon 285, where another twelve tanks were destroyed. Here, Sergeant Ames Broussard reportedly advanced alone into German lines, where he destroyed a tank with his bazooka. Ultimately, considering that Romagny was now occupied by the enemy, whilst 285 was partially overrun, it thus seems clear that the Germans very nearly enveloped 120th Regiment. Consequently, the situation was exceedingly difficult throughout this entire area.\textsuperscript{30}

Concurrently, 120th Regiment’s 3rd Battalion (without K-Company, but supported by 743rd Tank Battalion’s B-Company) advanced into Barenton at 03:00. This resulted in heavy fighting which lasted until dawn. The attack was in the form of a pincer movement, with L-Company advancing from the north, whilst I-Company approached from the south. Although Barenton was thus occupied, the battalion soon found themselves in a situation similar to that of 2nd Battalion, being effectively cut off from 30th Division by advancing German troops. Fortunately, 3rd Battalion was able to establish an all around defense, and there was little subsequent fighting here.\textsuperscript{31}

Further north, the Germans were moving west through Tove. Shortly thereafter, 743rd Tank Battalion’s B-Company was ordered to establish a roadblock east of Adelee, in support of 119th Regiment’s B-Company. However, after destroying a German tank, the infantry had withdrawn and thus the American tank company discovered that Adelee was already occupied by a large enemy force. Consequently, they established their roadblock west of town. Meanwhile, in order to cut the German axis of advance, 119th Regiment’s 3rd Battalion (supported by a company from 743rd Tank Battalion) advanced north from Juvigny, although they were halted south of Tove by a "great volume" of defensive fire.\textsuperscript{32}
With 119th Regiment’s 3rd Battalion pinned down, Sergeant Merlin Johnson (L-Company) moved east through the nearby woods, in order to direct mortar fire upon the D79, east of Tove. Johnson was thus credited with destroying a German tank and an accompanying vehicle. Meanwhile, K-Company’s 2nd Platoon attempted to resume their advance, only to find that two halftracks were approaching from the east. The second vehicle attempted to dismount a squad, but Private Leonard Henry grabbed a machine-gun and opened fire, forcing the enemy to surrender. Shortly thereafter, Henry used incendiary grenades to destroy both halftracks. Nevertheless, the battalion remained halted and made no progress.\textsuperscript{33}

Later that afternoon, both the Germans and the Americans were heavily bombarded by Allied aircraft. At this time, the Americans were using red smoke shells to direct airstrikes, but the Germans soon began marking American positions with red smoke. A group of American Thunderbolts and British Typhoons thus engaged 119th Regiment’s I-Company, destroying three of the accompanying tanks. Shortly thereafter, part of the disorganized company surrendered, including a platoon commander. Nevertheless, faced with heavy bombardment and continued pressure from American infantry and tanks, the Germans began withdrawing from Adelee.\textsuperscript{34}

Subsequently, elements of 3rd/CCB advanced east through Adelee and continued toward Tove. Nevertheless, 3rd Battalion’s situation was not yet secure, as German infantry had infiltrated south around their rear, where they engaged elements of 105th Engineer. During the night, 3rd Battalion thus remained under constant bombardment. Amidst this barrage, Privates Eldred Viard and William Lindquist (1st Platoon, 119th AT-Company) made at least five trips to evacuate wounded, during which they were both injured.\textsuperscript{35}

Finally, that evening, 4th Division’s 12th Regiment was assigned to 30th Division and began moving south, enduring what the records describe as a "veritable nightmare." Indeed, the
roads were blocked with heavy traffic from numerous units "wedged in" together. Shortly after midnight, this situation was exacerbated when German aircraft attacked the column, destroying an ammunition carrier. The resulting explosion killed the crew and “made the route seem like the road to Hell.” Consequently, the column had to be halted whilst an alternate route was sought. Of course, being jammed into trucks whilst German aircraft roared overhead, it was naturally impossible for the already tired troops to get any sleep. Nevertheless, upon arrival, 12th Regiment would be immediately committed.  

1st Division

Shortly after midnight, 16th Regiment reported that they were under attack by elements of 9th Panzer Division, whilst enduring a "good concentration" of artillery and rocket fire. However, the Germans withdrew after 1st Battalion knocked out a tank. Meanwhile, 26th Regiment also reported enemy tanks, whilst both 1st and 3rd Battalions were bombarded. In this way, the troops of 1st Division found themselves beginning a "bewildering" campaign which historians have glossed over as a “constant brushing by and bumping into isolated detachments.”

At 04:00, despite the continuing bombardment, 26th Regiment’s 3rd Battalion crossed the Mayenne at St. Fraimbault. The infantry simply waded across the river, although their vehicles could not cross without the construction of a bridge, which was begun at dawn and took ten hours to complete. Meanwhile, K-Company occupied the heights southeast of town, with I&L-Companies holding defensive positions extending west toward the river. Subsequently, patrols were dispatched south toward Mayenne, where they encountered additional tanks.

Concurrently, further south, 4th Cavalry occupied Segre. Indeed, elements of First Army had thus established a line extending more than a hundred kilometers south of Mortain, behind which the advance of Third Army was protected. At 04:30, this position was attacked by German
tanks, which soon enveloped and isolated the town. Subsequently, a reinforcing taskforce was diverted south from 16th Regiment. However, since the direct route from Mayenne was not yet secure, despite the theoretical presence of 90th Division, it was necessary to first move twenty kilometers west, passing through Ernee and avoiding the forest of Mayenne.39

Of course, after dispatching reinforcements toward Segre, 16th Regiment was weakened along a wide frontage. By mid-morning, the Germans had resumed their advance here, attacking with tanks and infantry, supported by artillery and rockets. Three American tanks were thus destroyed, several antitank positions were overrun, and A-Company was withdrawn a full kilometer. Not surprisingly, 16th Regiment soon requested reinforcements.40

Previously, 7th Corps had warned that a German offensive was likely, and therefore 26th Regiment’s 2nd and 3rd Battalions prepared a limited counterattack, which began that afternoon. Along the southern flank, 2nd Battalion’s E-Company thus crossed the Mayenne at Montgiroux. Meanwhile, 3rd Battalion advanced southeast of St. Fraimbault. This effort was opposed by snipers, who were positioned amidst roving infantry patrols.41

Of course, the division’s logistical situation was complicated by their remote position, and the artillery commander thus reported, “The distance of hauling ammunition is so great that firing must be limited...” Meanwhile, German artillery maintained a strong presence, and 18th Regiment was thus halted by a heavy bombardment, during an attempt to advance north from Ambrieres toward Ceauce. However, the regiment was able to dispatch patrols eastward, and elements of F-Company thus inflicted fifteen casualties during an engagement near Chantrigne.42

Ultimately, a growing concern was the possibility that the Germans might end their effort northwest of Mortain, and instead attempt to encircle 1st Division. Consequently, 3rd/CCA was ordered south. However, only a few tank companies could be immediately spared, as that combat
command was already engaged near Barenton. Eventually, by midnight, a company arrived at Gorron, where they were paired with 26th Regiment’s 2nd Battalion (without E-Company). Meanwhile, a second tank company was paired with E-Company at Montgiroux, and this taskforce moved south toward Gontier, between Laval and Angers. First Army was thus protecting both of Third Army’s flanks.43

August 8

On August 8, although historians have criticized the supposedly foolish offensive at Mortain, there were no such sentiments expressed within the records of First Army. Instead, the ongoing German attack was considered to be strong and determined, and the only good news was that the situation wasn’t any worse than on August 7. Indeed, as Mark Reardon has noted, the German offensive was admittedly flawed, but nevertheless had a genuine chance of success.44

Reinforcing 30th Division, 35th Division was now returned to First Army and attached to 7th Corps. Subsequently, advancing northeast from St. Hilaire toward Barenton, 134th Regiment was soon halted by a strong counterattack, west of St. Jean. Meanwhile, east of Mortain, 2nd/CCB advanced from Barenton toward Ger against increasing resistance from minefields and artillery. Although most accounts describe this as an advance involving the entire combat command, the records clarify that only 41st Regiment and 67th Armored Regiment’s 3rd Battalion advanced toward Ger. Meanwhile, 67th Armored Regiment’s 2nd Battalion occupied Barenton, whilst 1st Battalion was in reserve at Teilleul. Subsequently, 1st Battalion dispatched a patrol north toward St. Jean, where one of their tanks was destroyed. Further north, 28th Division’s 109th Regiment once again advanced toward Gathemo, experiencing bitter fighting without occupying the objective. Simultaneously, 112th Regiment advanced toward Vengeons, but was
halted at Nudieres. Likewise, advancing in the center, 110th Regiment was also halted by stiff resistance.45

As for Third Army, the records of First Army pointedly note that despite Patton’s premature boasts, both Brest and Lorient remained occupied by the enemy. Indeed, Brest would not be occupied until September 19th. However, Third Army was finally beginning to advance along the southern flank, with 5th Armored Division enveloping Mans, although the city was not yet occupied. Meanwhile, as Second Army reorganized after their difficult advance, the Canadian Army was now advancing from Caen toward Falaise, led by 4th Canadian Armoured Division. Although some historians have denounced the Canadians as inexperienced and essentially incompetent, a more plausible explanation for their subsequent difficulties can be deduced from the fact that the Germans had established a concentration antitank position, which was supported by two infantry divisions and dozens of heavy tanks. During a single incident, the enemy thus destroyed twenty Canadian tanks, after which American aircraft inflicted hundreds of casualties upon Twenty-First Army Group. Subsequently, that evening, the Polish Armoured Division attempted to advance toward St. Sylvain, but they were soon halted by heavy tanks firing at a range of three kilometers.46

According to newspapers, the Americans continued to "smash" toward Paris. Supposedly, the German attack at Mortain "never" had a chance of success, and it promptly "wilted." Indeed, with the enemy tanks allegedly destroyed before they could even reach Cherence, the Americans supposedly counterattacked and reoccupied Mortain! Meanwhile, although Reardon has explicitly defined this engagement as a major counteroffensive, journalists insisted that it was not so serious, as this was merely a limited counterattack. Finally, completely distorting geographic
and strategic realities, journalists concluded that following the seizure of Vire, it should now be possible to advance south and thereby encircle the Germans.\textsuperscript{47}

\textit{9\textsuperscript{th} Division}

Shortly after midnight, 39\textsuperscript{th} Regiment’s 1\textsuperscript{st} Battalion endured a bombardment, during which C-Company and the recon platoon were overrun by infantry advancing from the northeast. Although the line was restored an hour later, approximately a company of German infantry had thus penetrated inside the perimeter. Consequently, at dawn, M-Company was forced to retreat northwest from their positions near Mardelle, after being engaged from the rear. Meanwhile, heavy fighting continued along the frontage of 1\textsuperscript{st} Battalion, during which ten German tanks were destroyed by infantry who desperately rushed them with grenades. Concurrently, 8\textsuperscript{th} Regiment’s B-Company advanced to once again clear the enemy from within the zone of 39\textsuperscript{th} Regiment, moving northeast along the D55. Finally, along the southern flank, the Germans were withdrawing east through Tove.\textsuperscript{48}

Further north, shortly before noon, 47\textsuperscript{th} Regiment’s 1\textsuperscript{st} and 2\textsuperscript{nd} Battalions advanced southeast toward Perriers, supported by a rolling barrage from four artillery battalions. 2\textsuperscript{nd} Battalion moved directly along the D491, with 1\textsuperscript{st} Battalion echeloned toward the northeast. Ultimately, strong resistance was encountered, and 1\textsuperscript{st} Battalion was almost immediately halted by intense fire which "rained down" from the south, east, and northeast. Unfortunately, there was some suspicion that 60\textsuperscript{th} Regiment was thus firing indirectly upon 1\textsuperscript{st} Battalion.\textsuperscript{49}

Eventually, 47\textsuperscript{th} Regiment’s B-Company was ordered to retreat, withdrawing northwest and regrouping along the D173, near Naiziere. This company then moved east behind the regimental frontage, in an attempt to clarify the situation and establish communication with 60\textsuperscript{th}
Regiment. However, after moving approximately two kilometers, during which they were fired upon from unknown sources, they were suddenly ambushed by German infantry. At this point, a half kilometer southwest of Hardonniere, B-Company was pinned down until evening.

Afterwards, they withdrew northwest of Hardonniere, where the rest of 1st Battalion concentrated. Meanwhile, elements of 2nd Battalion were able to continue advancing south, thereby making contact with 39th Regiment. As for 3rd Battalion, they remained in reserve at St. Michel, reflecting concern about the possibility of a German advance from Gathemo.50

Finally, 60th Regiment’s 1st and 3rd Battalions continued advancing toward Gathemo, facing scattered resistance. Meanwhile, 2nd Battalion advanced south toward Hardonniere, where they were halted by heavy defensive fire. Indeed, glancing at a map, it seems entirely plausible that fire from 60th Regiment’s 2nd Battalion was passing over Hardonniere, and into the zone of 47th Regiment. Unfortunately, the strength of this German position was quite unexpected, and the division history quips, “It seemed like the repetition of an old tale, the enemy was holding the heights.”51

4th Division

Although this formation had previously established a defensive line facing south along the See, extending east between Cuves and Cherence, an emphasis was increasingly placed upon establishing a line facing east, between Cherence and Lingeard. By shifting their weight in this manner, whilst dispatching reinforcements in support of both 9th and 30th Divisions, 4th Division provided an excellent example of how a reserve division operated within the context of a triangular corps.

It is particularly instructive to note how 4th Division shuffled companies as interchangeable units, just like higher formations were doing with regiments and divisions.
Ultimately, 4th Division did not pivot in the manner of a Napoleonic army, with strictly linear formations rigidly attempting to maintain continuous contact with one another. Instead, the various companies were redeployed as individual taskforces, such that the higher commands were primarily administrative.52

For example, 8th Regiment’s B-Company moved against scattered resistance to occupy Mardelle. Subsequently, B-Company was relieved by 22nd Regiment’s I-Company, and B-Company then moved southwest to occupy a position along the D55, northeast of 2nd Battalion’s position at Cherence. From here, B-Company advanced northeast to assist 39th Regiment along the D55. Concurrently, 22nd Regiment’s L-Company occupied positions on 230, relieving 8th Regiment’s C-Company, whilst 22nd Regiment’s K-Company occupied Lingeard.53

Emphasizing continued concern about the possibility of a sustained German advance, these companies were subsequently ordered to establish hedgehog positions, organized for all-around defense. This appears to be a standard defensive procedure, as little value was placed upon holding a clearly defined geographic line. Instead, the goal was to create a pattern of strongpoints, which could pin enemy infantry down whilst artillery bombarded the intervals.54

Finally, 4th Division continued to assist the neighboring divisions with supporting artillery fire. This was concentrated along the ridge east of Mardelle, where nearly two dozen German tanks had been concentrated alongside an infantry company, with an obvious intent to penetrate 39th Regiment. Subsequently, the bombardment was credited with the destruction of three tanks, and the Germans were dispersed. Likewise, fire was directed toward Tove, in support of 3rd/CCB.55
30th Division

Shortly after midnight, the Germans attacked 120th Regiment’s 1st Battalion, on 285. This effort was supported by at least eight tanks, and it was not until dawn that the Germans began to retreat, amidst a heavy defensive bombardment. Two hours later, the attack was resumed and B-Company was nearly overwhelmed by assault troops armed with "mechanized flamethrowers." Meanwhile, facing similar aggression, A-Company was forced to withdraw. During this renewed advance, the Germans apparently employed several captured M4 Sherman tanks. Similarly, it was reported within other sectors that German troops were using captured jeeps and wearing American uniforms.56

Ultimately, having been pushed back, 1st Battalion would spend the next two days trying to clear the enemy from 285. A brief anecdote serves to indicate the confused nature of this close combat: Lieutenant Roy Lothner (A-Company) saw Private McCoy nearby and told him to come closer. McCoy responded, “I can’t! I’m captured!” Suddenly, the unseen Germans who had captured McCoy opened fire upon Lothner with a machine-gun, and he was thus pinned down.57

During the morning, the headquarters of 120th Regiment received a brief radio message from the commander of 2nd Battalion, who was located somewhere inside Mortain. Hardaway stated that he was turning his radio off to conserve his batteries, but would turn it back on in twenty minutes. However, he was not heard from again. As for 2nd Battalion, they subsequently made a request for batteries, medical supplies, food, and ammunition. Indeed, their situation was growing increasingly critical, and they were only saved by a sustained defensive barrage.58

At the climax of this struggle, Lieutenant Ronal Woody (G-Company) was forced to order a barrage within twenty meters of his position. Additional artillery fire was directed by two lieutenants from 230th Artillery: Charles Bartz and Robert Weiss. Such defensive fire was
arguably the only reason the battalion survived, and the situation could thus be compared to that facing 7th Cavalry Regiment’s 1st Battalion, during the Ia Drang campaign in November of 1965. Meanwhile, German troops managed to overrun the 2nd Battalion’s aid-station, which was located northwest of Mortain, and was not along the ridge. This resulted in the capture of all the station’s personnel, along with the battalion chaplain (Gunner Teilman) and half of 105th Engineer’s C-Company.59

With 1st and 2nd Battalion under heavy attack, the regimental headquarters endured an intense bombardment. During the day, Major James Eynum (S-4) was thus killed, and his successor (Captain Layton Tyner) was severely wounded, leaving Warrant Officer Percy Dempsey as the regiment’s new logistics officer. Meanwhile, German aircraft were reported in great numbers, and 30th Division’s anti-aircraft asserts were therefore ordered to revert from their deployment as emergency antitank troops. Further south, 117th Regiment’s 2nd Battalion and 119th Regiment’s 1st Battalion continued to engage German troops between Romagny and Mortain, although their primary effort was merely to maintain contact with one another, amidst "high-walled" hedgerows.60

With the Germans having withdrawn from Adelee, 30th Division began desperately counterattacking along the northern flank. These counterattacks contradict the traditional narrative, which emphasizes a supposedly foolish German obsession with continuing a meaningless and ineffective attack. In reality, although the Germans wanted to advance as far as possible, they had already gained a considerable advantage by occupying positions between Mortain and St. Barthelemy. Hausser had thus ordered that the advance be halted at noon on August 7, and the Germans were quite willing to remain on the defensive. Indeed, as the records note, it was now the Americans who “continued to carry the attack to the enemy for four
successive days.” Therefore, rather than portraying this offensive as a failed attempt to reach Avranches, historians should ultimately portray it as a successful effort to seize defensive terrain, which forced the Americans to make frontal assaults. Of course, historians of the American Civil War will recognize that this very idea was advocated by Longstreet, who urged Lee to be “offensive in strategy, but defensive in tactics.” 61

During the afternoon, 119th Regiment’s 3rd Battalion (with 3rd/CCB) resumed their advance toward Tove. Previously, 3rd Battalion had been relocated from south of Tove, to a new position east of town. Subsequently, their initial attack failed due to German bombardment, but after several hours the town was nearly surrounded. At this point, approximately eight tanks managed to enter the town, alongside an infantry platoon, although this initial penetration was forced back. Eventually, however, the Germans began to withdraw, and contact was established further north with 8th Regiment.62

By late afternoon, Tove was cleared, and 3rd Battalion continued east toward Bellefontaine. However, facing heavy resistance, this advance proceeded slowly and by midnight they were halted just two kilometers from Tove. Meanwhile, 119th Regiment’s 2nd Battalion finally returned from their attachment to 2nd Armored Division, having suffered heavy casualties near Vire. This exhausted battalion would remain in reserve, presumably between Tove and Juvigny, until they were committed near Tete on August 10.63

Concurrently, 117th Regiment (with 12th Regiment’s 3rd Battalion) launched a morning assault towards St. Barthelemy, although this was halted by blistering defensive fire from entrenched tanks. This advance was conducted against entrenched German tanks. In support, the 3rd Platoon of 12th Regiment’s M-Company was credited with firing approximately eight hundred mortar rounds, whilst enduring a heavy bombardment. Subsequently, having taken
heavy casualties, 117th Regiment’s A-Company mustered merely twenty-five infantry. Records thus emphasize that the regiment was thoroughly crippled.\textsuperscript{64}

During the morning, after marching eleven kilometers eastward, 12\textsuperscript{th} Regiment’s 1\textsuperscript{st} and 2\textsuperscript{nd} Battalions were deployed west of Tete, where they filled a gap between 117\textsuperscript{th} and 120\textsuperscript{th} Regiments. By thus deploying, pressure would be relieved upon the northern flank of 120\textsuperscript{th} Regiment, where at least two battalions of German tanks and infantry were still operating between Abbaye Blanche and 285.\textsuperscript{65}

At this time, the situation around Abbaye Blanche was particularly critical, because there were insufficient troops to defend the perimeter. One of the principal roads was thus held by just six troops, one of whom was Private Robert Vollmer of 120\textsuperscript{th} Regiment’s antitank company. Armed with a bazooka, Vollmer was repeatedly under fire from infantry, who were supported by a machine-gun and a heavy bombardment. Nevertheless, he managed to destroy two armored cars, a truck, a motorcycle, and finally he knocked out the machine-gun and killed its crew. This courageous defense caused the Germans to believe that the road was strongly held, and thus saved the position from an overwhelming assault.\textsuperscript{66}

Later that afternoon, 12\textsuperscript{th} Regiment began their advance toward Tete. Reports emphasize that the weather was quite hot, whilst the exhausted regiment was halted by stiff resistance. Eventually, Colonel James Luckett diverted 1\textsuperscript{st} Battalion southeast toward Abbaye Blanche, whilst 2\textsuperscript{nd} Battalion continued toward Tete. However, 1\textsuperscript{st} Battalion was soon pinned down near Deliniere, where the troops were suffering from severe fatigue and struggling amidst the rugged hedgerows. Meanwhile, 2\textsuperscript{nd} Battalion managed to reach Tete, where they entrenched amidst a German barrage. Subsequently, the situation was described as one of extreme vulnerability, as a
large gap existed between these battalions. Furthermore, they had left their heavy equipment behind, due to a swamp which blocked the rear.\textsuperscript{67}

During the night, 4\textsuperscript{th} Engineer attempted to support 12\textsuperscript{th} Regiment by building a bridge across the swamp, but they suffered severe casualties during a dawn bombardment. Meanwhile, C-Company was forced to withdraw, after which Sergeant Paul Hackley was cited for returning to the abandoned positions and rescuing a wounded soldier. Meanwhile, the company commander collapsed from exhaustion, as did many of his troops. Finally, A-Company was brought forward whilst C-Company was withdrawn further.\textsuperscript{68}

Ultimately, Captain Francis Ware subsequently stated that the largely forgotten fighting at Tete was amongst the heaviest and bloodiest of the entire war. As the surgeon for 2\textsuperscript{nd} Battalion, he was cited for his efforts to evacuate casualties across the swamp, whilst under continuous fire. Unfortunately, much like the simultaneous struggle for Hardonniere, or the heavy fighting along the Mayenne, absolutely nothing is said about this engagement within most narratives. Since the German offensive was focused upon Mortain, historians routinely fail to consider the records of 1\textsuperscript{st}, 4\textsuperscript{th}, 9\textsuperscript{th}, and 28\textsuperscript{th} Divisions. Consequently, the extent of the German offensive has been severely underappreciated.\textsuperscript{69}

\textit{1\textsuperscript{st} Division}

The morning passed quietly, whilst defensive positions were consolidated amidst continued skirmishing. In the north, 26\textsuperscript{th} Regiment’s 3\textsuperscript{rd} Battalion reported that the enemy was entrenching nearby, after which American artillery bombarded the area. Subsequently, 1\textsuperscript{st} and 3\textsuperscript{rd} Battalions dispatched patrols which cleared the Bourgneuf, northeast of St. Fraimbault.\textsuperscript{70}

That afternoon, 1\textsuperscript{st} Recon patrolled southeast from Mayenne, toward Bais. Meanwhile, 26\textsuperscript{th} Regiment dispatched patrols northeast, toward Pre. Likewise, 18\textsuperscript{th} Regiment dispatched
patrols from Ambrieres, which encountered tanks at Cigne. Here, 2nd Battalion’s E-Company was temporarily trapped within the village, incurring three casualties. Afterwards, E-Company dispatched a platoon (with two tanks) which cleared Cigne that evening.71

Another patrol moved toward Lassay, but was halted by German tanks near Chantrigne. The records report the precise location of one such tank, at grid coordinates VY-840829. This position is southwest of Chantrigne, within a small hedged field along the Haie de Vienne. Examining the area, it is not difficult to see how the tank was positioned to ambush American forces moving along the D33. Due to the surrounding hedges and trees, this vehicle would have been completely hidden until the Americans reached a bend in the road, at which point they would have been engaged at a range of three hundred meters. Should the Americans have attempted to keep moving forward under flanking fire, they would have been engaged by German forces within Chantrigne. Meanwhile, any effort to move off the D33 would have brought them into a tangle of defended hedgerows. The advance was thus halted.72

Viewing this terrain gives one a sense of claustrophobia, as vision is frequently limited to no more than a hundred meters, in a manner not unlike the geography of Normandy. Historians have thus exaggerated the geographic significance of the breakout. Indeed, despite advancing a hundred kilometers from St. Lo, 1st Division remained mired in the bocage of Maine. Highlighting the confusing nature of such terrain, 16th Regiment eventually discovered that German infantry were operating within their perimeter, entrenching north of Aron. Faced with this complex maze of defensive positions, 1st Division requested reinforcement by 4th Cavalry Squadron. However, this was denied, as the squadron was already being committed further north.73
Summary

During August 7 and 8th, 9th Division’s 39th Regiment was severely exposed south of Perriers. Concurrently, held in reserve, 4th Division provided substantial assistance to both 9th Division and 30th Division. Meanwhile, 30th Division incurred heavy casualties as the Germans overran much of 117th and 120th Regiments. Subsequently, arriving as reinforcement, 12th Regiment faced an extremely difficult situation at Tete. Finally, although largely forgotten, 1st Division also experienced considerable aggression from the enemy, and there were concerns that the Germans might shift south from Mortain and envelop this exposed formation.
CHAPTER 5
A PROLONGED STRUGGLE

During August 9 and 10th, First Army incurred 2779 combat casualties, although the German offensive was essentially over. Indeed, having seized a commanding position north of Mortain, the Germans remained on the defensive. Consequently, the Americans were now counterattacking, in order to support the isolated battalions of 120th Regiment.¹

By overemphasizing the initial German advance, historians have failed to discuss this subsequent defense. Supposedly, according to Bradley’s memoir, “The German had failed… the attack appeared to have spent its initial momentum.” Such sentiments would have hardly encouraged the infantry who were now advancing toward entrenched tanks, under one of the heaviest defensive barrages of the entire war. Indeed, 30th Division reported an "unusually heavy" bombardment. Quite simply, the American positions were under an essentially continuous barrage from approximately two hundred pieces of heavy artillery, along with additional fire from tanks, mortars, aircraft, antitank artillery, machine-guns, and rockets.²

Historians have struggled to accept that the Germans achieved some success, by forcing the Americans to advance amidst such disadvantageous conditions. Instead, Mark Reardon’s narrative blames the Americans for their difficulties, rather than emphasizing the German role. He therefore criticizes the Americans for “poor lateral coordination” and states that they failed to properly coordinate their own artillery. However, such arguments fail to properly appreciate the severe exhaustion of these formations.³

The simple fact of the matter is that by occupying strong defensive positions, the Germans were able to steadily exploit a considerable advantage which allowed them to maintain a consistent level of attrition. Although strategically defeated, they thus remained operationally
viable. Consequently, between August 1 and August 10, First Army’s average daily casualty rate was more than twenty percent higher than during the period between June 6th and July 24th, and ten percent higher when compared with the period from July 25th to August 1.

Fortunately, the records divide these statistics into categories, and we can thus note that the combat casualty rate remained fairly consistent at just under .40% per day, nudging slightly higher to 0.42% during late July, and then dropping back down. For comparison, if the US Army had experienced such losses in Vietnam, during 1968, the casualty rate would have approached two thousand per day. This tells us that the Cobra offensive was no "cake-walk" through the bombarded remnants of German formations. Indeed, the post-Cobra environment was just as dangerous, and the strength of German resistance was officially reduced by a negligible 1.3%. Although the frontline began moving, and large numbers of German troops were killed and captured, there was no statistical indication that German capabilities had been genuinely reduced.

We should also note that after August 1, the daily rate of soldiers evacuated for "disease, other" more than doubled, from 0.08% to 0.18%. What was happening? Presumably, soldiers with conditions such as "trench foot" had been retained throughout the heavy fighting, and they were now being released for treatment since victory had supposedly been achieved. However, it must have been thoroughly demoralizing for the remaining troops to realize that resistance had not substantially decreased. Consequently, the "exhaustion" rate suddenly doubled, from 0.05% to 0.1%, as morale plummeted and personnel increasingly succumbed to psychological stress.4

Most historians simply avoid this subject altogether, preferring to focus upon the heroic defense of 120th Regiment’s 2nd Battalion, which is patriotically portrayed as a sort of Bunker Hill or Little Round Top. However, 314 was located along the edge of the battlefield, and they did not have a commanding position. Although the hill provides excellent observation of
movements toward the west, it does not overlook the battlefield further north. Indeed, the position was far more valuable to the Germans.

Ultimately, historians are simply too eager to describe the German offensive as a suicidal blunder, doomed to failure before it began. Instead, after withdrawing from their initial effort, which was nearly successful, the Germans were content to generate the same attritional situation which was seen at Verdun in 1916. By threatening to capture a prominent objective, they were thus forcing the enemy to advance through an unceasing barrage. This may not have been what Hitler hoped for, but it was certainly a limited victory.

August 9

On August 9, 2nd Division’s 9th Regiment moved south along the D577. This relieved 29th Division’s 116th Regiment, although 115th Regiment continued to face heavy resistance, east of Tallevende. Meanwhile, 28th Division advanced toward Gathemo, but was still unable to capture the objective. Further south, the Germans began to concentrate increasing strength southwest of Mortain. Consequently, 35th Division endured repeated counterattacks which severely disorganized 320th Regiment. Finally, 2nd/CCB continued to advance toward Ger, although resistance from 9th SS Division had hardened such that progress was limited to a single mile, whilst German aircraft destroyed many of the American vehicles. During this heavy fighting, a Private Hurtado reportedly threw more than six sacks of grenades, after which he had to be treated for an elbow injury. Indeed, German counterattacks became so intense that Lt.Colonel Marshall Crawley (41st Regiment’s 3rd Battalion) doubted that his formation would survive the night, and Captain Thomas Carothers was subsequently cited for leading a bayonet charge which saved the situation.5
As for Third Army, they made substantial progress, with 5th Armored Division passing through Mans against essentially no opposition. It was not until nearly midnight, at Marolles, that this formation finally encountered significant resistance "for the first time." Meanwhile, they remained more than a hundred kilometers southeast of Mortain. Meanwhile, Canadian 4th Armoured Division was halted near Bretteville, northwest of Falaise, by 89th Division and 12th SS. By the end of the day, the Canadians thus retained merely thirteen tanks. Unfortunately, 271st Division continued to hold positions west of Bretteville, whilst 272nd Division occupied the eastern flank.

Therefore, when historians discuss the brilliant advance of Third Army, which is typically contrasted with the abject failure of the "slow" Canadians, one must remember the disparity between the German defenses in the north, and those in the extreme south. Indeed, the situation map thus shows twenty-four enemy divisions holding a line extending between the coast and Mayenne, whilst zero divisions were opposing Third Army. Considering these facts, it seems clear that the halt of the Canadians was not due to incompetence, but rather because they encountered the same heavy resistance which faced First Army.

Unfortunately, newspapers continued to minimize the severity of this struggle, simplistically stating that Patton "surged" toward Paris through the "ripped" German lines. The advance toward Mans was thus compared with the victory at Amiens in 1918. Meanwhile, the situation at Mortain was only briefly mentioned. Ignoring reality, journalists merely reported that Gathemo had been captured, such that the battlefield at Mortain was somehow substantially "narrowed" as the "feeble" enemy was steadily "ground to pieces."
9th Division

At 03:00, 39th Regiment’s C-Company was once again attacked. Although this was repulsed, the aggressive effort was renewed by dawn. Subsequently, at noon, 39th Regiment was finally returned to the command of 9th Division, and ordered to advance north toward Perriers, from which the Germans enjoyed excellent observation.10

However, 1st Battalion continued to endure strong pressure, along the eastern flank, it was first necessary to divert 2nd Battalion into positions north of 1st Battalion. Meanwhile, anticipating renewed attacks, F-Company was attached to 1st Battalion. Unfortunately, that evening, the Germans managed to achieve surprise by instead attacking the northeastern flank, where G-Company was thus engaged by two mechanized companies.11

During the day, 47th and 60th Regiments advanced toward Hardonniere. Unfortunately, this position dominated the surrounding terrain, with an elevation fully a hundred meters higher than that of 47th Regiment, along the D491. The principal effort was initially made by 60th Regiment’s 2nd Battalion, which enveloped the northeastern flank. Consequently, F-Company advanced south along the eastern flank, but they were soon halted. At this point, E-Company shifted east along the northern flank, in order to provide supporting fire. However, further efforts were firmly repelled.12

Concurrently, 47th Regiment’s 1st Battalion attempted to coalesce north of Hardonniere, in support of 60th Regiment. However, German fire was so accurate that 1st Battalion failed to secure their line of departure. It appears that primary problem here was that Hardonniere is shielded on the northwest by an arc of woods, located in low ground, which thus funneled 1st Battalion into a narrow corridor, west of Bercerie. This area was presumably bracketed by German artillery and exposed to direct fire from machine-guns.13
Finally, 47th Regiment’s 2nd Battalion was directed to continue advancing southeast, with F&G-Companies ordered to envelop the northern outskirts of Perriers, whilst E-Company was to move south and then approach Perriers from the southwest. However, continued flanking fire from Hardonniere "pummeled" the northern thrust, whilst E-Company merely managed a slight advance.14

4th Division

Once again, continuing to orient themselves toward the east, various companies were shuffled around the frontage. 8th Regiment’s B-Company (southwest of Mardelle) was thus relieved by A-Company, after which B-Company relieved 22nd Regiment’s I-Company (northwest of Mardelle). Subsequently, with two of 1st Battalion’s companies playing a prominent role along the eastern flank, the battalion headquarters moved from west of 211 to west of Mardelle. Further south, 2nd Battalion continued to occupy Cherence, whilst 1st Battalion remained near 211.15

As for 22nd Regiment, little of interest happened here, aside from a decision to push 3rd Battalion forward and reinforce the flank at Lingeard. Perhaps the idea was that if the enemy were to advance through Mardelle, which was certainly threatened, then 3rd Battalion could occupy a defensive line along the forested ridge between Mardelle and Lingeard. Indeed, Hodges had ordered his subordinates to “button up tight” and “be prepared for anything.” Of course, this deployment can also be portrayed in offensive terms. With 9th Division struggling at Perriers, 3rd Battalion was situated to advance east through a forested valley, from which they could emerge along the southern flank of 47th Regiment’s 2nd Battalion.16
Finally, 4th Division’s artillery continued to support 9th and 30th Divisions, although the Germans returned fire which inflicted nineteen casualties amongst the headquarters of 22nd Regiment, including the commander, executive officer, and the assistant personnel officer.\textsuperscript{17}

\textit{30th Division}

At dawn, 117th Regiment (without 2nd Battalion, but with 12th Regiment’s 3rd Battalion) advanced toward St. Barthelemy, where they were once again halted by entrenched tanks and infantry, supported by a heavy defensive bombardment. After being pinned down for most of the day, 117th Regiment made a second attempt that afternoon, although gains were limited to a mere hundred meters. 1st Battalion was thus halted south of Bellefontaine, whilst 12th Regiment’s 3rd Battalion was west of St. Barthelemy. Meanwhile, 117th Regiment’s 3rd Battalion remained in reserve, further west.

Simultaneously, 119th Regiment’s 3rd Battalion (with elements of 3rd/CCB) advanced northeast, toward the D33 between Cherence and Bellefontaine. Yet again, entrenched German troops were supported by artillery, and were thus able to inflict heavy casualties which included the taskforce commander, Colonel William Cornog. Nevertheless, firm contact had finally been established between 30th Division, 4th Division, and 9th Division. Subsequently, that evening, 117th Regiment’s 3rd Battalion was moved north, in order to relieve this exhausted taskforce.\textsuperscript{18}

Concurrently, 120th Regiment (without 2nd and 3rd Battalions, but with 119th Regiment’s 1st Battalion and 117th Regiment’s 2nd Battalion) sought to regain contact with the position on 314. Although a slight advance was made by 119th Regiment’s 1st Battalion, this entire effort was halted by “heavily defended enemy strong points.” Meanwhile, 120th Regiment’s 1st Battalion remained engaged on 285, with the attached battalions holding a line extending south toward Romagny. Further south, at Romagny, the road was completely blocked by a destroyed German
tank, which was now surrounded by a minefield. Nevertheless, 119th Regiment’s 1st Battalion attempted to advance with 743rd Tank Battalion’s B-Company. However, the advance was channelized by the hedgerows into narrow lanes, within which the tanks were “smothered” by antitank fire.19

As for 120th Regiment’s 3rd Battalion, at Barenton, they were now formally attached to 3rd/CCA for logistical reasons (apparently, during the previous evening, they had been temporarily attached to 2nd/CCB). Subsequently, they cleared the heights south of town, as a staging area for a planned advance north by 3rd/CCA. However, these plans were changed as 3rd/CCA instead joined 1st Division at Mayenne, whilst 3rd Battalion advanced to clear the area southwest of Barenton. With L-Company leading, this limited objective was secured with light casualties. Presumably, as 3rd/CCA moved south, the battalion was now returned to 2nd/CCB. Certainly, the situation was becoming quite convoluted.20

During the morning, 12th Regiment renewed their effort to clear the D5 at Tete, between Mortain and St. Barthelemy. Once again, they faced heavy shelling and increasingly heavy resistance from strong defensive positions “characteristic of enemy resistance along [the] entire front.” Not surprisingly, 1st Battalion thus reported that considerable combat fatigue was thinning their ranks. Meanwhile, after a merciless morning bombardment, the exposed flanks of 2nd Battalion were subjected to a "smashing" blow from German tanks which advanced from both the south and the north. Fortunately, a "complete rout" was narrowly averted by the battalion commander, Lt.Colonel Gerden Johnson. Nevertheless, the battalion was forced to withdraw behind the swamp, where they focused upon maintaining a defensive line, extending south toward 1st Battalion.21
Indeed, the records note that this was the "fiercest bloodiest contest" in 12th Regiment’s history, during which tremendous losses were incurred from an "unprecedented" defensive bombardment. Nevertheless, having initially withdrawn, the attack was resumed that afternoon in conjunction with the renewed efforts of 117th Regiment, although no progress was made. During the subsequent night, all three of 12th Regiment’s battalion headquarters were "forced out" by heavy shelling. Meanwhile, 4th Engineer (supported by a company from 105th Engineer) did heroic work, completing a bridge across the swamp under constant bombardment. Afterwards, the engineers were commended for achieving the impossible whilst "catching hell."22

Finally, of course, 120th Regiment’s 2nd Battalion remained isolated east of Mortain. During the day, two pilots attempted to parachute supplies, but both aircraft were hit by flak. Subsequently, the battalion received a formal request for surrender. According to the German officer who presented these terms to Lieutenant Elmer Rohmiller (E-Company), the American position was hopeless and they therefore had until 20:00 to surrender. Supposedly, when a nearby wounded soldier heard this demand, he cried out, “No! No! Don’t surrender!” Shortly thereafter, Lieutenant Ralph Kerley (E-Company) responded by stating that he would not surrender “until his last round of ammunition had been fired and his last bayonet had been broken in a German belly.” Apparently, various expletives were included with this "unprintable" response. Afterwards, German infantry nearly broke through the perimeter, during a determined assault which was once again supported by tanks.23

1st Division

During the day, 16th and 26th Regiments consolidated their positions whilst conducting patrols. Here, the most significant event involved an encounter with a German platoon, which was dispersed by mortar fire from 26th Regiment’s 3rd Battalion.24
During the morning, 18th Regiment’s I-Company advanced toward the enemy positions which remained between Ambrieres and Mayenne, clearing St. Loup with the support of tanks and two battalions of artillery. It was soon discovered that the Germans occupied a fortified pillbox here, and it thus took until mid-afternoon before the position was burned out. Subsequently, the Germans counterattacked with tanks and infantry, and thus reoccupied St. Loup. Meanwhile, they saturated the area with mortar fire, such that 18th Regiment was unable to bring reinforcements forward. Forced out of town and under continuous fire, one of I-Company’s isolated platoons was thus pinned down within a nearby field, where they reported twenty casualties for whom they had insufficient medical supplies. Concurrently, 18th Regiment also attempted to clear Chantrigny, where B-Company was halted west of town by heavy defensive fire. The events of this day are not even mentioned within the division history, which simply states that “little… trouble” was encountered.25

After the retreat from St. Loup, it was reported that the division’s Slidex tactical encryption system had been compromised. The Slidex device is very basic, consisting of independently rolling scrolls, which facilitate rapid word substitutions. Surprisingly, it is not at all clear just how exactly the Slidex system was employed, and the National Cryptologic Museum has thus issued a challenge, requesting more information on this subject. Unfortunately, the records provide only vague details. Essentially, the records clarify that each division had a daily Slidex setting, and that this key was rotated every 24 hours. Since it was believed that the settings were compromised for August 9 and 10th, the division therefore ordered all of its formations to use the predetermined setting for August 11. This suggests that individual Slidex users would only know the settings for the current day, and possibly the next day, whilst master keys were maintained by higher headquarters.26
August 10

On August 10, 2nd Division occupied positions south of Jourdan, where they were halted by counterattacks along their eastern flank. Indeed, although the enemy was "badly battered" and was no longer fighting with "independent cohesive bodies," they were nevertheless capable of substantial resistance. Even at this late date, the records thus state, “The enemy gave no ground until definitely compelled to do so, and then only by making our advance as costly as possible.” Indeed, 29th Division made little progress along the D577, whilst 28th Division’s 109th Regiment (with 2nd/CCA) finally captured Gathemo and slowly continued toward Vengeons. The records of 66th Armored Regiment thus emphasize heavy fire from antitank artillery positioned amidst this exceptionally difficult terrain. Further south, 35th Division also faced stiff resistance, although 320th Regiment’s 1st Battalion finally reached positions south of Mortain. As for 2nd/CCB, they consolidated after a dawn counterattack against 67th Armored Regiment’s 2nd Battalion, at Barenton. Concurrently, 3rd Battalion (north of Barenton) reported that they spent the day under a continuous bombardment, whilst 1st Battalion (at Teilleul) suffered twenty-three casualties during a pre-dawn airstrike.27

As for Third Army and Twenty-First Army Group, little progress was made by either of these formations, except near Mans. Here, 79th Division occupied the city, followed by 80th and 90th Divisions, whilst 5th Armored Division was still engaged at Marolles. According to the official history of 5th Armored Division, these efforts caused the Germans to halt the advance toward Avranches, although this is clearly not true. The only impact this advance had was upon 1st Division, as 708th Division and 9th Panzer Division began to redeploy toward Avranches.28

Although 5th Armored Division reported enemy antitank artillery positions at "all" the main junctions, which were supported by "strong tank forces," journalists claimed that the
advance toward Paris was encountering "no opposition," as "whirlwind wedges" rushed forward "without check." Of course, Patton’s 15th Corps was certainly making progress, but this formation remained two hundred kilometers from Paris, and a hundred kilometers from the bulk of Seventh Armée. Meanwhile, in contrast to the extensive daily article focusing upon Third Army, almost nothing was said about the situation facing First Army, and newspapers merely reported that there was still fighting near Mortain.29

9th Division

The enemy continued to occupy both Perriers and Hardonniere. Consequently, at dawn, 47th Regiment’s 3rd Battalion was brought forward from St. Michel, and ordered southeast through 60th Regiment. Subsequently, after deploying northeast of Hardonniere, 3rd Battalion thus supported the ongoing efforts of 47th Regiment’s 1st Battalion and 60th Regiment’s 2nd Battalion. However, by noon, no progress had been made under heavy defensive fire. This situation was complicated because the Germans were also established east of Bercerie, from which they were firing into the rear of 3rd Battalion. Therefore, I-Company was diverted east, and they eventually forced the Germans to withdraw from that area. Afterwards, the rest of 3rd Battalion was able to resume advancing toward Hardonniere, which was finally occupied that evening. Meanwhile, 60th Regiment’s 2nd Battalion moved southeast and established a defensive line facing east.30

Concurrently, at noon, 47th Regiment’s 2nd Battalion was once again ordered to occupy Perriers, hoping that the position at Hardonniere was distracted by the efforts of 3rd Battalion. However, although the advance of 2nd Battalion went well for the first couple hundred meters, they were soon halted by bitter resistance. Consequently, they made no appreciable gain, despite a reduction in flanking fire. Afterwards, 1st Battalion was deployed to fill the gap between 2nd
and 3rd Battalions. As for 39th Regiment, this formation conducted vigorous patrolling, still awaiting a line of communications through Perriers. Although this regiment was thus relatively inactive, they continued to endure a sporadic bombardment.31

4th Division

For most of the day, this formation maintained its reserve position without incident, aside from some incoming artillery fire. That afternoon, 22nd Regiment was ordered to move approximately twenty kilometers southeast, toward Teilleul. Temporarily, as the divisional headquarters moved south, 8th Regiment was thus attached to 9th Division.32

30th Division

At dawn, 117th Regiment (without 2nd Battalion, but with 12th Regiment’s 3rd Battalion) continued their advance toward St. Barthelemy, where they were once again halted by entrenched infantry and tanks, supported by a heavy defensive bombardment.33 Along 117th Regiment’s northwestern flank, 119th Regiment continued to operate with 3rd Battalion and elements of 3rd/CCB. Consequently, one might thus portray this as an operation by 3rd/CCB, reinforced by an infantry battalion. However, the infantry headquarters was technically in command, which suggests the critical importance of various regimental assets, namely artillery. Ultimately, this combined force cleared the D33, between Cherence and Bellefontaine. After facing light resistance from German infantry, they then endured a severe bombardment. Nevertheless, the objective was occupied by noon, and 3rd Battalion was ordered to defend the D33/79 junction.34

Further south, 119th Regiment’s 2nd Battalion finally cleared the hills west of Mortain. Subsequently, they were ordered to move north and support a taskforce from 3rd/CCB. Previously, on August 9, this taskforce had lost twelve tanks in an advance which occupied the
juncture at Tete. However, after 12th Regiment’s 2nd Battalion was forced to retreat, the isolated tanks lacked infantry support. Consequently, efforts were now made to close the gap between the tanks and 12th Regiment. This resulted in a fierce struggle north of Neufbourg, with the battlefield dominated by enemy positions along the ridge, east of the D5, and little progress was made.  

Of course, 12th Regiment also advanced at this time. Within the zone of 2nd Battalion, Captain Warren Fox (E-Company) led his troops through heavy fire, making steady progress until he was mortally wounded. Subsequently, the Germans counterattacked with both tanks and infantry, after which E-Company was forced to retreat. Meanwhile, the situation would have been much worse if not for the bravery of Sergeant Joseph Leve, whose squad delayed the Germans for four hours.

Shortly thereafter, having suffered heavy casualties, 2nd Battalion received a hundred replacements. These were brought forward by Sergeant Thomas Kirkman. However, the inexperienced troops quickly began to take casualties and thus panicked amidst heavy fire. Fortunately, Kirkman rallied them and they helped stop a series of aggressive counterattacks. Another notable figure was Lieutenant Charles Blodgett, who commanded two reinforced machine-gun platoons. Originally, seeking to advance, 2nd Battalion had dispatched patrols to envelop the German flanks. However, it was quickly realized that the Germans were already enveloping the American flanks! Consequently, Blodgett’s force was used as a defensive "fire brigade," repeatedly intervening along both flanks.

Further south, 12th Regiment’s 1st Battalion also experienced bitter losses as they advanced across the swamp. They thus endured a heavy bombardment, which included two devastating concentrations of Nebelwerfer rockets, which hit the battalion headquarters. By the
end of the day, 1st Battalion’s official strength was down to forty percent, despite the arrival of additional replacements, whilst exhaustion further reduced their effectiveness. Meanwhile, contact between 1st Battalion and 120th Regiment was maintained by 30th Recon, which engaged isolated positions near 285.\(^{38}\)

As for 120th Regiment (without 2nd or 3rd Battalions, but with 119th Regiment’s 1st Battalion, and 117th Regiment’s 2nd Battalion), their advance began at dawn. Here, the primary effort was made by 119th Regiment’s 1st Battalion, commanded by Major Robert Herlong. Each of Herlong’s companies advanced alongside a platoon from 743rd Tank Battalion’s B-Company. However, this force soon encountered a German minefield along the southwestern edge of Mortain.\(^{39}\)

Amidst the resulting chaos, Sergeant Francis Cordle (A-Company) was credited with motivating his platoon to continue their difficult advance, whilst the tanks lagged behind within the minefield. A bulldozer-tank eventually cleared a gap through the hedgerows and thereby bypassed the minefield. However, shortly after this path was cleared, the tank was hit and burst into flames. At this point, the platoon was withdrawn, leaving Cordle with just four other troops, and together they conducted a stout defense against the counterattacking Germans. Finally, Cordle remained by himself in order to cover the retreat of his subordinates. The records thus emphasize that this was a great example of heroism.\(^{40}\)

Concurrently, the rest of 119th Regiment’s 1st Battalion suffered an equally dismal experience. In particular, a heavy barrage completely disrupted C-Company, whilst advancing German infantry forced the withdrawal of a platoon, which opened a gap between B&C-Companies. Realizing that the enemy was on the verge of a breakthrough, Lieutenant Earl Bowers led his platoon back to their original positions, despite heavy casualties. Also credited
with heroism was Sergeant Agaptio Morales (D-Company) who climbed into a burning tank and rescued a wounded crew-member who could be heard screaming for help. Subsequently, the Germans counterattacked with armored cars, although the advancing infantry were "chewed up" and the enemy soon withdrew.\(^{41}\)

Strong resistance thus prevented anything more than slight progress, and 120\(^{th}\) Regiment’s 2\(^{nd}\) Battalion remained isolated. Fortunately, presumably advancing from the southwest through 35\(^{th}\) Division, five tanks from 3\(^{rd}\) Armored Division apparently managed to reach the isolated battalion, although it’s not clear whether they remained or where they were subsequently positioned.\(^{42}\)

Finally, at Barenton, 120\(^{th}\) Regiment’s 3\(^{rd}\) Battalion advanced in a circle, clearing the surrounding area despite a heavy bombardment, and helping 2\(^{nd}\)/CCB clear the D36 (which German troops continued to interdict). Meanwhile, it was becoming increasingly clear that the enemy was retreating, and artillery therefore fired heavy concentrations against columns moving east from Mortain. Nevertheless, there was still concern about a renewed effort, and both 105\(^{th}\) and 294\(^{th}\) Engineer Battalions were therefore tasked with laying minefields, whilst simultaneously removing German mines.\(^{43}\)

1\(^{st}\) Division

During the day, this formation conducted vigorous patrolling to determine whether the Germans were withdrawing. This was a rational hypothesis, considering that a patrol from 18\(^{th}\) Regiment had discovered that the Germans were no longer at Cigne. However, although 18\(^{th}\) Regiment confirmed that the Germans had indeed withdrawn from Cigne, they soon discovered a new defensive position less than a kilometer to the northeast.\(^{44}\)
Concurrently, 3rd Battalion realized that they were surrounded by entrenched German infantry, and therefore spent the day directing artillery fire against these positions. Meanwhile, patrols toward St. Loup were halted by machine-gun fire, whilst a jeep and an M10 tank were missing. Finally, air and artillery assets were directed against a concentration of vehicles along the N12, after which “smoke columns rose thick.” It thus remained clear that the enemy retained considerable strength throughout this area.45

Operating further north, in conjunction with 18th Regiment, elements of 24th Cavalry Squadron crossed the D962 between Ambrieres and Ceauce, advancing toward Cigne from the north, where they were halted by a tank. Another patrol managed to advance further east, where they observed the position at Chantrigny. However, the support thus provided was necessarily limited, as the cavalry remained responsible for defending the junction at Passais.46

Further south, near Aron, 16th Regiment dispatched patrols which also encountered significant resistance. A-Company thus dispatched a patrol under a Sergeant Borland, which was to reconnoiter a group of houses, after which they would pass through some hedgerows before returning. As they were moving through the hedgerows, a Private Bejain spotted two German machine-guns, each located approximately a hundred meters on either side. Meanwhile, Borland realized that approximately twenty German infantry were on the other side of an adjacent hedgerow. Acting quickly, Borland ordered suppressing fire, whilst the patrol jumped the hedgerow and engaged the nearby infantry, seizing four prisoners. At this point, Bejain noticed additional enemy troops, and shouted a quick warning. Shortly thereafter, attempting to climb over a hedgerow, he was hit by machine-gun fire and killed. At this point, Borland ordered a retreat amidst heavy fire. Likewise, C-Company dispatched similar patrols, capturing two prisoners but losing an officer.47
Summary

During August 9 and 10th, 9th Division’s advance toward Perriers was disrupted by the dominating German position at Hardonniere. Concurrently, 4th Division remained in reserve, although the bombardment of 22nd Regiment shows that this period was hardly quiet. Meanwhile, 30th Division continued to struggle, alongside 12th Regiment, and the situation of 120th Regiment’s 2nd Battalion was becoming quite precarious. Finally, attempting to advance from Mayenne, 1st Division encountered strong delaying actions which were well supported by German artillery.
CHAPTER 6
A PYRRHIC VICTORY

During August 11 and 12\textsuperscript{th}, First Army incurred 2061 combat casualties. The Germans thus continued to defend north of Mortain, whilst gradually evacuating their positions. Although historians have traditionally argued that the German advance was foolish, because it allowed Seventh Armee to be enveloped, this continued defensive effort did help to extricate formations which were being enveloped southwest of Vire. Consequently, 84\textsuperscript{th} Division was withdrawn through Sourdeval, and they subsequently established defensive positions southwest of Flers. Meanwhile, most of the remaining German tanks were withdrawn southeast, where they established positions along the Varenne, between Biot and Domfront.\textsuperscript{1}

Having previously conducted operations at St. Pois and Perriers, 116\textsuperscript{th} Panzer Division was also redeployed east, toward Argentan. Likewise, 9\textsuperscript{th} Panzer Division arrived from Mayenne. Together, these formations established defensive positions which blocked the advance of Third Army’s 15\textsuperscript{th} Corps, moving north from Mans. Meanwhile, 708\textsuperscript{th} Division was also redeployed, filling the gap between Domfront and Argentan. Consequently, far from being outflanked, the Germans were thus successfully maneuvering in order to refuse their flank. Such efforts represent the fundamental difference between a panicked rout and a determined defense.

Of course, these German formations had suffered heavy losses, and Anthony Tucker-Jones has argued that their tanks were outnumbered nearly ten to one. He thus stated that the Germans only had a hundred tanks in Normandy, although he vaguely acknowledged an "unlikely" report which doubled this estimate. This latter figure seems far more accurate, considering the number of tanks which were subsequently encountered. Indeed, the latter figure is apparently an underestimate. From the records (discussed subsequently), we know that some
two hundred German tanks were encountered by 15th and 19th Corps, as they advanced north from Dreux toward Rouen. Meanwhile, advancing east toward Rouen, Twenty-First Army Group encountered nearly four hundred armored vehicles. These figures would have been supplemented by the considerable number of tanks which were encountered by 7th and 15th Corps during their advance toward Argentan and Putanges. Finally, thousands of German vehicles managed to reach the Seine and escape.²

Indeed, historians seem to consistently underestimate how many tanks the Germans possessed. For example, discussing the situation in late July, Bill Yenne flippantly stated, “It didn’t really matter whether the German Panthers could take three Shermans to their grave with them. [Seventh Armee] was practically out…” Such statements would surely have infuriated the troops of 2nd Armored Division, who faced plenty of Panthers on August 1 and 2nd, near Tessy and Margueray. Indeed, time and again, the records emphasize such heavy tanks, with large numbers reported at Mortain, Ranes, Vernon, and in Luxembourg. Were these exaggerations? Perhaps, but when eyewitnesses repeatedly describe their shells bouncing off the enemy armor, whilst something was definitely destroying American tanks, it seems quite clear that the Germans did consistently retain a significant quantity. It would thus seem that historians fail to understand that the Germans were actively moving their forces toward the front, rather than away. Consequently, although it may appear mathematically that the German reserves had been depleted, in reality they were being steadily replenished.³

Unfortunately, a merely quantitative analysis will not properly clarify the situation. At one point, Bradley did inquire about overall enemy losses, and only Third Army was able to provide a prompt response. Although D’Este claimed that this shows how Patton was a better administrator than his peers, what it really meant was that Patton fetishized meaningless
statistical data, keeping a copy next to his bed. However, this data was no more reliable than the similar body counts which were conducted in Vietnam. Pressured to achieve results, Patton’s subordinates undoubtedly inflated these figures. There is thus evidence that some formations counted every dead German and every disabled vehicle that they saw, leading to doubling and tripling as multiple formations passed through the same area.\(^4\)

As for the notion that Third Army might have kept better overall records that First Army, one should consider the dramatic difference between the records of these formations. In particular, the daily operational diary for First Army is much longer, and it typically describes the location and situation of each division, alongside a discussion of the other three armies. In contrast, the corresponding documentation for Third Army is extremely vague, rarely stating the location or situation of any division, and almost never mentioning the other armies. First Army thus attempted to keep a genuine narrative of events, whereas Third Army barely attempted to do so.

Ultimately, the important issue was not how many Germans had been killed, or how many remained, but just how effective were they at defensive operations? Indeed, we need only look at the fighting near Mortain, in order to understand the capabilities of a "badly mangled" formation. Meanwhile, their tanks were substantially superior. According to the research of Steven Mercatante, who applied his statistical experience as a tax attorney, a single German heavy tank was worth a dozen American tanks. He thus noted that the Soviets lost 96,000 tanks during the war, and concluded that the vast Anglo-American reserves were “less than impressive and more a matter of necessity.”\(^5\)

Indeed, there is an inherent advantage to defensive operations. Although tanks are most efficient when employed offensively, this derives from their ability to bypass infantry and
overrun the rear. However, when defending, the vehicle can be positioned as a mobile antitank cannon, along the reverse slope of a hill, or within a copse of trees, from which it will gain the critical first shot against an advancing tank. Meanwhile, wouldn’t the Germans have also employed minefields and antitank formations? Didn’t the Germans still retain aircraft?

Advancing on August 10, 5th Armored Division thus lost thirty-six tanks. Resistance increased on August 11, and two dozen German tanks were reported at St. Remy, whilst additional tanks were tenaciously defending roadblocks north of Alencon. General Oliver briefly contemplated advancing between these positions, through the forest of Perseigne, before wisely concluding that the forest was a "giant tank trap." Subsequently, five heavy tanks were encountered at Essay, where the leading American tank was hit by a projective which pierced the front armor, and continued out the back. Meanwhile, throughout the day, the advancing columns were bombarded by 105mm and 150mm artillery.6

On August 12, within the forest of Ecouves (approximately the same size as the forest of St. Sever), German tanks ambushed French 2nd Armored Division near Tanville. Unable to advance, the French were diverted eastward. They thus collided with the columns of 5th Armored Division, resulting in a traffic jam which took six hours to untangle. Overheard, German aircraft spotted this congestion and began strafing.7

Further north, at Sees, 116th Panzer Division "jabbed" the columns of 5th/CCA, where the two leading American tanks were disabled. As the Germans withdrew, five more American tanks were destroyed. Subsequently, as patrols advanced toward Argentan, they reported intense German activity, and the city was later discovered to be heavily mined. Meanwhile, further east, Gace was also reported to be well fortified, by a combination of tanks, infantry, minefields, and artillery. Approaching this position, Taskforce Hamberg was soon ensnared within a minefield,
whilst under fire from antitank artillery. These events provide the vital context within which one should assess the wisdom of Bradley’s decision to halt Patton’s advance. Regardless of the precise number of German tanks present, it is clear that they enemy maintained considerable resistance.8

August 11

On August 11, it became increasingly clear that the Germans were withdrawing, although this did not mean that their defensive strength had evaporated. Indeed, although German resistance was “not quite so tough” within the zone of 19th Corps, the advance was still firmly halted within a single mile. Attempting to break through, 2nd/CCA and 28th Division formed a taskforce which attempted to move east from Gathemo toward Sourdeval, although they were soon halted by the constant defensive barrage.9

Further south, 35th Division made a slight advance, reaching the D907 between Mortain and Barenton. However, the enemy maintained strong resistance between Mortain and St. Barthelemy. Likewise, 2nd/CCB was unable to make any progress toward Ger, and they remained halted southeast of Rancoudray. Indeed, although the traditional narrative portrays the role of 2nd/CCB as an armored spear thrusting into the enemy flank, the records clarify that the terrain was too rugged for tanks, and the advance was thus primarily conducted by the infantry of 41st Regiment. Ultimately, they were halted well short of the D157, which connects Mortain and Ger, and it thus seems unlikely that this limited advance disrupted the overall German effort.10

The situation remained equally static across the front of Twenty-First Army Group, which faced fifteen German divisions, in contrast with the twelve divisions facing First Army. As for Third Army, progress continued to be made along the undefended southern flank, with
80th Division advancing east from Laval toward Mans, whilst 79th and 90th Divisions moved north from Mans toward Alencon, following French 2nd Armored Division.11

At this time, twenty-six Allied divisions were thus facing Seventh Armee, where they were fighting a pitched battle between Caen and Mortain. Not a single division of Third Army was deployed here, and yet newspaper headlines screamed the name of Patton, a “specialist in mobile warfare.” The narrative of events thus focused upon the "lightning" advance of 5th Armored Division, which was supposedly moving toward Chartres, although it was really advancing toward Sees. Solemnly, journalists emphasized that the battle of Paris had now begun, observing that Chartres was "just" eighty kilometers from Paris. Meanwhile, they explained that the retreating Seventh Armee must now run a "gauntlet" between Paris and Chartres, emphasizing that it was Patton’s brilliant advance which would block this retreat. In reality, the Germans would withdraw toward Rouen, a hundred kilometers north of Chartres, and it would actually be First Army which moved to block this withdrawal.12

Helpfully, newspapers included a map of the front, showing the locations of Third Army, Second Army, and the Canadian Army, although First Army was inexplicably forgotten. This map used one arrow to show the contribution of Twenty-First Army Group, and assigned four arrows to Third Army. Elsewhere, buried beneath the leading story that Patton was "in charge," and squeezed between advertisements for garter belts and a "special" dress with a "coquettish winking" of black sequins, there was a vague acknowledgement that "apparently" fighting still continued at Mortain.13

9th Division

During the morning, this formation was preparing to once again advance toward Perriers, when patrols discovered that the enemy had mostly withdrawn. Subsequently, facing scattered
resistance, 47th Regiment’s 2nd Battalion occupied the town after it was bombarded by Allied aircraft. Meanwhile, 1st Battalion advanced further south, facing pugnacious flanking fire from the east. Further north, 3rd Battalion remained upon the high ground at Hardonniere.

Concurrently, 47th Regiment dispatched patrols east toward Beauficel (northeast of Brouains) and northeast toward Gathemo, where they established contact with elements of 109th Regiment and 113th Cavalry Group. Simultaneously, 39th Regiment’s 1st Battalion cleared the D33 east of Cherence, with C-Company receiving machine-gun fire near Forges.14

Finally, since 28th Division was advancing through the area east of Perriers (moving southeast toward Sourdeval), 60th Regiment was shifted into reserve positions west of 39th Regiment. Nevertheless, casualties were still incurred, and Lieutenant Irving Tapper was thus killed by shrapnel. As a chaplain, Tapper had served in Africa during 1942, and had declined a promotion which would have allowed him to leave the front.15

4th Division

Shortly before midnight, the leading elements of 22nd Regiment occupied Teilleul. Subsequently, at dawn, patrols were dispatched east toward the Varenne, which flows south from Torchamp toward Ambrieres, and they thus established contact with 137th Regiment. These patrols confirmed that German infantry held the eastern bank of the river, although a number of enemy patrols were encountered along the western bank. Ultimately, showing continued concern about counterattacks, 22nd Regiment spent most of the day improving their defensive positions, with an emphasis upon antitank positions.16

As for 8th Regiment, they remained along the See until that afternoon, when they were detached from 9th Division and ordered south of Teilleul, toward Desertines, arriving shortly after midnight. Meanwhile, in order to secure the twenty kilometer gap between Desertines and
18th Regiment at Ambrieres, a Provisional Ranger Group was temporarily attached to 4th Division until August 13, consisting of 2nd Ranger Battalion, 5th Ranger Battalion, 99th Independent Battalion, 759th Tank Battalion (Light), 18th Artillery, and 196th Artillery. Indicating the elite status of this force, the headquarters of 4th Division was explicitly not given tactical authority, and was merely expected to administratively facilitate their operations.17

30th Division

Although the enemy was withdrawing, 30th Division continued to face "tough sledding" and 120th Regiment’s 2nd Battalion remained isolated on 314. This battalion thus endured water shortages during a hot dusty day, which was perhaps the most critical of their ordeal. Previously, on August 10, C-47 Skytrains attempted to drop supplies, more than half of which landed within German positions. Afterwards, Captain Delmont Byrn (H-Company) led a patrol which salvaged supplies from the drop, after advancing a kilometer under intense fire. Unfortunately, none of the requested medical supplies could be located.18

Now, a second attempt was made, but this time the entire drop was misplaced by fully five kilometers, landing northeast of Bellefontaine. Exacerbating this problem, American P-47s subsequently strafed and bombed the besieged battalion. Unfortunately, German antiaircraft fire was quite heavy, and the situation was thus akin to that at Dienbienphu in 1954. Consequently, a reconnaissance plane was shot down whilst trying to discern the exact location of 2nd Battalion. Meanwhile, one of the packets of ammunition was also hit, exploding in midair.19

Unfortunately, on August 11, the only aid given to 2nd Battalion was by 230th Artillery (Colonel Lewis Vieman), which fired modified smoke shells containing medical supplies. However, these shells penetrated deep into the ground, and only one was actually recovered. Inside, the plasma bottles were both shattered, whilst the bandages were coated with chemical
residue. Meanwhile, supplies of food remained quite low, although the troops did manage to obtain some assistance from a French civilian who apparently maintained a small vegetable garden along the ridge.20

Ultimately, the focal point of the battle was shifting southward, in conjunction with the advance of 35th Division. Along the southeastern flank of this division, 120th Regiment’s 3rd Battalion thus advanced with elements of 2nd Armored Division, moving from Barenton toward the forest southeast of Mortain. Meanwhile, along the western flank of 35th Division, 120th Regiment (without 2nd or 3rd Battalions, but with 119th Regiment’s 1st Battalion and 117th Regiment’s 2nd Battalion) also advanced. Unfortunately, although 119th Regiment’s 1st Battalion reached the southern outskirts of Mortain, they were not able to enter the town which remained occupied by the enemy. Further north, 120th Regiment’s 1st Battalion cleared the small forest northwest of Neufbourg, whilst 117th Regiment’s 2nd Battalion secured the southern half of Neufbourg.21

That evening, 120th Regiment’s 1st Battalion occupied a defensive position along the D977, northeast of Tete. This redeployment to the eastern side of the D5 was possible due to the continued efforts of 12th Regiment (without 3rd Battalion), which continued to make efforts to clear the area. During the day, no appreciable gains were made, due to strong resistance from German infantry supported by heavy concentrations of artillery. Likewise, Taskforce-3 also attempted to advance, but the tanks were forced to withdraw southwest of Tete. Considering this difficult situation, during which such strong resistance was preventing all movement west of the D5, it is certainly surprising to realize that 120th Regiment’s 1st Battalion was subsequently inserted further east, seemingly without incident. Apparently, the Germans had suddenly
withdrawn during the evening, and 1st Battalion was ordered to advance since 12th Regiment was exhausted.22

Fortunately, the records contain a great deal of information regarding 12th Regiment’s efforts on this day. Advancing during the afternoon, 12th Regiment once again moved toward Tete behind a tremendous supporting barrage. Previously, the infantry had been operating without substantial support from tanks, but these had now arrived thanks to the construction of a bridge over the swamp. Nevertheless, in the north, 2nd Battalion reported heavy casualties upon reaching the highway, where they were immediately pinned down by a pair of enemy tanks located further north. Whilst attempting to address this threat, seemingly friendly troops were spotted to the south, although these turned out to be Germans wearing American uniforms. These infantry advanced to within two hundred meters, and a "hot" engagement took place. Subsequently, 42nd Artillery was credited with forcing them to withdraw.23

Concurrently, 1st Battalion reported a painful advance, during which a German tank managed to get behind A-Company. Fortunately, a Private Griffith distinguished himself by hitting the turret of the tank with a bazooka, after which the still functioning tank withdrew. During this same advance, Sergeant Vincent Bogdanski (D-Company) was credited with destroying another tank, by firing an 81mm mortar round which hit the open turret. There must have been numerous German tanks, as Private David McGirffith (12th Cannon Company) was also credited with hitting a tank with his bazooka. Meanwhile, Sergeant Waldo Larmon (D-Company) was cited for exceptional fortitude during the enemy barrage, bravely standing up to fire his machine-gun over a hedgerow, even after incoming fire had destroyed his tripod.24

Subsequently, 2nd Battalion attempted to continue eastward, in order to occupy the D977, which leads northeast from Tete toward Vire, whilst 1st Battalion attempted to occupy positions
south of Tete. The advance of 2\textsuperscript{nd} Battalion was led by F-Company, followed by G-Company, whilst E-Company held the northern flank against German counterattacks. However, as they moved east, German infantry further north were moving west to encircle 2\textsuperscript{nd} Battalion. Naturally, 2\textsuperscript{nd} Battalion therefore requested that 3\textsuperscript{rd} Battalion advance southeast from the zone of 117\textsuperscript{th} Regiment, in order to interdict this movement, although 3\textsuperscript{rd} Battalion was unable to comply since they were heavily engaged west of St. Barthelemy.\textsuperscript{25}

Further south, German tanks and infantry likewise enveloped 1\textsuperscript{st} Battalion. At this point, it was realized that 1\textsuperscript{st} Battalion had advanced too far northeast, with their A-Company thus blocking F-Company. With the advance faltering, the commanders of 1\textsuperscript{st} and 2\textsuperscript{nd} Battalions (Lt.Colonels Charles Jackson and Gerden Johnson) decided that both battalions should pivot and advance south toward Mortain. Initially, this maneuver went well, as two soldiers from F-Company (Sergeants McConnell and Wojdan) were credited with using hand grenades to destroy a pair of German machine-guns. However, just after Colonel Johnson reported this success, a mortar shell exploded nearby and killed the 2\textsuperscript{nd} Battalion’s radio operator, along with another soldier, whilst seriously injuring both Colonel Johnson and his primary subordinate, Major Lay. Johnson was thus wounded in both legs, and the face, but continued to conduct operations until relieved by Lt.Colonel Franklin Sibert.\textsuperscript{26}

Not surprisingly, further progress was halted, and 2\textsuperscript{nd} Battalion reported that they had thus suffered nearly a hundred casualties, such that the battalion was now sixty-five percent understrength. Subsequently, during the night, the regiment were subjected to a continued bombardment by "all" the German artillery, and it therefore became necessary to withdraw, although 120\textsuperscript{th} Regiment’s 1\textsuperscript{st} Battalion apparently remained in position further east.\textsuperscript{27}
During this same night, both 12th Cannon Company and 42nd Artillery endured a series of airstrikes. Within the records of the cannon company, the records briefly mention the fate of 3rd Platoon’s 3rd Squad. Since this is one of the very few times that the official records contain a formal casualty list, it seems appropriate to pause here and consider how many casualties were incurred during just one single forgotten incident.28

Killed:
Sergeant Marlin Courtney  
Corporal Joseph Popielarczyk Jr.  
Private John Evans  
Private Lawrence Willis  
Private Max Haimowitz

Seriously Wounded:
Technician Johnny Norris  
Technician Wilmer West  
Private Edward Gonyon  
Private John Heavener  
Private James Sensel  
Private Joseph Zigrai  
Private John Rapp

The cannon company records describe this as “some of the bitterest fighting,” noting that it was frequently necessary to deploy in front of the infantry, in order to obtain suitable visibility. Consequently, the exposed gun crews experienced the same difficulties which were previously encountered amongst the hedgerows near St. Lo.29

During the day, 119th Regiment’s 2nd Battalion continued to operate with Taskforce-3, although their focus was once again shifted, this time from Tete toward Abbaye Blanche. Unfortunately, the situation was little better here. During their abortive advance, H-Company’s mortar platoon became disorganized after Lieutenant Clair Askew was killed. Fortunately, the platoon managed to keep firing, with Sergeant Frederick Unger acting as an observer. Unger had initially been posted inside a tank, but was forced out when the tank caught fire. Nevertheless,
Unger continued to direct the mortars, which temporarily allowed the infantry to advance. Nevertheless, by evening, the battalion was forced to withdraw into defensive positions, where they endured a counterattack.30

Further north, German resistance also remained strong around St. Barthelemy, where 117th Regiment (without 2nd Battalion, but with 12th Regiment’s 3rd Battalion) had been forced to consolidate into defensive positions, with 3rd Battalion withdrawn a full kilometer during the previous night. Subsequently, an attempt was made to dispatch patrols around the German flanks, but they were blocked by “heavy fire... all along the front.” Nevertheless, 3rd Battalion attempted to advance, and they were promptly halted.31

To the northwest of St. Barthelemy, 119th Regiment remained on the defensive, primarily because the regimental headquarters commanded only 3rd Battalion, along with a battalion from 3rd Armored Division. Officially, the records state that the attached formation was “1st Battalion, 33rd Armored Infantry,” but since the 33rd was not an armored infantry regiment, it seems plausible that the original author meant to refer to the 1st Battalion, 36th Armored Infantry. Regardless, such uncertainties suggest the critical need for historians to actively analyze combat events while they are taking place, and immediately afterwards, so that such details can be clarified. Ultimately, 119th Regiment’s 3rd Battalion occupied a line anchored along the D79 east of Tove, extending south toward the forest. Meanwhile, the battalion from 3rd Armored Division occupied positions further north, where they maintained contact with 39th Regiment.32

1st Division

During the morning, this formation continued dispatching patrols. Along the southern flank, 16th Regiment’s A-Company thus spent the day attempting to establish contact with the enemy. No casualties were reported, although they received fire from German machine-guns and
snipers. As for C-Company, they captured eight prisoners, also without taking casualties. Meanwhile, 3rd/CCA began arriving as reinforcement.\textsuperscript{33}

The situation was more critical further north, where the outposts of 26th Regiment had been pushed back a half kilometer, during the previous night. Indeed, 3rd Battalion thus reported that one of their nightly patrols was engaged by a company of German infantry who were supported by tanks, although the patrol was saved by defensive artillery fire. Nevertheless, the regiment had been forced to withdraw. Subsequently, as they attempted to regain their lost positions, advancing patrols were pinned down near St. Fraimbault.\textsuperscript{34}

As for 18th Regiment, along the northern flank, their patrols confirmed that the Germans had not yet withdrawn, despite the threat of encirclement posed by the advance of 24th Cavalry Squadron. Meanwhile, regimental observers directed the bombardment of German positions, which included a church steeple which was being used as an observation post. Of course, the Germans returned fire, and rocket artillery thus inflicted three casualties upon F-Company. Later that evening, as a patrol attempted to advance between Chantrigne and Cigne, they were halted by a heavy bombardment which was directed from yet another church steeple. As the division thus reported, “The enemy is not pulling out, and there is contact at all [points].”\textsuperscript{35}

One might wonder why the division did not make more of an effort to advance. Aside from continued resistance, another reason was that the southern flank remained open. Of course, Third Army had advanced between Laval and Mans, but the Germans still controlled the forests around Evron. Consequently, remaining elements of 9th Panzer Division might have advanced west from Evron, with the northern flank of that advance shielded by the woods. Upon reaching the Mayenne, the enemy could have then turned north and advanced into the rear of 1st Division. With such a threat in mind, the majority of 3rd/CCA was thus deployed defensively along the
southern flank, and 1st Division naturally requested that elements of Third Army be moved northward to secure the bridge at Montgiroux. In other words, Third Army was so far south, that they weren’t even in contact with First Army’s extended flank.36

August 12

On August 12, Hodges gave his first press interview, during which he clarified that 1st Division would soon be advancing north into the German flank. Facetiously, correspondents inquired about Third Army, but Hodges refused to answer such irrelevant questions. Throughout the day, the Germans were steadily withdrawing, and efforts to interdict this retreat via airstrikes were hindered by heat haze. Indeed, although historians have tried to glorify the American defense at Mortain, by insisting that this severely affected subsequent German mobility, the records observe that the enemy withdrew “fairly well” and even prepared additional counterattacks by concentrating near Domfront.37

Although First Army continued to advance, the strength of continued resistance is indicated by the fact that General Wharton was shot and killed by a sniper, whilst visiting the headquarters of 112th Regiment. Indeed, the day’s advance was "not great," with 2nd and 29th Divisions clearing less than five kilometers along the northern flank. Further south, 110th Regiment dispatched patrols toward Sourdeval. Likewise, 2nd/CCA attempted to dispatch a taskforce toward Sourdeval, but the tanks were soon halted by a minefield near Vengons. Bypassing this position, they were then halted by antitank fire. Meanwhile, the congested column was bombarded by heavy mortars, and they were finally ordered to withdraw.38

As for 2nd/CCB, they endured a night under fire from German artillery and rockets. Subsequently, at dawn, 41st Regiment led the advance northward, with 67th Armored Regiment’s 2nd Battalion operated as a spearhead, whilst 3rd Battalion was dispersed along the flanks, and 1st
Battalion was held in reserve to exploit any potential breakthrough. Finally, emerging from the forest east of Rancoudray, they encountered entrenched antitank artillery, whilst the entire area was bombarded. No further progress was made, and they thus remained several kilometers from their objective. Meanwhile, desperate to achieve some kind of success, General Brooks dispatched a solitary platoon of tanks from 82nd Armored Reconnaissance Battalion, supported by a platoon of infantry and one of engineers, which moved east toward Lonlay. Although this effort was successful in destroying the bridge, the German response forced the taskforce to spend the rest of the day pinned down in a nearby forest. 39

Within the zone of Third Army, fighting was ongoing at Brest and Lorient. Meanwhile, German troops remained in Alencon, blocking the road toward Argentan and delaying supply columns. One is thus reminded of the situation encountered previously at Brecey. Likewise, along the opposite flank, Twenty-First Army Group made little progress. Although historians have been almost unanimously critical of their advance toward Falaise, one should remember that the eastern flank passed through the rugged region of Thury, where there was heavy fighting amidst this French Switzerland. Ultimately, newspapers discussed such operations at length, but with regard to First Army “there were no details.” Indeed, a new map was now shown, indicating six of the seven armies in France, but once again neglecting to include First Army (although First Armee was shown). 40

9th Division

This formation was now in reserve, due to the convergent advance of 28th Division. Facing no significant opposition, aside from a considerable minefield, 39th Regiment cleared the area northeast of Cherence, advancing toward Brouains and extending south toward the D179. Meanwhile, the rest of the division began redeploying. Preparing for this, 47th Regiment was thus
concentrated north of Lingeard, leaving a reinforced antitank platoon at Perriers. Concurrently, 60th Regiment began transferring immediately, moving fifty kilometers by midnight, and occupying positions west of Mayenne, near Vautorte. The route of this movement was initially northwest toward St. Pois, and then south through Cuves, west to Brecey, south to St. Hilaire, southeast through Landivy to Ernee, and finally east toward the forest of Mayenne.41

30th Division

By noon, contact was regained with 120th Regiment’s 2nd Battalion (including K-Company and other attachments), with had incurred approximately three hundred casualties. Credit for the first unit to physically make contact was later given to 320th Regiment’s G-Company. Afterwards, 2nd Battalion was relieved by 119th Regiment’s 1st Battalion.42

Concurrently, 12th Regiment (without 3rd Battalion) once again advanced toward the D5. Previously, shortly before midnight, the regiment had received several dozen replacements, who were bracketed by two rocket barrages, an airstrike, and a long and heavy bombardment. It was thus reported, “They felt right at home in a hurry.” Surprisingly, German resistance remained substantial, as scattered enemy infantry remained throughout this area, along with at least six tanks, and the successful advance was thus considered to be a “miracle of spirit and courage” by an utterly exhausted formation. Ultimately, 1st Battalion cleared positions east of Tete, with 2nd Battalion established along the D5, southeast of St. Barthelemy. Afterwards, these infantry endured a continued bombardment. Finally, that evening, 12th Regiment’s 3rd Battalion was relinquished by 117th Regiment, and they occupied positions north of St. Barthelemy.43

Not surprisingly, considering that the battered 12th Regiment had already been slated for a period of rest following their advance toward St. Pois, these troops were incredibly weary and their strength was greatly depleted. Nevertheless, the fighting was not yet over. Indeed, shortly
before midnight, 3rd Battalion’s M-Company received a very heavy concentration of German mortar fire. In the midst of this barrage, the company commander appears to have accurately calculated the German position, after which 3rd Platoon fired more than a hundred shells in three minutes, thereby suppressing the enemy. Meanwhile, the battalion commander (Major Lindner) devised an "uncanny ruse" to distract subsequent fire, and he thus ordered a halftrack to drive noisily around the streets of St. Barthelemy, after which the Germans poured artillery fire into the empty town.44

With 12th Regiment consolidating along the D5, the flanks of 117th Regiment were extended north, in order to relieve 119th Regiment. Although 1st Battalion remained centrally concentrated along the D5, between the two large bends, 3rd Battalion was brought forward and divided in half along either flank. Two companies thus held a line extending northeast from the eastern bend, whilst the other two companies held a line extending south from the western bend.45

With 117th Regiment screening 119th Regiment, the latter headquarters was able to reorganize, relinquishing the attached battalion from 3rd Armored Division, and assuming command over 117th Regiment’s 2nd Battalion (previously attached to 120th Regiment) and 120th Regiment’s 3rd Battalion (previously attached to 3rd Armored Division). That evening, this taskforce began moving east of Mortain, where they were to relieve 320th Regiment. Of course, this process was not completed until the next day. Indeed, by midnight, they remained scattered across the map, with 119th Regiment’s 3rd Battalion west of St. Barthelemy, 120th Regiment’s 3rd Battalion southeast of Romagny, and 117th Regiment’s 2nd Battalion northeast of Mortain (where they apparently relieved 120th Regiment’s 1st Battalion).46
Ultimately, the day ended with Mortain secured, and the division reported nearly two thousand casualties since August 7. Meanwhile, the attached elements of 3rd/CCB were relinquished and dispatched toward Mayenne, where they would join with 3rd/CCA. Likewise, 30th Recon was dispatched southeast, toward Bion. Finally, 105th Engineer was ordered to conduct road repairs and clear rubble.47

4th Division

Having redeployed at Teilleul, 22nd Regiment established a line of outposts extending northeast toward Barenton, which was occupied that evening by E-Company. Meanwhile, C&I companies established a line along the western bank of the Varenne. Subsequently, vigorous patrols were dispatched across the river, where they penetrated German positions to a depth of five kilometers. Likewise, further south, 8th Regiment also established road blocks and conducted reconnaissance. Later that evening, 3rd Battalion was attached to 2nd Armored Division.48

1st Division

During the morning, 18th Regiment had "a lot going on" near St. Loup, where fighting began shortly after dawn. However, the German position collapsed after being attacked by two platoons supported by three tanks. In an impressive tactical victory, 18th Regiment reported that they thus inflicted approximately a hundred casualties, without taking any losses. Apparently, the Germans became disorganized after three machine-gun positions were simultaneously hit by the tanks. Subsequently, the panicked infantry attempted to flee, but were caught in the open by a concentrated barrage.49

Further south, patrols from 16th Regiment reported that the enemy had finally withdrawn. Consequently, the division headquarters wanted to immediately advance, and therefore requested that their defensive positions be relieved by some other formation, so that they could proceed
without risk of encirclement. Later that afternoon, it was thus arranged that 2nd Ranger Battalion would secure the bridges at Mayenne. Meanwhile, 4th Cavalry Group was attached to the division. Finally, indicating the severity of casualties thus far encountered, 16th Regiment’s A-Company reported that they were summarily promoting two corporals and four privates to the rank of sergeant.\textsuperscript{50}

Summary

On August 11 and 12\textsuperscript{th}, although the enemy withdrew from Perriers, 9th Division continued to face considerable interdictory fire. Concurrently, 4th Division was shifted south toward Teilleul, as First Army began to reorganize toward the east. Meanwhile, 30th Division continued to face surprisingly heavy defensive fire, which successfully prevented any pursuit of the enemy. Finally, 1st Division managed to consolidate their positions east of the Mayenne, preparing to move toward Mace.
CHAPTER 7
ENVELOPING SEVENTH ARMEE

Between August 13 and 15th, First Army incurred 1716 combat casualties, as they pivoted counterclockwise to face north and thereby envelop Seventh Armee. However, this does not mean that the Germans had been outflanked, or that First Army was now advancing into their rear. Instead, the situation was reminiscent of that at Zorndorf in 1758, when the Prussian army appeared behind the Russians, who essentially just turned around. Indeed, the Germans had readily established a line of ten divisions, facing south between Domfront and Nonant.¹

Although historians have emphasized the theoretical advance proposed by Patton, who wished for 5th Armored Division to continue moving north from Argentan to Falaise, a similar effort was made by 3rd Armored Division, which met heavy resistance at Carrouges. Further west, strong resistance was also faced by 1st, 9th and 30th Divisions. Contrary to Patton’s assessment, these engagements do not indicate that the Germans were on the brink of collapse. Bradley thus warned Patton to "button up" and "get ready" to defend the exposed position at Argentan. As Bradley later explained, “I doubted his ability… Nineteen German divisions… The enemy could not only have broken through, but he might have trampled Patton’s position.”²

Quite simply, Bradley’s reasoning was that attempting to close the gap, between Avranches and Falaise, would merely endanger any troops which thus exposed themselves. Indeed, as Sun Tzu stated, “Do not obstruct an army retreating homeward. If you besiege an army, you must leave an outlet.” The counterintuitive reasoning for this, as Bradley understood, was that the condition of a retreating army will steadily deteriorate as they withdraw. As Richard Leckie thus observed, “Bradley might have been thinking like the wily old Kutusov, pursuing the
retreating Napoleon from a careful distance… If the wounded bear is dying in the thicket, why
go into it?”3

Rather than risking a major battle, during which one’s most mobile troops will be forced
into a desperate defense, one can instead achieve a substantial victory by simply allowing the
enemy to flee, whilst dispatching mobile forces to harass their disorganized and demoralized
columns. Employing aircraft and artillery, the Allies thus inflicted heavy casualties upon Seventh
Armee. However, had Allied troops imposed themselves across the German path, then it would
have been impossible to bombard the Germans without incurring substantial casualties from
friendly fire. Furthermore, as Bradley noted, there was a distinct possibility that the Germans
would have overwhelmed the relatively weak blockade.4

Unfortunately, historians have echoed Patton’s belief that the Germans were routed and
fleeing, such that he could have easily reached Falaise. Martin Blumenson thus took Patton at his
word, writing a sensationalist account which describes this as “the campaign that should have
ended World War II.” Instead, the true untold story is that aerial reconnaissance observed the
Germans using their transportation assets to bring infantry westward! They really weren’t fleeing
at all, and they were instead planning to strongly resist any attempt to advance north of
Avranches, which they still occupied. Indeed, the records clarify that Patton quite literally did
not know what he was talking about, as the divisions of 15th Corps had acquired “practically no
information” about the overall strength or deployment of German opposition.5

Ultimately, both Blumenson and D’Este were simply exaggerating when they argued that
“one of the gravest mistakes of the war was the reversal of roles between Patton and Bradley.”
The continuance of this petty rivalry has sorely distorted the objectivity of the traditional
narrative. Indeed, Bradley was not “troubled by doubt” and Patton was not “the single
commander who grasped what needed to be done and how to do it.” The truth of the matter is that Patton lacked the ability to objectively judge the strength of enemy resistance, and he was willing to take irresponsible risks in pursuit of personal glory. As D’Este admitted, “Patton felt invincible.” This was the case at Maknassy in 1943, and the situation was identical at Avranches in 1944. Such excessive optimism is ideal in a junior officer, but disastrous at higher levels of command. Unfortunately, historians have chosen to ignore Patton’s flaws, and they irrationally obsess about theoretical scenarios which are devoid of concrete facts. Instead, if one truly wishes to celebrate the life of a heroic general, who led from the front, then one would do far better to consider such First Army commanders as Olinto Barsanti, Norman Cota, Maurice Rose, and James Wharton.6

August 13

On August 13, Hodges attended the funeral of General Wharton, which was "rather unpleasant" due to the rows of corpses which were piled nearby. Subsequently, Hodges met with Collins, who demanded permission to enter the zones of Second and Third Armies, in order to advance toward Falaise and Argentan, thereby blocking the German retreat. With this in mind, Hodges contacted Bradley. Of course, historians have repeatedly emphasized that Patton made such requests, but scant attention has been paid to the role of First Army. Ultimately, Bradley agreed to allow Collins to advance into the Canadian zone, where 3rd Armored Division would thus occupy Putanges, along the Orne. In this way, rather than trying to swallow and perhaps choking upon the entirety of Seventh Armee, Bradley instead opted for a smaller and much more manageable encirclement.7

During the day, 2nd Division’s 38th Regiment continued clearing the area southeast of Vire, reaching the D911 between Gathemo and Tinchebray. Although they reported that they
were “exhausted by long and heavy fighting," they nevertheless faced vicious resistance. Near Vieuxville, Private Richard von Patten was thus cited after his platoon was pinned down, whilst German infantry were counterattacking. Fortunately, Patten saved his platoon by crawling toward an enemy machine-gun and throwing a grenade. When historians focus their narrative solely upon the fighting at Mortain, or Falaise, they dishonor the memory of those who were simultaneously engaged elsewhere.⁸

Along their eastern flank, 29th Division advanced south of the D911, passing through Chaulieu. Further south, 28th Division also advanced, reaching the D157 between Mortain and Ger. Meanwhile, redeployed through Barenton, 2nd/CCA (supported by elements of 3rd/CCA) approached Ger from the southeast. As for 2nd/CCB, they were now directed toward Domfront, with one column approaching from the west (along the D907), and a second approaching from the southwest (along the D976). Within newspapers, nothing was said about any of these engagements, aside from a vague acknowledgement that there was bitter fighting, somewhere west of Flers.⁹

Concurrently, the bulk of 3rd Armored Division moved east toward Carrouges, establishing contact with French 2nd Armored Division. Meanwhile, within the zone of Third Army, 4th Armored Division occupied Nantes, whilst 5th Armored Division was positioned between Argentan and Sees. As for Twenty-First Army Group, little progress was made here, with ten German divisions continuing to hold a solid defensive line. As Anthony Tucker-Jones has noted, “What more could they have achieved in the face of such dogged German resistance?” Indeed, the Germans were not yet retreating, and the records emphasize that the enemy was fighting strongly.¹⁰
Considering that there is a general consensus that Patton should have been able to advance toward Falaise, one should carefully consider the official records of 5th Armored Division. During the early morning fog, 34th Tank Battalion was lined up, prepared to advance northward. Were they then halted by Bradley’s decision? No! Instead, as the fog dissipated, German antitank artillery quickly destroyed seven tanks and the operations halftrack. Lt. Colonel Thomas Bartel was thus seriously wounded. Meanwhile, advancing toward Gace, Taskforce Hamberg was forced to withdraw by counterattacking infantry, who were supported by a heavy barrage. 5th Armored Division thus reported, “During the night, the enemy had moved in more infantry and AT guns. 88's had been placed in concealed positions on the flanks and on the dominating ground to the North…”  

30th Division

During the morning, this formation was attached to 19th Corps. Meanwhile, the bulk of the division was reorganized, whilst their frontage was enveloped by 28th Division. As 109th Regiment thus cleared the zone of 117th Regiment (without 2nd Battalion), the latter formation extended its own frontage southward, relieving 12th Regiment. Subsequently, 12th Regiment was detached, moving south toward Teilleul.  

As for 120th Regiment (without 3rd Battalion, but with 119th Regiment’s 1st Battalion), they initially remained in position, awaiting 109th Regiment. Subsequently, 120th Regiment’s 1st and 2nd Battalions were concentrated between Neufbourg and 285, whilst the battalion from 119th Regiment remained on 314. Meanwhile, 119th Regiment (without 1st or 2nd Battalions, but with 117th Regiment’s 2nd Battalion and 120th Regiment’s 3rd Battalion) completed their ongoing relief of 320th Regiment, east of Mortain. Afterwards, 117th Regiment’s 2nd Battalion was detached, and their positions were filled by the return of 119th Regiment’s 1st Battalion. Presumably, 119th
Regiment’s 2\textsuperscript{nd} Battalion also returned at this time. Later, 117\textsuperscript{th} Regiment’s 2\textsuperscript{nd} Battalion was moved to the southern flank of 117\textsuperscript{th} Regiment, at Neufbourg.\textsuperscript{13}

Finally, after the area east of Mortain was cleared, 119\textsuperscript{th} Regiment’s 3\textsuperscript{rd} Battalion was moved to Barenton. Arriving shortly before midnight, K-Company advanced five kilometers northward, occupying the forested ridge southeast of Rancourday (west of the D182). This movement was supported by 120\textsuperscript{th} Regiment’s 3\textsuperscript{rd} Battalion, which was positioned southwest of Rancourday. That evening, this latter battalion was finally reattached to 120\textsuperscript{th} Regiment.\textsuperscript{14}

Ultimately, these intricate and confusing movements suggest the complexity of a single division, and the manner in which subordinate formations were routinely organized as fluid taskforces. However, why should anyone ever bother to learn such details? Quite simply, during the midst of heavy combat, effective officers must anticipate such convoluted maneuvers, and be prepared to memorize and clearly delineate the location, objective, and situation of disparate formations. If they cannot do so at a desk, with the assistance of a teacher, they will never be able to do so spontaneously on the battlefield.

\textit{4\textsuperscript{th} Division}

East of Teilleul, 8\textsuperscript{th} Regiment solidified their line along the Varenne. Meanwhile, 22\textsuperscript{nd} Regiment crossed the river, with one patrol moving from Barenton toward Domfront, whilst another occupied Torchamp after a brief skirmish. The success of these patrols was taken as an indication that the Germans were continuing to withdraw. Consequently, efforts were made to establish a mobile reserve which might exploit the situation. However, this proved difficult due to a shortage of trucks, although a decision was made to allocate all kitchen trucks to 2\textsuperscript{nd} Battalion. Meanwhile, the Provisional Ranger Group was reassigned to 9\textsuperscript{th} Division, moving toward Mayenne.\textsuperscript{15}
During the day, 4th Division resumed command of 12th Regiment, which concentrated near Juvigny and then moved toward Heusse, south of Teilleul. Having endured a "brutal punishment" north of Mortain, the exhausted regiment reported 1150 casualties over five days, with losses of 130% since June. With this in mind, the official Mortain memorial should certainly be modified, in order to clearly acknowledge the significant contributions of 4th, 9th, and 35th Divisions, alongside both 2nd and 3rd Armored Divisions. Indeed, 12th Regiment lost twice as many troops in comparison to any of 30th Division’s regiments. Meanwhile, as a testament to pronounced German determination, the regiment captured a total of just three sullen prisoners. Lest one think that 12th Regiment simply failed to aggressively pursue and capture the defeated enemy, a captain from 120th Regiment’s 1st Battalion stated that he didn’t see a single German surrender until August 14.16

9th Division

At this time, 60th Regiment was temporarily assigned to 3rd Armored Division. Subsequently, 3rd Battalion led the regiment toward Pre, whilst the remainder of the regiment concentrated between Javron and St. Cyr. Meanwhile, 47th Regiment concentrated southwest of St. Georges, whilst 39th Regiment regrouped near Cherence. Finally, as noted, 9th Division temporarily took control of the Provisional Ranger Group, which occupied Mayenne. Consequently, the division was split into four sections, extending across nearly a hundred kilometers.17

1st Division

Shortly after midnight, 2nd Ranger Battalion arrived at Mayenne, where they would guard the bridges, so that 1st Division could move northeast toward Mace. This advance began at dawn, with 1st Recon leading, followed approximately an hour later by the infantry. Meanwhile, the
Germans began automatically withdrawing, with one report stating that the Americans were thus trailing the Germans by approximately five minutes. However, 1st Recon’s 2nd Platoon (followed by 26th Regiment’s 2nd Battalion) soon encountered resistance along the D34, east of St. Fraimbault.\textsuperscript{18}

Concurrently, 18th Regiment advanced toward Juvigny and Andaine, with 2nd Battalion on the left, and 3rd Battalion on the right. They were preceded by 1st Battalion’s A-Company, reinforced with halftracks and a tank platoon, which engaged strong delaying forces northwest of Lassay. Subsequently, south of Juvigny and Andaine, this taskforce was halted by stronger defensive positions. Upon reaching this area, A-Company made three unsuccessful attempts to clear a German position, presumably at Mocherie. Meanwhile, 2nd Battalion’s K-Company advanced north from Chantrigne toward Bretignolles, where initial resistance was encountered. Subsequently, 2nd Battalion moved toward Sept-Forges, where they discovered that the bridge over the Mayenne had been demolished.\textsuperscript{19}

Further north, across the river, elements of 4th Cavalry Group advanced toward Beaulandin, where they were halted by a German tank supported by infantry and 20mm cannon. Further east, 26th Regiment reported that Couterne was heavily fortified. The Germans had thus withdrawn to a defensive line anchored on the Mayenne at Couterne, and extending northwest along the D976 toward Domfront.\textsuperscript{20}

By midnight, seeking to penetrate between Andaine and Couterne, 18th Regiment’s 3rd Battalion engaged the German position at Andaine, whilst 2nd Battalion shifted east and attempted to occupy the junction at Haleine, from which they intended to clear the heights west of Tess-Froulay. The initially unsuccessful effort by 3rd Battalion was conducted by K&L-Companies, whilst I-Company was unable to participate, as they were instead diverted to
eliminate German skirmishers who had infiltrated the perimeter. As for 2\textsuperscript{nd} Battalion, they were firmly halted by German counterattacks.\textsuperscript{21}

Not surprisingly, the division headquarters became concerned about this precarious situation, and 18\textsuperscript{th} Regiment was advised to be careful and consider postponing further operations until the following day. Nevertheless, 1\textsuperscript{st} Battalion was brought forward to hold the center and relieve pressure upon 2\textsuperscript{nd} Battalion, whilst 3\textsuperscript{rd} Battalion moved west to envelop Andaine and occupy the heights at Poirier. Subsequently, K&L-Companies were thus able to provide suppressing fire from the north, as I-Company began to clear Andaine from the south.

Concurrently, further east, 26\textsuperscript{th} Regiment advanced with 2\textsuperscript{nd} Battalion on the right, and 1\textsuperscript{st} Battalion on the left. Upon reaching Couterne, where resistance was encountered from tanks and infantry, 3\textsuperscript{rd} Battalion crossed the bridge and occupied the town, whilst 2\textsuperscript{nd} Battalion attempted to occupy the eastern heights. However, 2\textsuperscript{nd} Battalion encountered considerable resistance whilst trying to cross the river at Mehoudin, such that only a few elements were across by midnight.\textsuperscript{22}

Finally, supporting the eastern flank of 26\textsuperscript{th} Regiment, 16\textsuperscript{th} Regiment cleared the D34 between Lassay and Couterne.\textsuperscript{23} The records of A-Company indicate that at least part of the regiment was first concentrated near Ambrieres, where they rested before continuing eastward. Likewise, 24\textsuperscript{th} Cavalry Squadron secured the western flank, establishing a line extending northeast from Lore toward St. Denis. Indeed, there was considerable concern about a potential German advance proceeding southeast from Domfront, such that 18\textsuperscript{th} Regiment’s 1\textsuperscript{st} Battalion was ordered to face west from Geneslay.\textsuperscript{24}

August 14

On August 14, 2\textsuperscript{nd}, 29\textsuperscript{th}, and 28\textsuperscript{th} Divisions consolidated positions between Vire and Mortain, east of the D977. Although the Germans were withdrawing, 2\textsuperscript{nd} Division noted that they
continued to endure bombardment, whilst dense minefields were becoming an “even more bothersome threat.” Meanwhile, although the Germans were clearly exhausted, they nevertheless maintained "stop-gap" formations which continued to delay the advance. Instead of fleeing, disintegrated German formations thus rallied into platoon-sized elements, which continued to make limited counterattacks.25

Further south, 30th Division advanced northeast from the D907, clearing the area east of Mortain with support from 2nd Armored Division. Further east, 3rd Armored Division experienced extremely heavy fighting between Carrouges and Ranes, where they were engaged against 708th Division, which was supported by 2nd Panzer and 2nd SS. As Anthony Tucker-Jones has acknowledged, these formations were “far from destroyed.” Indeed, although newspapers reported that the Germans were streaming eastward, First Army continued to face strong resistance from enemy troops who refused to acknowledge their grave predicament. After combat lasting all night, 3rd/CCA thus endured a vicious engagement throughout the day, “fighting desperately for its very existence” during what the records state was “some of the heaviest fighting in the Normandy campaign.” As the records concluded, the enemy had to be respected, and they remained extremely effective even when beaten. Meanwhile, American aircraft bombed the combat command’s headquarters.26

It was only now that the presence of Third Army became significant along First Army’s flank, with French 2nd Armored Division advancing west of Argentan and 5th Armored Division operating further east. Although Patton believed that it would have been possible to advance further north, it should be noted that four American divisions (1st, 3rd Arm, Fr 2nd Arm, and 5th Arm) were opposed by eight German divisions (331st, 708th, 6th FJ, 2nd SS, PzL, 2nd Pz, 9th Pz, and 116th Pz). Certainly, formations such as Panzer Lehr were sorely understrength, but it is
understandable that Bradley doubted the wisdom of a continued advance, considering that a
dozen additional enemy divisions were approaching this area.

Further north, the Canadian Army made substantial progress toward Falaise, penetrating
between two German infantry divisions, only to discover that the objective was firmly held by
89th Division and 12th SS, such that the enemy retained a commanding position. Meanwhile,
although the Germans were forced to withdraw from Potigny after a heavy bombardment, this
unfortunately caused four hundred casualties amongst the attacking troops.27

With German infantry thus holding Falaise, the remaining tanks of 12th SS were free to
turn south and intervene against any advance by 15th Corps. Meanwhile, 9th Panzer was directly
north of Argentan, and they would have undoubtedly fallen back toward the reinforcements of
12th SS, adopting defensive positions along the forested ridge which dominates this area.
Consequently, the advancing 5th Armored Division would have been funneled into a narrow
valley, with counterattacking forces massing along both flanks, and antitank artillery
undoubtedly deployed in great quantities. Meanwhile, one should remember that Third Army had
still not cleared Argentan, and the proposed advance would thus begin with German infantry
retaining a firm blocking position along the main road.

Furthermore, according to the division records, this formation was exhausted. How could
they have thus reached Falaise? Rather than feeling robbed of an opportunity to achieve
immortal glory by capturing an entire enemy army, the personnel instead appear to have been
quite happy to use this opportunity to pause and perform “as much maintenance as possible.”
Snidely, Patton would later state, “We had perfect facility in shifting divisions without losing a
moment’s time… We never had to regroup, which seemed to be the chief form of amusement in
the British armies.” However, regrouping is exactly what 5th Armored Division spent the day
doing. Subsequently, advancing east toward Dreux, the division headquarters reported that
control was difficult amidst this rugged terrain, despite light resistance. In other words, after
resting for an entire day, and moving against minimal opposition, the division did not find it easy
to advance.28

One need only consider the experience of 2nd Armored Division at Ger, and 3rd Armored
Division at Ranes, in order to understand how difficult this situation would have become, if 5th
Armored Division had instead moved north without even pausing to reorganize. Indeed, Patton
appears to have learned nothing from the fate of 1st Armored Division, which he obsessively
ordered to advance at Maknassy, in 1943. Quite simply, although tanks have been fetishized by
historians and theorists, they were not terribly effective against prepared defensive positions.
Indeed, within its own records, 5th Armored Division specifically stated that the advance toward
Falaise did not fit within their specialty. As Bradley thus realized, the proper role for 5th
Armored Division was not to make a direct frontal assault, but instead to exploit the undefended
region further east. Therefore, the enemy would instead be allowed to withdraw east along a
"passage of death," where they would endure continuous bombardment.29

30th Division

Although historians have criticized the slowness of the advance, 30th Division reported a
vigorous operation, although this was inevitably delayed by insufficient transportation.
Eventually, by shuttling the available trucks back and forth, the division was moved southeast
behind 113th Cavalry Group, with 117th Regiment "detrucking" at St. Georges, and 120th
Regiment concentrating near St. Mars (followed by 119th Regiment).30

Advancing northeast toward Lonlay, 117th Regiment’s 3rd Battalion was soon halted by
heavy fire emanating from the heights east of the Egrenne, which flows through Lonlay.
Eventually, 1st Battalion advanced along the northern flank and occupied Lonlay. However, they were immediately withdrawn, because the town was dominated by the heights. Meanwhile, 3rd Battalion was dispersed into companies and moved south, where they secured a line facing toward Domfront, extending along the river between the D907/262 junction and the D22. Finally, 2nd Battalion remained in reserve, at the estate west of the D217.31

Concurrently, 120th Regiment moved northeast toward Domfront, preceded by cavalry elements which were steadily engaged as they advanced. Leading the infantry, 1st Battalion also encountered resistance, and their advance was further delayed as the D976’s bridge across the Egrenne was destroyed. Fortunately, 105th Engineer’s A-Company was able to construct a hasty ford bypass whilst B-Company constructed a bridge.32

Subsequently, the advance continued with 1st Battalion facing concentrated resistance southwest of Domfront, along the D976 at Pignon Blanc, where the infantry endured a "terrifying" bombardment. Bypassing this area, 2nd Battalion advanced into Domfront, whilst 1st Battalion followed the enemy. By the end of the day, 1st and 3rd Battalions were thus north of Domfront, with 1st Battalion halted by stiff resistance northwest of town. Meanwhile, 2nd Battalion established defensive positions within the eastern suburbs. Finally, 30th Recon was also quite active, clearing ten kilometers of the D907 between Barenton and Rouelle. Afterwards, this force screened the northwestern flank, maintaining contact with 109th Regiment.33

4th Division

8th and 22nd Regiments extended patrols further east, clearing the western banks of the Mayenne, northeast of Ambrieres. Meanwhile, the exhausted 12th Regiment spent the day resting, refitting, and processing replacements.34 4th Division thus held a reserve position, extending from southeast of Domfront toward Mayenne.
During the early morning, 16th Regiment extended their positions eastward, with a "running patrol" along the D264, between Chevaigne and Madre. Meanwhile, 18th Regiment’s 2nd Battalion received small-arms and 20mm fire from the northeast, where "quite a bit" of resistance remained. Subsequently, at dawn, 26th Regiment’s 1st Battalion advanced north toward Bagnoles, moving along the D916. 2nd Battalion was ordered to support this movement, but they were then diverted to engage German troops who were blocking roads in the rear.35

During the morning, 18th Regiment’s 2nd Battalion cleared Haleine, with leading elements occupying the heights west of Tesse-Froulay. Further west, fighting continued in Andaine, where approximately two platoons of infantry (supported by tanks) were surrounded by 3rd Battalion. Efforts to clear this opposition were delayed by a series of explosions across the front. These detonations were also reported by 26th Regiment, which noted, “delayed-action stuff, everything from oil to munitions.” Meanwhile, approaching Andaine from the southwest, elements of 4th Cavalry Group engaged German artillery along the western edge of town, only to be bombarded by American artillery and aircraft. Not surprisingly, the cavalry requested, “Notify them where we are located.”36

By noon, 18th Regiment’s 2nd Battalion was approaching Gautier, moving northeast toward Bagnoles, followed by 3rd Battalion. Further south, 1st Battalion remained engaged at Andaine. Efforts to maintain contact were hindered because German defensive positions were still scattered along the D53, such that it became necessary for the regiment to make its own road by bulldozing through the hedgerows. It is not clear where this temporary road was located, but since the D53 was blocked at Andaine, and 2nd Battalion had advanced through Haleine toward Gautier, it seems plausible that this connected the D848 with the D235.
Concurrently, 26th Regiment’s 1st and 2nd Battalions occupied Bagnoles, whilst 3rd Battalion continued along the D916 and occupied positions northeast of town. Subsequently, that afternoon, with 18th Regiment still struggling to secure the D53 between Andaine and Gautier, 16th Regiment began moving north through Andaine, with 1st and 3rd Battalions approaching Sauvagere by midnight, followed by 2nd Battalion. Of course, as always, this movement was conducted against German infantry who were supported by mortars. Eventually, C-Company reported that they had captured a German tank, along with two vehicles and several prisoners, somewhere within the forest north of Sauvagere.37

After 16th and 26th Regiments had moved north, 18th Regiment was turned west, with B&C-Companies advancing toward Juvigny, where they were soon halted by enemy resistance. Meanwhile, elements of 4th Cavalry Group approached the objective from the west. However, rather than risk casualties by assaulting the town and getting "jumped on," the advance was halted whilst the town was bombarded. Concurrently, 3rd Battalion established a blocking position within the forest, at the crossroads north of Juvigny. Eventually, by midnight, it was reported that the mechanized German troops had withdrawn, presumably toward Champsecret. However, the enemy retained isolated formations to the southwest, and an infantry platoon thus attempted to move east from Beaulandis.38

9th Division

Still acting under the authority of 3rd Armored Division, 60th Regiment moved northwest from Pre, establishing a line extending northeast from St. Patrice toward Joue. Later that evening, this regiment reverted back to 9th Division. Meanwhile, the rest of the regiment occupied positions previously cleared by 3rd Armored Division, which was heavily engaged further north.39
Concurrently, 39th Regiment advanced through Couptrain and the forest of Motte, occupying positions southeast of St. Patrice. Further east, 47th Regiment established positions south of Joue, along the heights of Orgeres. Of course, one must bear in mind the size of these formations, and thus 47th Regiment’s headquarters remained south of Lignieres, at Vacherie.40 The regimental depth was thus five kilometers. As for the Provisional Ranger Group, they continued to occupy defensive positions at Mayenne, and were detached that afternoon.41

August 15

On August 15, 2nd Division’s 38th Regiment occupied Tinchebray, which was the final objective for 5th Corps. 3rd Battalion thus enveloped the area south of town, whilst 2nd Battalion cleared the objective. Although German prisoners were described as demoralized, and resistance was thus "half-hearted and ragged," the enemy nevertheless made a "bold" attempt to withdraw, after successfully delaying the advance all afternoon.42

Meanwhile, Hodges attended conferences with the commanders of 5th and 19th Corps: Gerow and Corlett. Of course, this is counterintuitive, since 7th Corps was where most of the combat activity was taking place. Here, 1st and 9th Divisions were engaged around Mace, whilst 3rd Armored Division continued to fight a major engagement along the eastern flank. However, as Second Army advanced south across the frontages of 5th and 19th Corps, it would be necessary to shift both corps laterally across the front, which would severely disrupt the already congested roads.

Therefore, leaving the immediate conduct of combat operations to his subordinates, Hodges focused upon the tremendous administrative difficulties associated with massive troop movements. Eventually, after consulting with Twelfth Army Group, it was decided that 5th Corps would only retain its headquarters, whilst 2nd Division was assigned to 8th Corps and moved
toward Brest. In this way, not only was Hodges facing the bulk of the German resistance, but he was also reinforcing Patton, who still failed to capture Brest. Of course, one shouldn’t minimize the difficulty of this task. Indeed, the point of this argument is not to discredit the efforts of Third Army, but rather to emphasize the profound strength of German resistance, which 2nd Division described as "hideously efficient."43

One should thus consider the experience of Lt.Colonel Olinto Barsanti, who commanded 38th Regiment’s 3rd Battalion. Advancing across the Plougastel peninsula on August 22, 3rd Battalion encountered a "seemingly impregnable bastion" on 154, consisting of reinforced concrete bunkers surrounded by entrenchments with "excellent fields of fire" for artillery and dozens of machine-guns. It took two days to clear this objective, during which Barsanti was wounded, although he retained command. During this fighting, Sergeant Alvin Carey received the Congressional Medal of Honor, posthumously. Subsequently, upon his own citation for a Silver Star, Barsanti would pointedly write, “This was [only] a small part of the fighting we did.” Indeed, within a week, he would receive another Silver Star. By August 31, after six hours of continuous fighting, Barsanti thus reported that his troops were fatigued and demoralized. Nevertheless, despite such heroism, the enemy continued to defend Brest. Afterwards, returning to First Army, 2nd Division would participate in the Belgian campaign, and Barsanti ended the war with four Purple Hearts, six Bronze Stars, three Silver Stars, and the Croix-de-Guerre.44

As for the headquarters of 5th Corps, they would be moved to Avranches, where they eventually took command of three divisions from 15th Corps. Not surprisingly, Patton viewed this decision with some disdain, believing that Eisenhower and Bradley were motivated by petty grudges. However, it seems that Bradley had little faith in Patton’s ability to handle critical combat operations. One must remember that Patton wrote demented things like, “You do what
leads to your ambition and… get the power… No sacrifice is too great... I will make a name or at worst an end…” Meanwhile, by early August, Patton was predicting that the war might end in days, and he wrote, “All that is necessary now is to take chances…” With some justification, Bradley was thus worried that Patton might try something exceedingly foolish, and Eisenhower stated quite plainly that he doubted Patton's judgment. Indeed, D’Este has acknowledged that Patton suffered from brain damage whilst Blumenson has admitted that Patton was occasionally delusional, or perhaps manic is the more appropriate diagnosis.45

More than either biographer, both Bradley and Eisenhower knew Patton’s personality from personal experience. Both commanders thus feared that he might unilaterally try and achieve the almost impossible advance toward Falaise. Within his memoir, Eisenhower emphasized that Patton was best suited for maneuvers through light resistance, essentially moving troops toward the front. Indeed, being "indifferent to fatigue," Patton did push his troops forward with all possible haste. However, in combat, his impulsiveness was a liability, and Eisenhower clearly preferred the "steady and sturdy" commander of First Army. Likewise, Bradley emphasized the common sense of Hodges, in whom he had "implicit faith."46

Patton appears to have never understood why Bradley “initiated potentially brilliant maneuvers, then aborted them.” Wrongly, Patton believed that Bradley lacked faith in himself, when it was actually Patton whom Bradley did not trust. By advancing Third Army, Bradley was thus feinting. Third Army was a diversion along the flank, whilst the primary force was First Army. Although Patton demanded that he be allowed to move north, one should remember that it had only been a week since the same general had prematurely proclaimed a victory at Brest. Sarcastically, Bradley noted that this report was difficult to believe since the Germans “did not customarily relinquish so important a prize without a struggle.” Now, on the very day that
Bradley was sending an additional division toward Brest, he was certainly not in the mood for self-aggrandizing nonsense.\textsuperscript{47}

Consequently, the 5\textsuperscript{th} Corps headquarters was ordered to assume command of French 2\textsuperscript{nd} Armored Division, alongside 80\textsuperscript{th} and 90\textsuperscript{th} Divisions. Therefore, although Patton should be credited with guiding his other formations toward Dreux (5\textsuperscript{th} Armored Division) and Chartres (7\textsuperscript{th} Armored Division), it is simply wrong to portray Patton as a central figure during the battle of Normandy. As D’Este stated, Patton was a mere "spectator." Meanwhile, by focusing upon a theoretical advance by 15\textsuperscript{th} Corps, historians have completely ignored the actual experience of 7\textsuperscript{th} Corps. Furthermore, they also ignore the subsequent experience of 80\textsuperscript{th} and 90\textsuperscript{th} Divisions, all of which indicates that resistance was far stronger than Patton anticipated.\textsuperscript{48}

\textit{30\textsuperscript{th} Division}

During the morning, this formation resumed advancing against a steady delaying action, during which elements of 17\textsuperscript{th} SS occupied defensible terrain surrounded by extensive minefields. Indeed, the records state that many of the enemy troops were drunk, but this does not seem to have impeded their ability to plant mines "in great profusion." Although the Americans had hoped that their advance would be a "breeze," they instead found the situation to be quite difficult, with their tanks firmly halted.\textsuperscript{49}

Many of the records are unavailable, but existing reports clarify that 3\textsuperscript{rd} Battalion cleared the heights north of Domfront, whilst 1\textsuperscript{st} Battalion advanced toward St. Bomer, where they were halted by tanks supported by rockets and 150mm artillery. As for 2\textsuperscript{nd} Battalion, they spent the day holding defensive positions, facing east from Domfront. During the advance toward St. Bomer, 1\textsuperscript{st} Battalion reported that the Germans employed an old trick, during which they placed their infantry on the reverse slope of a hill, with tanks hidden on either flank. Meanwhile, 3\textsuperscript{rd}
Battalion was surprised to discover Lt.Colonel Hardaway’s jeep, which had been captured at Mortain. Fortunately, nobody tried to drive the vehicle, as it was rigged to explode.\(^{50}\)

Subsequently, 119\(^{\text{th}}\) Regiment advanced behind 120\(^{\text{th}}\) Regiment, establishing defensive positions extending northeast of Domfront. 1\(^{\text{st}}\) Battalion thus advanced along the D21 toward Dompierre, clearing scattered resistance. Meanwhile, with 119\(^{\text{th}}\) Regiment occupying this area, 120\(^{\text{th}}\) Regiment’s 2\(^{\text{nd}}\) Battalion was presumably moved northward. Unfortunately, due to the incomplete records, we have little idea of 117\(^{\text{th}}\) Regiment’s activities, although they presumably crossed the Egrenne at Lonlay, where there was undoubtedly resistance from entrenched infantry emplaced along the heights.\(^{51}\)

Concurrently, along the eastern flank, 2\(^{\text{nd}}\) Armored Division engaged 10\(^{\text{th}}\) SS during an advance which finally reached Ger. Meanwhile, along the northwestern flank, 28\(^{\text{th}}\) Division consolidated positions along the Egrenne, facing light resistance from 1\(^{\text{st}}\) SS Division.

4\(^{\text{th}}\) Division

This was now a rear formation, tasked primarily with patrolling. During the day, they conducted training and maintenance. Subsequently, the troops enjoyed "the works," including movies, doughnuts, USO shows, showers, and swimming. According to the records of one battalion, this was thus a brief moment of happiness.\(^{52}\)

1\(^{\text{st}}\) Division

By 02:00, 16\(^{\text{th}}\) Regiment’s 1\(^{\text{st}}\) Battalion was northeast of Sauvagere, where A-Company fought a dawn engagement. Subsequently, holding their position, 1\(^{\text{st}}\) Battalion dispatched patrols which incurred several casualties. Meanwhile, 2\(^{\text{nd}}\) Battalion established positions west of town, and 3\(^{\text{rd}}\) Battalion occupied the objective.\(^{53}\)
During the afternoon, 18th Regiment advanced northwest from Sauvagere. Here, 2nd Battalion engaged in a prolonged struggle northwest of Coulonche, which delayed their advance toward the D21 (between Etangs and Bellou). F-Company was thus forced to defend against a sizable counterattack, until armored reinforcements arrived. Subsequently, 3rd Battalion occupied the forests around Rousseliere, with 1st Battalion clearing the D18 west of Mauny. Prior to advancing, 3rd Battalion reported employing heavy suppressing fire against enemy infantry, who still managed very heavy resistance. Subsequently, 18th Regiment endured heavy fighting which lasted throughout the night.54

Indeed, the woods north of Rousseliere were "loaded" with German infantry, moving east along the D266/218. Of course, 18th Regiment could have continued north, in an attempt to block this retreat, but that would have required a frontal assault against entrenched positions. Instead, the area was bombarded by four battalions of artillery, which did "beautiful work" via barrages ranging as far east as Lonlay. Meanwhile, patrols moved west, reaching Etangs shortly after midnight.55

Southwest of Etangs, 4th Cavalry attempted to pass through the western edge of the forest of Andaine, presumably moving north along the D52. However, they were soon halted by a roadblock near Champsecret. Meanwhile, along the eastern flank, 26th Regiment advanced northeast of Mace, toward Beauvain, where 2nd Battalion connected with 39th Regiment. Concurrently, 1st Battalion cleared positions northwest of Mace, whilst 3rd Battalion remained southeast of town. During this advance, Lt.Colonel Murdock (1st Battalion) was wounded by a German bullet. Indeed, 2nd Battalion reported snipers "all the way."56
During the day, 60th Regiment remained southwest of Joue, whilst 3rd Battalion was still operating with 3rd Armored Division. Indeed, the Germans maintained bitter resistance along the eastern flank, between Carrouges and Fromentel. Here, during the early morning hours, a German patrol entered the positions of 703rd Tank Destroyer Battalion, capturing and then executing several members of that formation. Subsequently, an advancing tank company was ambushed by German tanks, which had been hidden in caves. Reading a newspaper, the troops of 7th Corps would surely have been annoyed to discover, squeezed between ads for marmalade, shoes, costumes, and vitamins, that they were thus "plunging" forward against their "demoralized" enemy.\textsuperscript{57}

As for 39th Regiment, 2nd and 3rd Battalions advanced northwest from St. Patrice, toward the D916 between Mace and Beauvain. This advance met no resistance until 16:00, when they ambushed along both flanks, by German infantry operating alongside tanks. Subsequently, 2nd Battalion was entrenched along the Ferte, west of Beauvain, whilst 3rd Battalion continued another kilometer northwest, toward Aulnes. In reserve, 1st Battalion occupied positions east of Mace. Later that evening, these positions were bombarded.\textsuperscript{58}

Concurrently, advancing at dawn, 47th Regiment advanced north from Orgeres, moving behind a screen of motorized patrols, with additional patrols from 60th Regiment along their eastern flank. With 2nd and 3rd Battalions leading, there was initially no resistance. By that afternoon, 2nd Battalion was occupying the woods southeast of the D556/908 junction. From here, they continued northeast and occupied Chaux. Meanwhile, 3rd Battalion encountered light resistance after passing through Joue. Subsequently, they entered the forested area between the D51 and D202, moving northwest from Raitere. Finally, they established a position north of
Chaux. Of course, this is reminiscent of the overlapping position established at St. Maur and St. Aubin on August 3.\textsuperscript{59}

As for 47\textsuperscript{th} Regiment’s 1\textsuperscript{st} Battalion, they were ordered to seize the village of Beauvain. Although this battalion was a motorized reserve, the troops disembarked several kilometers away. Indeed, mechanized infantry are actually a liability when deployed against significant antitank defenses. Therefore, the advance proceeded on foot, and that evening they were engaged northeast of Beauvain. Despite a partial envelopment, the Germans were able to defend the objective.

It seems that the advance of 1\textsuperscript{st} Battalion was not directed at Beauvain itself, but rather at the D916. Indeed, capturing this road threatened the Germans with encirclement, and one might therefore wonder whether it would have made more sense to simply push 2\textsuperscript{nd} or 3\textsuperscript{rd} Battalion toward Annebecq, as this would have also cut the D916. However, the eastern advance was halted at Chaux, because of the threat posed by German tanks at Ranes. Meanwhile, although the garrison at Beauvain could have been defeated logistically by a distant envelopment, doing so would have taken time and would have slowed the overall advance. It was therefore necessary to immediately threaten the enemy with close combat, although 1\textsuperscript{st} Battalion naturally avoided a direct frontal assault. Indeed, rather than risk encirclement, the Germans predictably withdrew that evening.\textsuperscript{60}

Summary

Between August 13 and 15\textsuperscript{th}, 30\textsuperscript{th} Division reorganized and cleared the area north of Domfront, where the Germans had established extensive minefields. Concurrently, exhausted by continuous combat, 4\textsuperscript{th} Division was allowed to rest. Meanwhile, 9\textsuperscript{th} Division was shifted
through Mayenne, emerging on the eastern flank of 1st Division. Finally, 1st Division moved
northeast from Mayenne, encountered considerable resistance southwest of Mace.
CHAPTER 8
THE BATTLE OF FLERS

Between August 16 and 18th, First Army incurred 794 combat casualties, mostly within 7th Corps. Meanwhile, Seventh Armee was squeezed between First Army and Twenty-First Army Group. Ultimately, although historians emphasize the Argentan-Falaise corridor, the primary focus of Allied operations was further west, along the Orne.\(^1\)

Unfortunately, although Patton played essentially no role in these events, many historians retain him at the center of their narrative. Consequently, as Anthony Tucker-Jones has stated, Patton was "ready" to trap the enemy, when apparently nobody else was. Similarly, Thomas Zeiler has stated that Patton “grasped the import of the situation” and wished to employ the “largest armored force of the war on the Western Front," but Bradley procrastinated out of fear. Likewise, although the Canadians faced tremendous resistance during their advance, Leckie blames them for excessive caution whilst Patton flawlessly arrived "at his appointed place." However, the records of First Army explicitly support the Canadians, stating that such criticisms are based upon "little knowledge" of the subject.\(^2\)

Although historians have written of a nebulous battle of Falaise, where the Canadians supposedly failed to achieve what Patton could have done, the reality is that Falaise was hardly the focus of Allied operations. More appropriately, one should speak of a battle of Flers, as this was the central city around which Seventh Armee was positioned on August 16. Quite simply the advance toward Falaise was a subsidiary thrust, and it should be treated as such. Indeed, historians recognize that the battle of Kursk was composed of such lesser engagements as Ponyri and Prokhorovka. Why then has the struggle for Flers been so grossly distorted? The answer is
that by focusing upon Falaise, critics are able to draw attention toward the supposed failure of Montgomery, which allows them to exaggerate Patton’s potential.

Tragically, when historians focus their attention upon the supposedly flawed victory, they toss much of the larger narrative aside. To use an analogy from the American Civil War, pretend for a moment that Pickett’s charge had succeeded on July 3rd, 1863, representing the advance of 7th Corps. At the same time, suppose that General Hood had managed to occupy Little Round Top, representing the Canadian occupation of Falaise. Consequently, the Confederates had won the war! However, despite this fantastic victory, what if historians continued to focus upon Hood’s failure to advance on July 2nd? As a result of this distortion, instead of speaking of the great victory at Gettysburg, historians might instead emphasize the failed battle of the Emmitsburg Road. In essence, this is what has happened with Falaise.

Unfortunately, by distorting the battle in this manner, historians have lost their perspective. There was heavy fighting at Falaise, and the Canadians were victorious. There was also heavy fighting between Tinchebray and Flers, between Conde and Flers, between Domfront and Flers, and further east at Chambois. In the midst of this, First Army’s 7th Corps advanced between Flers and Argentan, with 3rd Armored Division moving toward Putanges and the Orne. Here, there was especially heavy fighting, with 3rd Armored Division fighting a campaign reminiscent of Prokhorovka, with tanks firing at each other from ranges of just twenty-five meters, whilst defending American formations were overrun by counterattacking German infantry. As the division history notes, “The dead lay everywhere [as] the whiplash slam of 88’s broke through a constant fabric of small arms fire.” This was thus “war at its grim height,” and the narrative of 7th Corps should therefore be emphasized over that of 15th Corps.
Although this heavy fighting was beginning to dissipate by August 16, the Germans continued to defend "every inch" of a road which was now littered with debris. Sergeant William Alberti thus rode on the blade of a bulldozer, firing his submachine-gun at German infantry, whilst the American columns were bombarded by German missiles. Subsequently, during a dramatic climax on August 17, 3rd Armored Division engaged a mass of approximately twelve hundred enemy vehicles. The records thus emphasize that this was the true battle for France, unlike Patton’s theoretical advance from Avranches.4

Of course, one might reasonably suggest that the advance of 7th Corps would have been greatly assisted by that of 15th Corps. However, divided by the Orne, these formations would have been unable to provide one another with direct assistance. Furthermore, what Patton had proposed on August 12 was to extend himself prematurely across the entire gap, moving fifteen kilometers north of Putanges, whilst 3rd Armored Division was still west of Mayenne, sixty kilometers southwest of Putanges. As a result, the Germans would have had several days to concentrate further east. Not only would 5th Armored Division have been exposed north of Argentan, but the enemy would have been able to move east from Mace toward Sees, thereby enveloping the rear of 15th Corps.

We can judge the potential strength of such a counterattack by considering the situation of 90th Division, on August 16. Instead of desperately attempting to defend the logistical lines of 5th Armored Division, the infantry had been placed further east, at St. Leonard. Here, the enemy had to advance five kilometers through a narrow valley, under a continuous bombardment. Although German strength had been reduced by four extra days of combat, they nevertheless retained sufficient strength to occupy St. Leonard. After the Americans counterattacked and reoccupied the objective, the Germans once again surged forward and took the town. Clearly,
had 90th Division been prematurely deployed northwest of Argentan, their situation would have been far more difficult, and the Germans would have broken through. Meanwhile, Allied positions would have become inevitably confused, and the effectiveness of Allied bombardments would have been severely reduced. Fortunately, Bradley did not underestimate the strength of Seventh Armee.

August 16

On August 16, General Hodges was "exceptionally busy," visiting the headquarters of 7th and 19th Corps. He also observed the battlefield at Ranes, where the town was burning and the roads were lined with destroyed tanks. Meanwhile, both 5th and 19th Corps were halted behind the convergent advance of Second Army’s 8th Corps, with 3rd Division establishing positions south of Flers, whilst 11th Armoured Division enveloped the northeastern outskirts. Further north, in the zone of 30th Corps, 43rd Division occupied Conde, with 53rd Division operating between Conde and Falaise. Finally, 4th Armoured Division cleared Falaise. Further east, along the eastern flank, the Polish Armoured Division expanded their bridgehead across the Dives, at Jort, whilst 51st Division advanced toward St. Pierre. Across this entire frontage, Twenty-First Army Group experienced severe resistance, particularly in the zone of 53rd Division.5

Of course, such details indicate the intensity of efforts along the northern flank of Seventh Armee, which must be contrasted with Third Army’s nominal presence. After 5th Armored Division moved east toward Dreux, out of twenty-four Allied divisions which were arrayed against Seventh Armee, only two belonged to Third Army: French 2nd Armored Division and 90th Division. Meanwhile, journalists continued to claim that Patton had "slashed through" the defenses at Brest, though the enemy occupied that critical port for another month.6
Ultimately, during the day, conditions were foggy and it rained heavily across much of the front. Considering that this limited the effectiveness of Allied bombardment, it seems clear that an even greater victory could have been achieved, if only the weather had been favorable. Meanwhile, if Third Army had established a thin corridor between Avranches and Falaise, that position have been counterattacked, and the enemy would have benefited from poor visibility. Indeed, until the evening of August 17, visibility was so limited that the Germans were reportedly unmolested by Allied aircraft.7

30th Division

At dawn, the advance continued against light opposition. By the end of the day, 117th Regiment occupied northern flank, forming a triangle with 1st Battalion at L’Epine, 3rd Battalion at St. Clair, and 2nd Battalion south of St. Clair. Meanwhile, operating in the center, 120th Regiment’s 3rd Battalion was in reserve south of St. Bomer, whilst 1st Battalion advanced east of St. Bomer toward the Varenne, and 2nd Battalion moved northeast toward the D962.8

Concurrently, 119th Regiment’s 1st Battalion held the southeastern flank, where they occupied the forest northeast of Dompierrre. Further north, 30th Recon occupied Ferriere, where they established contact with 18th Regiment and Second Army. Meanwhile, 2nd Battalion occupied the forest northwest of Dompierrre, with 3rd Battalion along their southwestern flank, such that these battalions held a line extending southwest from the D811 toward the D260. Having established these positions, 119th Regiment dispatched patrols northeast. 9

After supporting this advance, 743rd Tank Battalion’s A&B-Companies were placed in reserve south of St. Bomer, whilst C&D-Companies remained northeast of St. Mars. In contrast, 823rd TD Battalion was dispersed in successive positions along the axis of advance. In this way, we can see a fundamental difference between tank and tank-destroyer doctrine, with the former
being held well back in reserve, whilst the latter were deployed as a mobile screen of antitank artillery.  

Finally, 113th Cavalry Squadron operated along the division’s eastern flank, maintaining contact with 1st Division. Likewise, 125th Cavalry operated along the western flank, until relieved that afternoon and ordered to concentrate near Domfront. This redeployment may help explain why 743rd Tank Battalion was split on either side of Domfront, since traffic congestion was a chronic problem, which would have been alleviated by leaving much of the battalion south of the city, alongside the support echelon. One should also acknowledge the effort of 105th Engineer, which spent the day repairing roads and bridges, whilst clearing minefields.  

1st Division

At dawn, 18th Regiment’s G-Company (at Ferriere) reported hearing heavy traffic. Although their initial inclination was to plaster the area with artillery, they had doubts about whether they were hearing German or British vehicles. This uncertainty was naturally of some concern, particularly since one of G-Company’s platoons had been nearly overrun shortly after midnight, although reinforcements had fortunately arrived from F-Company.  

It is not clear what happened next, other than that the division headquarters was consulted, and they replied that “units were to be sure that vehicles were identified before being fired upon.” Of course, this incident lends credence to Bradley’s explanation for why he was hesitant to order an aggressive blockade of the Avranches-Falaise corridor. Quite simply, it was exceedingly difficult to identify the nationality of troops within a timely manner, and there was thus a significant risk of friendly fire.  

Shortly after dawn, 16th Regiment’s 1st and 2nd Battalions crossed the D218/266 between Rousseliere and Lonlay, occupying the woods further north. During this advance, no significant
opposition was encountered, as the previous day’s barrage had "completely cleaned out" the German position. However, 26th Regiment’s 1st Battalion faced heavy resistance as they moved toward Lonlay, whilst 2nd Battalion occupied Mace, and 3rd Battalion trailed 16th Regiment.14

Subsequently, the objective of 16th Regiment was to block the roads leading northeast from Coulonche toward Briouze, along with those leading east from Bellou toward Briouze. Consequently, 1st Battalion moved southwest of Briouze, followed by 2nd and 3rd Battalions, with the latter formation anchored along the D218/266. Eventually, 2nd Battalion continued forward and occupied positions southeast of Briouze. Further west, C-Company encountered German halftracks transporting antitank artillery, which they ambushed southwest of Ozenne. A "rocket team" (Privates Martin May and Steve Marcinek) was thus credited with the destruction of three armored vehicles, whilst their company captured thirteen vehicles and seventy prisoners.

Meanwhile, 3rd Battalion was heavily attacked, and 26th Regiment’s 2nd Battalion was redeployed as reinforcement. Finally, securing the western flank, elements of 18th Regiment occupied positions between Coulonche and Ozenne, whilst patrols were dispatched toward Bellou.15

That evening, the enemy began to apply increasing pressure near Briouze, where 1st Recon Troop was forced to retreat along the eastern flank. Meanwhile, German vehicles were concentrating near Bellou, and the division commander therefore ordered a bombardment of this area. Consequently, four artillery battalions fired three volleys each upon Bellou, after which interdictory fire was maintained throughout the night. Meanwhile, the division reported that they were preparing to defend against counterattacks from the north, northwest, northeast, and east. In contrast, newspapers wrongly declared that the Seventh Armeé had "ceased to exist."16

At this time, it was noted by the operations officer that the inter-army boundary was inadequately drawn, as Second Army was forbidden to fire south of the 20 grid (48°45'N), whilst
First Army was forbidden to fire north of the railroad at Briouze (48°42’N), thus leaving a gap of five kilometers through which the enemy was withdrawing. However, this was quickly resolved after consultation with 7th Corps, which ordered 1st Division to bombard the area.17

9th Division

During the morning, 39th Regiment’s 2nd and 3rd Battalions continued advancing north against slight opposition, which became heavier by evening. Ultimately, they were halted along a line extending east from Briouze, which was still occupied by the enemy. Meanwhile, advancing in echelon to the southwest, 1st Battalion cleared a position on 250, west of Lignou.18

Concurrently, 47th Regiment’s 1st Battalion occupied Beauvain, which the Germans had abandoned, after which they moved northeast. Meanwhile, 2nd Battalion moved north from Chaux toward Annebecq, until they were halted by very stubborn resistance, southeast of Faverolles. Indeed, this was thus the beginning of a costly battle, as Faverolles was "full" of enemy troops. Fortunately, elements of 3rd Armored Division arrived as reinforcement.19

As 2nd Battalion halted, 1st Battalion managed to continue advancing, passing south of Faverolles and occupying 270, northeast of town. Meanwhile, 3rd Battalion was motorized and passed through Beauvain, after which they moved briefly along the D916, and then turned north via Benoit. Upon arriving northwest of Faverolles, the battalion was heavily engaged by enemy tanks. They therefore withdrew south of 1st Battalion, occupying positions between the D19 and the D218. Likewise, 2nd Battalion was positioned southeast of Faverolles, along the D318.20

As for 60th Regiment, they remained in reserve, with 3rd Battalion still assigned to 3rd Armored Division. However, patrols from 1st Battalion were dispatched northeast from Joue toward Ranes, during which they destroyed a German tank. Subsequently, the battalion occupied
positions south of Annebecq. As for 2nd Battalion, they established roadblocks west of Annebecq, where they defended against a potential counterattack toward Mace.  

4th Division

This formation remained in reserve near Teilleul, and continued efforts to repair equipment and process replacements. Meanwhile, troops received typhus inoculations, along with training in navigation, tactics, and weapons. During the day, Hodges visited the headquarters, awarding General Barton the Distinguished Service Medal, and decorating a number of other individuals. Finally, after consulting with Hodges, the headquarters initiated preparations for movement.

August 17

On August 17, Hodges attended a series of conferences, during which he met with Bradley, Corlett, Craig, Patton, Ridgway, and others. From the description of these meetings, we can see that the role of the army commander was to develop plans for "orientation" within the context of a "sphere of influence" amidst competing "zones of action." Ultimately, road networks were the primary issue, as these funneled the advance and constricted operations. Therefore, rather than micromanaging the immediate situation, Hodges was instead concerned with the overall course of the advance, with the Seine as his objective.

During these meetings, there was a debate about the city of Evreux, which lies along the N13 between Caen and Paris. Of course, this area was clearly within the zone of Second Army. However, Hodges successfully argued, with the assistance of Colonel Russell Akers, that the British were ill-prepared to advance east, considering that their axis of advance was toward the south. Meanwhile, First Army had multiple divisions resting in the rear. Consequently, it was
agreed that 19th Corps would redeploy and advance north from Dreux toward Rouen, after which Second Army could reorganize within this cleared area.24

Throughout the day, 3rd Armored Division was heavily engaged near Fromentel, with 3rd/CCB advanced toward the Orne, between Ecouche and Putanges, where they were pinned down by heavy defensive fire. As for 3rd/CCA, they attempted to establish defensive positions at Fromentel, but were "driven out" by American aircraft. Subsequently, German troops reoccupied Fromentel, 3rd/CCA then reoccupied the town, and Allied aircraft once again bombed the objective. Although excessive attention has focused upon the area between Argentan and Falaise, it was actually Putanges which most naturally blocked the rear of Flers, as this was a primary crossing over the Orne. Consequently, with 11th Armored Division advancing from the northwest, five German divisions were overrun: 84th, 326th, 363rd, 708th, and 10th SS.25

Further east, Gerow had arrived at Alencon before dawn, where he was to take command of French 2nd Armored Division, along with 80th and 90th Divisions. However, Patton had stubbornly grouped these divisions into a provisional corps under General Hugh Gaffey, his chief of staff, who was uncooperative and refused to relinquish command until 15:00. Unfortunately, this delay severely disrupted the planned advance of 359th Regiment, moving north from St. Leonard toward Chambois.26

Within his memoir, Patton indicates that he waited until after Gerow had already arrived, before he confirmed that Gerow was to take command. This was despite the fact that both Patton and Gaffey had known of Bradley’s decision, since the morning of August 16. Belatedly, when Patton finally decided to formally acknowledge this situation, he had the message relayed through his assistant chief of staff, General Hobart Gay, who was undoubtedly encouraged to take his time. Subsequently, Gaffey facetiously insisted that these orders be positively confirmed.
by Bradley. It thus took more than nine hours before Gerow was able to assume command. Ultimately, despite the traditional notion that Gerow was sluggish and failed to act quickly, Jade Hinman’s recent research has suggested that Gerow was characteristically energetic and quick with a “proven record of success.” Indeed, he had thus arrived at Avranches before dawn, ready to go.\textsuperscript{27}

Although historians are routinely critical of Bradley’s decision to prevent Patton from launching a premature advance on August 12, they typically ignore the fact that Patton thus obstructed First Army’s advance on August 17! Undoubtedly, Patton felt that this situation was an insult to Third Army, but nevertheless this was what Bradley had ordered. Therefore, when Gerow arrived, Gaffey should have immediately stepped aside. Nevertheless, First Army has been blamed for this embarrassing incident, by historians who wrongly assert that Gerow was not personally prepared to take command. Fortunately, with eleven artillery battalions operating alongside 90\textsuperscript{th} Division, the Germans were still subjected to an extremely heavy bombardment, even though the advance was unnecessarily delayed.\textsuperscript{28}

Concurrently, 2\textsuperscript{nd} Armored Division was ordered east from Domfront toward Tourouvre, from which they would conduct subsequent operations with 19\textsuperscript{th} Corps. Indeed, there was a gap of approximately eighty kilometers extending between 90\textsuperscript{th} Division at Nonant and 5\textsuperscript{th} Armored Division at Dreux. With 331\textsuperscript{st} Division holding the German flank east of Nonant, 2\textsuperscript{nd} Armored Division was thus preparing yet another encirclement.

Consequently, it was once again First Army which was conducting combat operations along the flank of Seventh Armee, whilst Third Army continued to advance into essentially undefended territory. Indeed, Patton thus occupied positions extending a hundred kilometers, between Versailles and the Loire. However, the only area of significant contact was at Chartres,
where 5th and 79th Divisions engaged 48th Division, with 5th and 7th Armored Divisions advancing along either flank. Here, the primary factor delaying the advance was that Patton had orders not to destroy the medieval cathedral, and was not allowed to employ artillery. Although this combat was certainly quite real, it was nothing like the situation in central Normandy.

As Third Army attempted to envelop a single enemy division with four divisions, the rest of the Allied forces were fighting an extensive series of engagements. Amidst heavy fighting, Canadian 2nd Division occupied Falaise, whilst 4th Armored Division continued southeast toward Argentan. Concurrently, the Polish Armoured Division moved east between 85th and 89th Divisions. Further north, 51st Division was assisted by 7th Armoured Division, advancing east toward St. Julien, between 85th and 272nd Divisions. Nevertheless, newspapers continued to emphasize Patton, as the strategic protagonist who would soon make "his choice" about how to proceed. These accounts assumed that Third Army would be advancing toward Rouen, as this was "exactly the same" maneuver which Patton had proposed at Argentan.29

Ultimately, the deployment of Twenty-First Army Group makes it clear why an advance from Dreux toward Rouen was necessary. Indeed, between the southern flank of the Canadian Army, and the positions of 80th and 90th Divisions at Argentan, there were only twenty kilometers through which Second Army would funnel eleven divisions. Meanwhile, there are few roads within this area, such that traffic would be inevitably congested along the D511 (between Conde and Falaise) and the D63 (between Falaise and Trun). Ironically, the same geographic factors which constricted the German retreat would thus impede the advance of Second Army. Therefore, Second Army was poorly positioned to engage German resistance, and 19th Corps was ordered to advance.
30th Division

Blocked by 11th Armoured Division, this formation remained in reserve, although they continued to conduct patrols. These moved northeast and confirmed that the enemy had abandoned Chatellier. Continuing further north, one patrol eventually made contact with 3rd Division, west of Flers. Meanwhile, the regiments began processing badly trained replacements, although they remained understrength.30

Emphasizing that this situation remained quite dangerous, the records include an anecdote about how Seventh Armee was a "great believer" in the use of landmines. Indeed, on August 19, elements of 247th Engineer would attempt to construct a bridge, within an area which had supposedly been cleared by 105th Engineer, on August 17. However, Teller mines were discovered two feet beneath the road, where they were impossible to locate with metal detectors. Being buried so deep, these mines did not initially explode when exposed to vehicle traffic. However, as the initial advance was followed by heavy supply columns, continuous pressure would have eventually detonated the mines.31

1st Division

During the morning, 16th Regiment’s 2nd Battalion was located southeast of Briouze, where they reported “considerable noise from moving vehicles.” This movement was temporarily halted by artillery fire, but quickly resumed once the barrage was lifted. Further west, 18th Regiment contacted British troops at Etangs, where 11th Armoured Division’s E-Company was leading the advance. During the afternoon, the frontage of 18th Regiment was thus enveloped by Second Army.32

Unfortunately, this convergence was not without mishap, and a British soldier was subsequently shot as he approached an American roadblock near Briouze. Shortly thereafter, 7th
Corps ordered 1st Division to withdraw from this area. Meanwhile, 745th Tank Battalion’s C-Company was dispatched east, where 9th Division was engaged.\textsuperscript{33}

\textit{9th Division}

Awaiting the advance of Second Army, this formation continued to engage delaying forces, principally from 10th SS Division. 39th Regiment thus advanced slowly against scattered resistance, gradually establishing a line facing northwest, between Briouze and St. Hilaire (both of which were still occupied by the enemy). Ultimately, this amounted to an advance of merely one kilometer.\textsuperscript{34}

Further east, 47th Regiment’s 1st and 3rd Battalions also advanced, along a frontage extending from St. Hilaire toward Fromentel. At first, rapid progress was made against little opposition, until they suddenly encountered heavy resistance within the hedgerows, between the D924 and the railroad. Along the western flank, 1st Battalion was thus halted by a combination of machine-gun and 120mm mortar fire. Eventually, after a supporting barrage by American artillery, B-Company unsuccessfully attempted a flanking maneuver near St. Hilaire.\textsuperscript{35}

With 3rd Battalion similarly halted, no progress was made until that evening, when 745th Tank Battalion’s C-Company finally arrived. Subsequently, during the resumed advance, a mortar team from 1st Battalion was credited with the destruction of a German tank. Ultimately, 47th Regiment thus secured a line extending along the northern edge of the D924. This position was established with refused flanks which crossed south of the road, thus anticipating German counterattacks. Finally, 2nd Battalion was in reserve, southwest of Fromentel.\textsuperscript{36}

Finally, 60th Regiment (without 3rd Battalion) remained in reserve, occupying Annebecq and the D916. That evening, 2nd Battalion was detached and ordered to assist 3rd Armored Division. Consequently, this regiment now had two battalions operating with that division, which
certainly says something about the severity of fighting further north. Nevertheless, according to journalists who were reporting from the distant headquarters of Third Army, Seventh Armee was "decimated" and amounted to nothing more than "roving guerilla bands."  

4th Division

By midnight, this formation was transferred fifty kilometers northeast toward Carrouges, in order to reinforce French 2nd Armored Division (which was at Ecouche). 22nd Regiment led the movement, departing at 08:00 and arriving at 17:00, after some delay awaiting the construction of a bridge, west of Cearce. Ultimately, the new assembly areas were: 8th Regiment (southwest of Carrouges), 12th Regiment (south of Carrouges), 22nd Regiment (southwest of 8th Regiment), and 4th Engineer (Lignieres). During the night, 4th Recon patrolled southeast toward Alencon.

The organizational difficulties associated with such movements can be seen within the records of 12th Regiment’s 1st Battalion. This formation’s quartering party was dispatched at 07:30, and by noon the regiment was ordered to be ready for immediate movement. However, it was not until 20:00 that movement was actually initiated, since there was a severe shortage of transportation. Subsequently, although this entire area was technically behind the front, the advancing columns were fired upon by numerous snipers.

August 18

On August 18, Hodges spent the morning "ironing out" road clearances. Not surprisingly, given the constricted situation around Falaise, the British were demanding access to the area between Briouze and Argentan. Of course, 9th Division was currently engaged between Briouze and Fromentel, whilst 3rd Armored Division and French 2nd Armored Division were engaged further east. However, it was agreed that these divisions should be withdrawn, in order to
facilitate the advance of Second Army. Subsequently, Hodges visited the headquarters of 5th and 7th Corps, undoubtedly seeking to smooth this transition, and he also visited 9th Division where General Eddy was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross. Shortly thereafter, Eddy was promoted to command 12th Corps, and he was succeeded by General Craig.

That evening, Hodges reviewed the situation along his southeastern flank. Unfortunately, Third Army was petulantly resisting the advance of 4th Cavalry Group, which was moving northeast through Nogent. With regard to this incident, one cannot help but be reminded of the situation in Sicily during July of 1943, when Patton was furious because Eighth Army was granted priority over the SS124 between Vizzini and Enna. Due to this unnecessary distraction, General Kean was forced to waste several hours resolving the issue, and Twelfth Army Group firmly ordered that priority should be given to First Army. Subsequently, 3rd Armored Division and 30th Division would thus conduct “one of the biggest and most complicated troop movements” of the war.40

Of course, it is not difficult to imagine why Patton objected to First Army’s occupation of ‘his’ territory, since this was the natural staging point for an advance upon Paris. However, although Patton clearly desired the prestige of occupying the French capital, it is not reasonable for historians to conclude that Patton was arbitrarily denied this opportunity because Bradley and Eisenhower wished to deny Patton’s access to the “glory road.” Quite simply, the traffic situation was severely congested, and there was no rational reason why Third Army should have been allowed to block the advance of both First and Second Armies.41

Nevertheless, newspapers continued to speculate that Patton would soon occupy Paris. Meanwhile, Seventh Armee was reportedly "liquidated" and ready to give up" before the "bewildering" advance of Patton’s "hard-driving" columns. Indeed, reporters emphasized that it
was 5th Armored Division which posed a "most imminent peril" for the enemy. Without irony, these journalists once again celebrated the impending occupation of Chartres, which Third Army had been repeatedly on the verge of capturing for a week. As an analogy, this Escheresque paradox of swiftness and slowness is reminiscent of an infamous scene from *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981), parodied within *The Simpsons* (#58), during which a door dramatically closes, and closes, and closes, and yet it’s clearly not closing. The simple fact of the matter is that Patton was not as fast as journalists and historians have portrayed.42

**30th Division**

This formation conducted maintenance and training with grenade and rocket launchers. Meanwhile, at least within 120th Regiment, a third of the troops were fortunate enough to receive clean clothes. Finally, some elements engaged lingering resistance, whilst patrols from 119th Regiment established contact with Second Army, at Banvou.43

**1st Division**

In order to make room for Second Army, this formation began to withdraw south, although they remained in contact with isolated but "fairly well-armed" pockets of resistance. Meanwhile, there were several large explosions within nearby forests. These were of considerable strength, with one detonation causing considerable damage over a half kilometer radius. It was eventually determined that abandoned German depots were being ignited by brush-fires, with several others on the verge of detonation. Ultimately, as 11th Armoured Division’s 159th Brigade occupied Briouze, 1st Division was finally pinched out.44

**9th Division**

Before dawn, a patrol from 39th Regiment confirmed that the enemy had withdrawn from St. Hilaire. Further east, 47th Regiment’s 3rd Battalion occupied positions northwest of
Fromentel. Subsequently, 3rd Battalion dispatched patrols, which likewise confirmed this withdrawal. Meanwhile, it was reported that British troops were approaching Briouze. Consequently, at noon, 39th Regiment was ordered to withdraw, leaving patrols to screen the D924, whilst 11th Armoured Division continued east. Likewise, 47th Regiment was withdrawn, occupying positions southeast of St. Hilaire, along the D862. By this time, contact with the enemy was completely broken, and 47th Regiment thus placed their headquarters along the eastern flank, across the D19 at L'Chateau. Of course, this makes sense from a logistical perspective, as the D19 is the primary road leading southwest toward Mace. As for 60th Regiment’s 1st Battalion, they remained near Annebecq, with 2nd and 3rd Battalions still attached to 3rd Armored Division.45

4th Division

Until August 23, this formation remained near Carrouges, “conducting necessary and appropriate tactical and technical training... maintenance... cleaning... rest... physical conditioning... discipline... [and] orientation.” Not surprisingly, the official records note that the troops particularly enjoyed the absence of artillery fire. Meanwhile, they continued to receive training, with replacements focusing on the basics, whilst veterans gained experience in more advanced subjects. For example, selected troops were taught how to fire the 60mm mortar shell, using a grenade-launcher. Concurrently, other troops practiced hedgerow tactics.46

Summary

Between August 16 and 18th, both 4th and 30th Divisions were allowed to rest, having faced intense combat over the past few weeks. Meanwhile, 1st and 9th Divisions faced considerable resistance north of Mace, with 3rd Armored Division heavily engaged along their eastern flank.
CHAPTER 9
APPROACHING THE SEINE

Between August 19 and 22\textsuperscript{nd}, First Army incurred 591 combat casualties. At this time, most of the army was in reserve, although 19\textsuperscript{th} Corps advanced north from the Avre toward Rouen, with 2\textsuperscript{nd} Armored Division followed by 28\textsuperscript{th} and 30\textsuperscript{th} Divisions. Although largely ignored by historians, who focus almost solely upon Falaise, this effort resulted in yet another major encirclement, with remnants of five enemy divisions trapped west of Conche (85\textsuperscript{th}, 89\textsuperscript{th}, 331\textsuperscript{st}, 10\textsuperscript{th} SS, and 2\textsuperscript{nd} Panzer).

Further west, on August 20 and 21\textsuperscript{st}, ten thousand German troops surrendered to 90\textsuperscript{th} Division, which reportedly inflicted a total of twenty-one thousand casualties. Clearly, although Patton had not been allowed to participate, First Army and Second Armies had nevertheless managed to achieve a significant victory, even though one post-war study argued that the "startling" decision to halt Patton represented a critical "matrix of failure." Unfortunately, such arguments are based upon a dubious presumption that Patton’s proposed advance would have been far more successful than what actually happened.\textsuperscript{1}

Of course, despite the encirclement at Conche, Seventh Armee continued to withdraw, with their rear protected by the forests between Verneuil and Brionne. Meanwhile, reserves concentrated between Neubourg and Louviers, behind which the enemy moved east from Brionne toward Rouen. As these events were taking place, the rest of First Army was being reorganized, preparing to move northeast toward Belgium. One must understand those latter operations, before one can truly assert that there was a "pathway to misfortune" which prevented the Allies from achieving a "quick and decisive" victory.\textsuperscript{2}
Although Carlo D’Este has claimed that Eisenhower, Bradley, and Hodges were far too preoccupied with planning the advance toward Belgium, and that they thus failed to take seriously Patton’s plan, the truth is that the Germans were subsequently trapped in Belgium. Therefore, these preparations were quite successful. Meanwhile, although D’Este asserted that the sole purpose of First Army’s subsequent advance was to passively protect Montgomery’s flank, such that Patton’s Third Army should "obviously" have been given priority, the reality is that First Army would play a primary role in subsequent operations. Nevertheless, although Patton retained just six divisions, D’Este insisted that Patton was the "greatest threat" to western Germany, despite the twenty-seven Allied divisions which were engaged between Caen and Chambois.³

As for the advance of 19th Corps, Blumenson stated that this effort was trivial, conducted with ease against "small pockets" of resistance which were quickly "smashed." However, 19th Corps engaged at least 125 tanks, incurring approximately five hundred casualties. Although such losses were relatively light, this is still higher than the daily casualty rate suffered by the entire US military in Vietnam, during 1968. Indeed, each of these three divisions incurred daily losses which were slightly higher than those of 1st Marine Division, during the nine-day engagement at Fallujah in November of 2004.⁴

Therefore, it seems clear that Blumenson was exaggerating when he stated, “German troops showed a stronger inclination to [retreat and] get to the Seine ferries, than to fight.” Although the Germans withdrew, retreating fifty kilometers over five days, they nevertheless maintained significant resistance, which actually increased rather than decreased. Indeed, at the end of this withdrawal, the Germans did not surrender, and they were not defeated. Instead, they
firmed halted 19th Corps upon a defensive line of their choosing. Subsequently, they retained sufficient strength to delay the bulk of Twenty-First Army Group.5

August 19

On August 19, Hodges met with Bradley and Montgomery, who approved the plan for 19th Corps to advance from Dreux toward Elbeuf, and Hodges then discussed this with the staff of 19th Corps. Further east, Third Army’s 15th Corps (79th Division and 5th Armored Division) occupied positions along the Seine, near Mantes. Considering the severity of fighting here, which will be discussed subsequently after these formations were attached to First Army, it seems obvious that these divisions could not have occupied Paris, even though Patton believed otherwise.

Once again, both Blumenson and D’Este have exaggerated Patton’s potential, stating that Bradley unwisely prevented 15th Corps from exploiting the bridgehead at Mantes. However, 5th Armored Division couldn’t exploit 79th Division’s bridgehead, because the armored division was busy protecting the bridgehead by clearing resistance northwest of Mantes. Indeed, the leading elements quite literally collided with German tanks, and by August 20 they were engaged against strong resistance, in their own words, from heavy tanks entrenched amidst rugged terrain, operating alongside fanatical infantry. On August 21, the German positions were bolstered by increased quantities of artillery. Later that night, two German tanks penetrated the perimeter of 5th CCA, where they quickly destroyed three American tanks.6

On August 22, the advance was delayed by dense fog. Consequently, a “peaceful looking pastoral scene” was suddenly revealed to be a “formidable enemy stronghold,” with entrenched antitank troops ambushing the Americans from beneath piles of harvested wheat. By August 23 the situation had deteriorated even further, amidst increasingly bad weather. Nevertheless, the
division bravely engaged sixty German tanks, which were supported by entrenched infantry and antitank artillery, whilst all three of the division’s columns were bombarded, bombed, and strafed.

Subsequently, on August 24, it began to rain heavily and the tanks were delayed by mud and the growing need for maintenance. Meanwhile, having given Patton a fair chance to advance as far as possible, Bradley transferred 15\textsuperscript{th} Corps to First Army. Furthermore, since 5\textsuperscript{th} Armored Division was clearly exhausted, Hodges wisely employed other formations at Paris. Indeed, after resting and performing maintenance for several days, 5\textsuperscript{th} Armored Division was ordered to advance on August 28. However, they insisted that they were still not yet ready, and First Army trusted their judgment, allowing them to take their time and properly reorganize. Unfortunately, Patton had not allowed the division to rest for more than three weeks, and the records state that this was badly needed. Indeed, stubbornly refusing to halt for maintenance, Patton severely damaged his vehicles.\textsuperscript{7}

Unfortunately, the traditional narrative naively asserts that it would have been easy for Patton to advance in every direction, and yet Bradley was a "slimy jealous toad" who consistently stole this glory away. In reality, the advance of 5\textsuperscript{th} Armored Division was very difficult, and casualties included three battalion commanders. Clearly, although the German formations had been greatly weakened, they were nevertheless readily combined into flexible and highly effective kampfgruppen, such that 5\textsuperscript{th} Armored Division engaged elements of eight enemy divisions: 711\textsuperscript{th}, 17\textsuperscript{th} Lw, 1\textsuperscript{st} SS, 2\textsuperscript{nd} SS, 4\textsuperscript{th} SS, 7\textsuperscript{th} SS, 12\textsuperscript{th} SS, 17\textsuperscript{th} SS. These were supported by additional adhoc and rear formations.

Strangely, as 15\textsuperscript{th} Corps was temporarily halted, Harry Yeide has asserted that the Germans were deployed to defend against an advance that "never" took place. Why didn’t
Bradley ever let 15th Corps advance from Mantes? Such questions highlight the invisibility of First Army, which subsequently took command of 15th Corps and did advance against heavy resistance, which will be discussed shortly.8

As for Second Army, on August 19, they firmly closed the corridor between Falaise and Argentan, with the assistance of 5th Corps. As the Polish Armored Division reached the positions of 90th Division, there were a series of "bloody dog-fights" amidst "terrible" carnage. Further north, the Canadian Army occupied St. Pierre, and continued advancing toward Lisieux, northwest of Evreux. Even now, according to the sober analysis of Lionel Ellis, the German retreat could still be described as orderly.9

Despite the efforts of the other Allied armies, newspapers emphasized that Third Army’s "smashing" advance was blocking the withdrawals of both Seventh and Fifteenth Armées, which were supposedly retreating toward Paris. However, Fifteenth Armée was positioned northwest of Paris, and there was absolutely nothing preventing their advance toward the capital. As for Seventh Armée, they were moving toward Rouen, and it was First Army which was attempting to block their withdrawal.10

Supposedly, Third Army had established a "wall of steel" along the Avre. However, the German southern flank was held by 331st Division, which occupied the forests west of L’Aigle. This position was fully fifty kilometers from Third Army’s 7th Armored Division, at Dreux. Eventually, 331st Division would withdraw northeast toward Conches, where Panzer Lehr Division held a reserve position. Therefore, if Third Army were going to block any portion of Seventh Army, Patton would have to advance 7th Armored Division forty kilometers and occupy Conches. This is exactly what First Army did do, and 331st Division was thus trapped.11
Of course, it cannot be denied that 7th Armored Division played a secondary role, preventing 331st Division from conceivably withdrawing southeast toward Paris, via Dreux. However, it's doubtful that the bulk of Seventh Armee would have withdrawn toward Paris, even if Third Army had disappeared. Quite simply, the bulk of Seventh Armee was north of Gace, where roads predominantly converge toward Bernay, just thirty kilometers from the Seine at Elbeuf. Would this army have instead detoured a hundred kilometers, only to be delayed by the turmoil and congestion of Paris?

30th Division

Before dawn, 113th Cavalry Group began moving a hundred kilometers east, from Domfront toward Brezolles. They were followed by 119th Regiment, which arrived northwest of Brezolles that evening. Likewise, 120th Regiment began movement at noon, deploying northeast of town by midnight. Finally, 117th Regiment departed during the afternoon and arrived the following morning, concentrating southeast of Brezolles.12

During this movement, the division was assisted by six truck companies, containing approximately three hundred vehicles. Therefore, if we estimate the fuel mileage of an M35 truck at fifteen kilometers per gallon, and we include approximately a thousand additional trucks which were organic to the division, this allows us to roughly calculate that it required just thirty thousand gallons to move a motorized infantry division from Paris to Aachen. In theory, such a journey could be completed within a single day, without replenishing the M35’s fifty gallon fuel capacity. Furthermore, at less than three kilograms per gallon, and with a cargo capacity of more than four metric tons per M35, a couple dozen trucks could have easily transported sufficient fuel to sustain this movement toward Berlin.13
These facts certainly suggest that the subsequent notion of a fuel shortage must refer to something far more complex than merely advancing, as doing so required trivial amounts of fuel. Indeed, when army reports refer to fuel shortages, this is really an indirect reference to the need for more tanks, more artillery, more bulldozers, more bridges, more ammunition, more mines, more ambulances, and more heavy equipment. In other words, the armies were opposed by heavy resistance, and they thus required extensive logistical support, and it was this support which required tremendous amounts of fuel. Of course, additional fuel would certainly have expedited the advance. However, the primary limiting factor was continuous resistance, which routinely halted the advance. Meanwhile, traffic congestion was a truly unexpected problem.

An examination of 120th Regiment gives some indication of the difficult traffic conditions and the circuitous routes which were taken to avoid congestion. Of course, the most direct route would have taken them through the area of L’Aigle, which was occupied by 331st Division. Consequently, although Brezolles is northeast of Domfront, the regiment first moved southeast toward Alencon. In theory, they might have then attempted to move northeast toward Verneuil, although this would have taken them through the congestion of 2nd Armored Division. Therefore, they instead moved east to Bleves, south to Mamers, east to Belleme, northeast to Courgeon, southeast to Boissy, northeast to Longny, east to Senonches, and finally north to Brezolles.

Although Third Army had supposedly cleared this area during their “steel wall” advance toward Dreux, the reality was that 17th Luftwaffe Division held strong defensive positions north of Brezolles, between Verneuil and Nonancourt. Although intelligence reports had suggested that this formation had recently crossed the Seine, nobody had expected to encounter them along the Avre, where they thus held an extended flank southeast of 331st Division. Unfortunately, Patton
had been far more concerned about reaching the Seine, where he bragged about urinating in the river, and he had thus neglected to ensure that patrols were active along his flanks. Consequently, rushing due east from Armentieres toward Brezolles, and then further east toward Dreux, 5th Armored Division had neglected to send patrols toward the Avre. The records of 30th Division thus sarcastically observed that Third Army had “at best” taken time to litter the roads with their garbage, before moving on without engaging or even detecting an entire enemy division.15

Of course, 5th Armored Division was “exhausted” and their commander had ordered them to make a “swift paralyzing thrust,” and not to think about their flanks. Tragically, for some members of the division, the advance was thus far too swift. As they were “racing” along through Crulai, a column of artillery was suddenly ambushed by a platoon of German tanks. Subsequently, arriving at Dreux on August 16, the leading tank was blasted by German antitank artillery, and Lieutenant James O’Connor was thus killed. Afterwards, 47th Artillery deployed hastily, only to belatedly realize that they were setting up in full view of the Germans, after which they withdrew under accurate enemy fire. Pressured by Patton, General Oliver now ordered an advance “without delay,” and the advancing companies were thus ambushed and withdrew in a “daze.” Finally, having eventually cleared Dreux, the division was then thrust into the aforementioned carnage near Mantes.

With these facts in mind, the staff of 5th Armored Division can perhaps be forgiven for not investigating the Avre. However, someone on the staff of Third Army should have cared enough about the flank to figure out whether a German division was positioned there. Indeed, is prudent caution really as cowardly as Patton believed? Quite simply, Patton didn’t know what was north of the Avre. With hindsight, the records clarify that the Germans deployed at least two hundred tanks between Evreux and Vernon. Consequently, if the Germans had known that Third

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Army wasn’t conducting proper reconnaissance along their flanks, they might conceivably have arranged a devastating counterattack west of Dreux, by taking advantage of the poor weather and concentrating between Verneuil and Nonancourt.

9th Division

This formation spent the day resting and maintaining equipment.16

4th Division

This formation also remained in reserve, at Carrouges.

1st Division

Likewise, this formation “refitted, reequipped, and maintained” amidst a “general clean-up.”17 There were also various inspections and training programs.18 Subsequently, some of the troops attended a USO show in Mace.19

August 20

On August 20, Hodges met with General Leclerc, who demanded that French 2nd Armored Division be allowed to advance toward Paris. However, as Leclerc was forced to admit, his formation required considerable maintenance and replacements, whilst the roads were too congested. Unfortunately, David Hogan’s administrative history ignored these facts, stating instead that Hodges was simply “preoccupied” and “unaccustomed to dealing with French sensitivities.” Likewise, Michael Neiberg’s metropolitan history has implied that Hodges was simply “tired” of hearing about the capital. However, with no formations adjacent to the city, and heavy combat taking place, the immediate occupation of Paris was not a realistic option.20

During the day, within the zone of 5th Corps, 80th and 90th Divisions were heavily engaged northeast of Argentan, where the surrounded elements of Seventh Armee were still attempting to move eastward. During this fighting, 5th Corps captured General Elfeldt.
Meanwhile, despite heavy losses, the Germans retained considerable strength, making extensive use of tanks and maintaining considerable fire from 20mm artillery. Further east, 19th Corps began advancing north, with 30th Division occupying Nonancourt, whilst 2nd Armored Division bypassed positions at Verneuil, which would subsequently be cleared by 28th Division. Ultimately, although German resistance was initially light, it would steadily increase as 19th Corps approached Evreux.21

Concurrently, the frontage of Twenty-First Army Group remained relatively static, as the Germans shifted 85th and 89th Divisions north, in order to block the Canadian Army. Meanwhile, Second Army continued to clear the area southeast of Falaise, whilst reorienting eastward. Here, Canadian and Polish troops were bombarded by Allied aircraft, which certainly suggests that Patton would also have suffered such difficulties during his proposed advance toward Falaise.22 Indeed, according to Crerar, such incidents were “unavoidable.”23

Southeast of Paris, 48th Division fought a delaying action northeast of Chartres. Meanwhile, the advance of Third Army was essentially halted, with 4th Armored Division remaining at Vendome, whilst 7th Armored Division was concentrated near Dreux. Only 5th Armored Division remained in motion, taking five days to advance thirty kilometers from Mantes toward Gaillon, during which they were repeatedly ambushed by antitank defenses. Why was the bulk of Third Army thus halted? Why wasn’t Patton allowed to advance toward Berlin? Quite simply, his role was merely to screen the Allied flank, whilst the main battle was waged further north.24 Having reached the Orleans gap, there was no rational reason for Patton to continue advancing until the situation further north was resolved. Indeed, doing so would have been thoroughly reckless, risking a counterattack emanating from Paris.
Although Third Army would not occupy Paris, they certainly deserve credit for establishing a reconnaissance line. Elements were thus patrolling the southwestern suburbs, near Versailles, although the southeastern edge of the metroplex remained under German control. Nevertheless, journalists made it appear that Third Army was in the process of occupying Paris, or at least was “very near” to doing so. They this provided readers with a map showing the immediate vicinity of the Eiffel tower.²⁵

Of course, in theory, Third Army could have attempted to immediately occupy the city. However, 48th Division would certainly have provided some resistance as they fell back toward the positions of 325th Division, which was already positioned in Paris. Indeed, it’s likely that the Germans would have managed far more resistance at this early date, with elements of 15th Army rushing south from Amiens. Regardless, historians shouldn’t exaggerate the strength of Third Army’s presence. Both 5th Armored Division and 79th Division were heavily engaged northwest of Paris, leaving only 7th Armored Division at Dreux and 5th Division at Chartres. Consequently, the bulk of Patton’s available forces were fully seventy kilometers from the center of Paris.²⁶

1st Division

Aside from continued patrols, this formation remained in limbo at Mace, awaiting orders which were contingent upon the clearance of congestion further east. During the afternoon, 7th Corps suggested that the division should make a preliminary reconnaissance toward Chartres. Naturally, 1st Division asked whether 7th Corps had a “recommended route.” After some thought, 7th Corps replied that the division might backtrack south toward Couterne, and then east toward Alencon via Pre. Subsequently, movement would be northeast via Mortagne, and then east toward Chartres, passing through the forested terrain between Mortagne and Courville. Having received this information, the division ordered an advanced detail to begin moving along this
route. Later that evening, 7th Corps added that a second northern route would also be available, extending due east from Mace toward Moulins via Sees, and then southeast via Vidame. However, without any specific orders, the bulk of the division remained near Mace, and many of the troops spent an enjoyable evening playing games and watching movies.27

9th Division

This formation was also ordered to prepare for movement, in order to establish a defensive screen extending thirty kilometers from Sees toward Verneuil, thereby protecting the northern flank of 1st Division’s advance. Supporting this mission, 9th Recon was temporarily attached to 4th Cavalry Group, which was then tasked with immediately establishing a screen. Subsequently, after being joined by 9th Division, the cavalry would be attached to the infantry.28

Although historians typically discuss these movements by referring to maps covered with sweeping arrows, such depictions do not provide a realistic notion of the way in which the divisions of 7th Corps “worked together as closely as did any three battalions of a regiment.”29 Without precise details, it merely appears that First Army advanced, but upon closer examination we can see that there was actually a systematic and continuous process of sequentially linked movements, which the records refer to as "leapfrogging."

As Hogan noted, these were “complex arrangements," which were aggravated by both congestion and vehicle shortages. Meanwhile, Hodges also had to deal with Patton, who petulantly viewed First Army’s advance as an infringement of "his" territory.30 Of course, First Army’s advance would pose considerable problems for Third Army, as the rear area would thus become increasingly congested. Unfortunately, Patton just does not seem to have understood that the other armies had nearly thirty divisions crammed within a frontage of just a hundred kilometers, extending between Alencon and the beaches north of Caen. Meanwhile, Patton
enjoyed the luxury of maintaining just six divisions along a frontage of equal width. Clearly, the whole point of Third Army’s advance had been to gain space for the expansion of the other armies, and it was now time for Patton to step aside.

4th Division

This formation remained in reserve at Carrouges.

30th Division

During the morning, 120th Regiment advanced northeast toward Nonancourt, where the Germans had concentrated with the “greatest [available] force.” This was the start of a “not so easy” advance of seventy kilometers over three days, moving entirely on foot, during what eventually became known as the "rat race." Although contemporary usage of this phrase has been generalized and refers to competitive bureaucracy, this was not how the term was used during WWII. Instead, this phrase alluded more directly to the experience of laboratory rats, trapped within a literal maze of roads, whilst rushing constantly after the German 'cheese’.

During the afternoon, 2nd Battalion crossed the Avre near Ilou and Dampierre. According to Lieutenant Robert Warnick (H-Company), this advance was actually led by a mortar platoon which fired "beaucoup" shells upon the Germans, who had just blown the only available bridge. Subsequently, the infantry advanced past the mortars and crossed the river. This effort was followed by that of 3rd Battalion, which crossed further west, between Tillieres and Brules.

Although the Germans had destroyed the bridges, the river itself was only lightly defended. Consequently, by evening, 2nd Battalion had advanced north toward Ardillieres, whilst 3rd Battalion apparently moved behind 2nd Battalion, and occupied positions northwest of Nonancourt. Within this area, the roads were blocked by log obstacles, which were firmly defended by infantry and artillery. Nevertheless, the Germans withdrew during the night, and 3rd
Battalion dispatched patrols which established positions on the far side of town. Meanwhile, 1st Battalion followed the southern bank eastward, occupying positions across the river from Nonancourt, at St. Lubin. Afterwards, patrols from 1st Battalion crossed the river and helped 3rd Battalion clear Nonancourt. This effort was conducted with assistance from “extremely helpful” FFI insurgents. Indeed, next to a picture of a woman holding an MP40 submachine-gun, the regimental history clearly contradicts the typically condescending portrayal of the French, “We had help...” Similarly, a French woman had previously done an "excellent" job, assisting 82nd Armored Reconnaissance Battalion.36

Concurrently, 119th Regiment advanced along the western flank, with 3rd Battalion in reserve, and 113th Cavalry Group operating further west. 1st Battalion thus crossed the Avre east of Acon, whilst 2nd Battalion crossed northwest of Brules.37 Initially, only light opposition was encountered, but this hardened once they were across.38 This subsequent resistance is glossed over by the division history, which merely mentions that “some damage” was inflicted upon C-Company.39

After 1st Battalion crossed the river, they continued moving north. However, in a manner similar to the situation previously seen at Brecey, and subsequently seen at Liege, Dinant, and Wallendorf, this advance was a deceptive success which only served to draw the advancing formations apart. Consequently, 2nd Battalion endured a counterattack which inflicted dozens of casualties, including fifty-four within G-Company. Once 2nd Battalion’s leading platoons were across a small bridge over the Avre, they were suddenly pinned down by a heavy bombardment. This barrage also destroyed the bridge and contact was thus lost with the leading platoons. Subsequently, the rest of the battalion made four failed attempts to cross the river. During this process, Sergeant Alexander Harvey was credited with moving forward and locating the missing
platoons, during which he came under fire from artillery, a machine-gun, and a sniper. Eventually, the advance resumed, although it proved difficult to move tanks across the river. Indeed, although 1st Battalion had previously been able to push some tanks across a ford, subsequent efforts were frustrated as the river banks were soon churned into an impassable bog.40

Having crossed the Avre, 2nd Battalion moved forward in a column, which was attacked by three German tanks, four halftracks armed with 20mm cannon, and supporting infantry. This split the battalion’s column in half, such that F-Company was now isolated, whilst the rest of the battalion was pinned down. Across the river, the battalion headquarters remained unaware of this crisis, perhaps because Private George Kocotis (F-Company) had destroyed his radio in order to prevent its capture. However, Kocotis soon redeemed himself by grabbing a machine-gun and capturing seven prisoners. Meanwhile, Lieutenant Harold Fayette (F-Company) was separated from his platoon, as he had been attempting to help reorganize G-Company. Recognizing the seriousness of the situation, Fayette eventually fought his way back toward the river, swam across, and informed the battalion commander. At this point, 3rd Battalion was finally brought forward, and the Germans were repelled.41

By evening, 2nd Battalion occupied positions between Mesnil and Brosse, whilst 1st Battalion occupied Droisy. As for 3rd Battalion, L-Company remained along the Avre to guard the crossing, whilst the remainder of that battalion split into independent companies which established a screen in front of 2nd Battalion, centered upon the forest between Hellenvillers and Panlatte.42

Concurrently, arriving at Brezolles that morning, 117th Regiment remained in reserve, with most of the troops presumably trying to sleep after their exhausting trip. Later that
afternoon, this formation occupied the forest of Broullets, southeast of Tillieres, with 1st Battalion along the western edge and 2nd Battalion further east. Meanwhile, 3rd Battalion crossed the Avre within 119th Regiment’s sector, and K-Company established a roadblock along the western flank, southwest of Folie, whilst L-Company established positions southwest of Troudiere.43

As for 30th Recon, they maintained contact with 2nd Armored Division’s 82nd Recon Battalion (to the northeast) and 7th Armored Division’s 40th Armored Battalion (to the southeast). Meanwhile, 113th Cavalry Squadron advanced along the northwestern flank, maintaining contact across the frontage of 119th Regiment and extending east toward 2nd Armored Division, whilst 125th Cavalry Squadron operated along the northeastern flank and extended patrols toward the Eure. Naturally, 105th Engineer Battalion was also quite active, primarily constructing bridges.44

August 21

On August 21, Hodges met with Bradley, in order to discuss the advance of Second Army, which would eventually be passing through the zone of 19th Corps. They also discussed theoretical operations which might take place after First Army had crossed the Seine. In this regard, once again clarifying the seniority of First Army, it was proposed that both 15th and 20th Corps should be transferred from Third Army. Subsequently, Hodges met with Collins, in order to discuss the redeployment of 7th Corps.

Concurrently, the Canadian Army continued to advance toward a line extending south from Deauville, through Lisieux, and then toward Livarot. However, the situation remained more difficult further south. Here, Second Army (alongside Canadian 2nd Corps) faced elements of nine German divisions which held a line extending southeast from Lisieux toward Monnai. It was this position which 19th Corps was outflanking, whilst bypassing the forests around L’Aigle,
which were defended by two additional German divisions. Consequently, including the two divisions north of Lisieux, along with the three divisions facing 19th Corps (these being 6th Fallschirmjäger, 17th Luftwaffe, and the remnants of Panzer Lehr), 19th Corps was thus initiating a second encirclement which threatened to trap elements of fourteen divisions.

During the day, Third Army once again captured the attention of journalists, who claimed that battles “raged” across Paris as Third Army enveloped the city. Although these accounts correctly described the approach of 5th Armored Division toward Vernon, and 5th Division toward Fontainebleau, this was hardly an envelopment of Paris. Examining a map will show that a straight line from Vernon toward Fontainebleau passes twenty kilometers southwest of central Paris. This was thus a mere screen, established at some considerable distance. Furthermore, this overextended position was particularly weak near Paris, and First Army thus noted that there was an “open” gap, through which the Germans might conceivably counterattack. Nevertheless, Patton’s “armored powerhouse” was not only prepared to “stab” through Paris, but the “formidable battle array” was supposedly positioned to move north toward Calais, thereby cutting off the other three Allied armies.

1st Division

During the day, advance parties sought locations near Chartres, whilst the rest of the division remained in position, conducting continued maintenance and training. At this time, there was a meeting hosted by the battalion commanders of 26th Regiment, during which they debated the proper doctrine for tanks and tank destroyers. According to 1st Battalion, infantry should precede tanks, which should precede tank-destroiers, which should be followed by additional infantry. However, according to 2nd Battalion, tanks should precede infantry, which should be
intermingled with tank-destroyers. Finally, 3rd Battalion argued that all three assets should be intermingled.47

Ultimately, the regimental commander concluded that battalion commanders should simply adopt whatever methods they wished. However, on August 27, orders were given that tanks and tank-destroyers should be dispersed throughout the infantry, so that enemy anti-tank guns could not destroy more than one vehicle at a time. Indeed, 3rd Armored Division would encounter considerable difficulty during their advance from Melun, and they thus warned 1st Division to avoid overconcentration. Although advocates of blitzkrieg emphasize concentration, it seems that there is a limit beyond which this becomes a severe liability.48 During the modern area, with mass area of effect weapons, one might argue that dispersion is far more important.

4th Division

This formation remained in reserve near Carrouges. Of course, one should not exaggerate the luxuriousness of this extended rest period. Indeed, although the troops certainly “enjoyed the absence of artillery,” they were nevertheless exposed to the elements, and it was thus that a heavy downpour left them with nothing to do other than desperately “trying to keep dry.”49 Meanwhile, they experienced the exhausting stress of continuously waiting for an impending movement into combat. For example, 12th Regiment’s 1st Battalion was ordered at 16:00 to prepare for movement within one hour, although this movement did not begin until 19:30. Shortly thereafter, the movement was cancelled without explanation, and the troops were returned to their bivouacs.50

9th Division

At 10:30, this formation began moving toward Mortagne, although there was a severe shortage of vehicles, and the divisional records thus include the amusing comment, “It was
necessary to move the 39th and 47th Infantry without their 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Battalions; and in the
case of the 60th Infantry, the 1st and part of the 2nd Battalion had to be left in the old area awaiting
transportation. All other units were available to move...” Nevertheless, by 16:00, the
headquarters of 39th Regiment (without its battalions) had been established at St. Scolasse, and
sufficient troops were available to establish patrols extending northeast from Sees toward
Moulines. Further east, 60th Regiment occupied similar positions. Finally, 47th Regiment occupied
a reserve position at Vergottiere (northeast of Mortagne).51

In this way, 9th Division was positioned to block a potential German advance, proceeding
southwest toward Alencon and Mans. Indeed, elements of three German panzer divisions were
currently operating near Gace, whilst two infantry divisions were located near L’Aigle. Although
advancing these divisions would have been strategically and logistically unsustainable, the
Germans were certainly capable of bypassing the positions of 90th Division at Nonant. The
deployment of 9th Division is thus an example of prudently defending against what the Germans
might conceivably do, rather than merely against what they were expected to do.52

30th Division

Shortly before dawn, 120th Regiment’s K-Company captured approximately forty
prisoners at a roadblock. However, other German troops apparently witnessed this incident, and
so they quickly launched a counterattack which was supported by heavy artillery fire.
Consequently, all but eight of the prisoners escaped.53

Subsequently, 120th Regiment advanced northeast against light resistance, and ended the
day with 2nd Battalion at St. Andre, 3rd Battalion southeast of St. Andre, and 1st Battalion further
south at Champigny.54 During this advance, 120th Regiment engaged German forces which were
defending a large airfield southwest of St. Andre. This delaying action is one of the few engagements where specific German units are clearly identified within American records.

German prisoners stated that 17th Luftwaffe Division’s 47th Regiment had previously established a line along the Avre, after which that formation withdrew north through the positions of 34th Regiment, which had been dispersed throughout this area. Subsequently, as 120th Regiment advanced, 34th Regiment’s 2nd and 3rd Battalions were concentrated at the airfield. Although Goering’s desire for Luftwaffe infantry has often been portrayed as sheer hubris, we can thus see that they had a very practical role during this campaign.

It does actually make some rational sense to have airfields protected by infantry under the direct command of air officers, as those officers are best suited to assess the needs of an airfield, and they can best develop the appropriate doctrine for the employment of such troops. Therefore, rather than employing the 1st Marine Division at Danang in 1965, perhaps the United States should have instead employed the 1st Air Force Division. Indeed, the marines at Danang expressed confusion regarding their role, and there was considerable debate over whether they should focus upon aggressive patrolling or a more direct defense of the threatened airfield.

During the day, 119th Regiment advanced northeast against spasmodic resistance, which included occasional bombardment. By midnight, 1st Battalion was northwest of St. Andre, 3rd Battalion was at Jumelles, and 2nd Battalion was southwest of Grossoeuvre. Meanwhile, L-Company held a roadblock at Thomer. During this advance, A-Company had been assigned the village of Foret, where they initially met light resistance. However, 1st and 3rd Platoons were ambushed by a German infantry company, supported by mortars and three tanks. Consequently, the Germans thus inflicted more than twenty casualties. 1st Platoon fled, whilst 3rd Platoon disintegrated, such that only twelve troops remained in the village. At this point, Lieutenant
Robert Henglein (3rd Platoon) crawled forward with a bazooka, and on his second shot destroyed one of the German tanks, after which the others withdrew. Subsequently, although wounded, Henglein rallied his platoon and led them back into the village.

Nearby, B-Company’s 2nd Platoon advanced across an open field, where they were pinned down by three German machine-guns. As German artillery began to fire and “casualties began to mount,” Sergeant Kenneth Beason rallied the platoon by advancing alone, and drawing enemy fire toward himself. Although Beason was thus killed, his heroic example enraged his friends, who subsequently stormed the German positions. Meanwhile, 197th Artillery’s C-Battery (operating with 531st AA’s C-Battery) was ambushed by a German infantry company, although the enemy took heavy casualties from 40mm AA fire.60

As for 117th Regiment, still operating in reserve, 1st and 2nd Battalions advanced toward Chavigny along the northwestern flank. Meanwhile, 3rd Battalion was employed further west, where they encountered stiff resistance northwest of Boissy, after which continued resistance was encountered as they advanced northeast toward Corneuil.61 Finally, by the end of the day, 743rd Tank Battalion was withdrawn into a reserve position, whilst 823rd TD Battalion occupied positions alongside the infantry, where they prudently prepared for expected counterattacks emanating from the west, north, and northeast.

August 22

On August 22, Hodges met with Dempsey, in order to once again discuss the advance of Second Army. Over the next twenty-four hours, 30th Corps would establish a salient along the southern flank, anchored between Monnai and Nonant, and extending thirty kilometers from Chambois toward L’Aigle. Upon reaching L’Aigle, the leading elements of 30th Corps were thus twenty kilometers from Verneuil and the western flank of 19th Corps. Concurrently, 12th Corps
had advanced northeast from Vimoutiers toward Bernay, thereby relieving pressure upon the Canadian Army.62

Hodges also met with Bradley and Gerow, in order to discuss the employment of 5th Corps at Paris. Indeed, there was a large gap within the lines of Third Army, and First Army would thus fill this hole. Meanwhile, although Patton appears to have believed that an occupation of the city would be relatively easy, Bradley prudently warned Gerow to avoid a major urban struggle. At this time, Third Army’s 79th Division was still contained at Mantes, where they were confronted by 18th Luftwaffe Division. Meanwhile, 5th Division was moving east from Etampes toward the Seine at Fontainebleau, with 7th Armored Division approaching Melun. It was thus that the formations of Third Army advanced at “right angles away from one another,” such that it was quite appropriate for First Army to insert 5th Corps.

Although the bridgehead of 79th Division was contained by strong resistance, journalists seized upon this as a “firm” position from which Third Army was beginning to “storm” toward Calais.63 These same reports stated that 20th Corps was already across the Seine at Melun, although the situation maps do not indicate any such crossing, even as late as noon on August 24. Perhaps elements of Third Army had crossed the river, but they certainly did not have a firm bridgehead. Indeed, on August 25, 7th Armored Division would be shown as barely across the river, where they were surrounded by four German divisions. Subsequently, when 3rd Armored Division crossed at this same location, they would report considerable remaining resistance. Meanwhile, although 19th Corps was tasked with the advance toward Rouen, newspapers insisted that “Patton’s tanks” were cutting off the retreat of Seventh Armee. These fallacious accounts explain that First Army was merely “herding” the enemy along, whilst Patton supposedly
positioned his army to simultaneously encircle two German armies, after which he would envelop Paris, occupy Calais, and “smash” east toward Germany.\textsuperscript{64}

\textit{1\textsuperscript{st} Division}

This formation remained in reserve near Mace, where training exercises were cancelled due to poor weather. However, some training was still conducted, focusing on the emplacement of roadblocks, trenches, and minefields.\textsuperscript{65}

\textit{4\textsuperscript{th} Division}

This formation, along with French 2\textsuperscript{nd} Armored Division, was attached to 5\textsuperscript{th} Corps. They therefore prepared for movement, and artillery formations began advancing toward Thymerais, northwest of Chartres.\textsuperscript{66}

\textit{9\textsuperscript{th} Division}

By afternoon, the bulk of the division was positioned near Mortagne, with 39\textsuperscript{th} Regiment along the western flank, 47\textsuperscript{th} Regiment in the center, and 60\textsuperscript{th} Regiment along the southeastern flank. There was little combat, except for some skirmishing by 4\textsuperscript{th} Cavalry Group, which was patrolling northwest of Glos, and south of St. Gauburge. Meanwhile, these patrols reported that the roads between L’Aigle and Verneuil were extensively mined. Behind this cavalry screen, the infantry regiments established a secondary "system" of motorized patrols. Ultimately, 9\textsuperscript{th} Division was thus covering an area of approximately a hundred square kilometers.\textsuperscript{67}

\textit{30\textsuperscript{th} Division}

During the morning, 119\textsuperscript{th} Regiment advanced northeast, encountering heavy resistance southeast of Evreux, between Prey and St. Aubin. At noon, whilst 1\textsuperscript{st} and 2\textsuperscript{nd} Battalions continued moving toward Huest, 3\textsuperscript{rd} Battalion was diverted north from Prey toward
Guichainville, after which they also moved toward Huest. Further west, 117th Regiment’s 3rd Battalion cleared heavy resistance at Cissey.

At Huest, the regiment held a line along the western edge of an abandoned German airfield, extending north toward Doucerain. Although this position was based along the forest, troops were projected as much as a half-kilometer eastward. In this way, they controlled the roads which connect Doucerain and Huest with Sassey. Of course, since Evreux was not yet cleared, the regiment was thus exposed on three sides. Subsequently, elements of the recon platoon entered Evreux, where they confirmed that the Germans were withdrawing, although they encountered a group of FFI partisans. Unfortunately, the startled French troops threw a grenade which wounded two Americans, after which the patrol was withdrawn. It was later determined that Evreux was experiencing a “frenzy of liberation” which resulted in riots.68

Concurrently, on the eastern flank, 120th Regiment advanced in a column led by 2nd Battalion. By midnight, after clearing “numerous pockets of enemy resistance,” 2nd Battalion was deployed northeast of Reuilly, 3rd Battalion controlled the crossroads southwest of Jouy, and 1st Battalion occupied the forest southeast of Haut-Cierrey. Although resistance remained strong, nearly five hundred prisoners were thus captured within a forty-eight hour period, including a battalion commander.69

Ultimately, these two regiments were oriented toward the east, in anticipation of a German counterattack emanating from Vaudreuil and Gaillon. 119th Regiment thus held the main defensive line, whilst 120th Regiment established three "hedgehog" positions which were intended to spoil and disrupt the German advance. One might thus compare this position with that established by 4th Division on August 8. In both cases, concentrated defensive positions were projected in advance of the main line. Along the southern flank, 117th Regiment’s 1st and
2nd Battalions were placed in reserve, where they occupied the forests near Coudray and St. Aubin. 70

When evaluating the defensive strength of these positions, one should note the exceedingly flat terrain which can be found between the various small forests, such that attacking forces would surely have faced withering defensive fire. For example, at Prey, visibility toward the northeast extends for two kilometers. Of course, this certainly helps to explain why 9th Division reported such heavy resistance during their advance.

Ultimately, discussing the day’s events, 120th Regiment observed, “Artillery has played a major role in all of our successes... they do a whale of a job.” The records thus emphasize the leapfrogging movement of 230th Artillery, which advanced with one echelon consisting of the battalion headquarters with A&B-Batteries, whilst the other contained C-Battery and a platoon of six M4(105mm) tanks from 743rd Tank Battalion. By the end of the day, the first echelon was located near Gauciel, with the second further south near David. However, with 120th Regiment dispersed across ten kilometers, there were considerable gaps in the line. Consequently, at midnight, the first echelon reported that a German column was approaching their position, advancing westward. Subsequently, the exposed battalion fought a prolonged infantry engagement, and the records thus stated, “Their accomplishments are not limited to their specialized field of endeavor.”71

Summary

Between August 19 and 22nd, 30th Division was shifted east from Domfront toward Dreux, advancing across the Avre toward Evreux. Concurrently, 9th Division protected the western flank of this effort. Meanwhile, 4th Division prepared to advance toward Paris. Finally, 1st Division was allowed to rest at Mace.
CHAPTER 10
THE CITY OF LIGHT

Between August 23 and 26th, First Army incurred 1265 combat casualties as they occupied Paris and crossed the Seine. Meanwhile, just as First Army had previously assumed command of Third Army’s divisions at Argentan, those at Mantes were attached on August 24. Surely, this indicates that First Army was the primary formation within Twelfth Army Group. Indeed, although D’Este expressed confusion at the way in which Bradley’s memoir praises Hodges and only gives token attention to Patton, the obvious conclusion is that Bradley really did believe that Hodges was a superior commander.¹

Subsequently, the occupation of Paris on August 25 was an important combat operation, although many historians have portrayed this as a mere sideshow, which was supposedly conducted against trivial resistance. However, the advance of French 2nd Armored Division was delayed by effective defensive fire, and the division thus lost a hundred and fifty vehicles during its approach. Nevertheless, Blumenson stated that the enemy "melted away" and that the deployment of 4th Division was largely intended as a means of boosting morale, rather than as a necessary reinforcement. Consequently, Blumenson’s narrative does not discuss the heavy combat which 22nd Regiment experienced at Corbeil.²

Ultimately, considering the extreme difficulty of urban combat, it is clear that Bradley made a wise decision to avoid Paris until the German withdrawal was well underway. There seems little doubt that if the Allies had prematurely entered the city, not only would there have been tremendous civilian casualties, but there would also have been extremely heavy fighting. Even a single infantry division could have sorely disrupted the Allied advance. Fortunately, the
French resistance posed a powerful threat to the enemy, as the capital’s ten thousand police had revolted on August 19.³

August 23

On August 23, Hodges visited the headquarters of 19ᵗʰ Corps, in order to meet with Corlett. However, the weather remained stormy, and consequently the plane following Hodges crashed. Indeed, generals took considerable risks flying during unsafe conditions, and their memoirs frequently contain such harrowing anecdotes. Subsequently, on both August 26 and September 9, the plane carrying Hodges was temporarily lost.⁴

Upon reaching the headquarters of 19ᵗʰ Corps, Hodges warned Corlett to “button up tight,” as large numbers of German tanks were operating northeast of Evreux. Afterwards, he also met with Brigadier Harold Pyman, and they discussed the advance of 30ᵗʰ Corps. Indeed, this formation was expected to enter the zone of 19ᵗʰ Corps on August 25, at which point severe congestion was expected. Consequently, it was agreed that these formations would share the roads via an alternating block schedule, with Second Army having priority on the first day.

Likewise, traffic congestion was a concern for 5ᵗʰ Corps, where Gerow reported that drunken French troops were blocking traffic throughout his sector. Undoubtedly, many French drivers were intoxicated, but congestion was a chronic problem throughout this campaign. Indeed, the French were stalled by the same exuberant crowds which delayed American formations, whilst German artillery and snipers remained a serious problem. Stuck in traffic, French tank crews naturally accepted the bottles of wine which were freely proffered by ecstatic civilians. Consequently, Gerow’s comments appear to be more indicative of his own frustration at the inevitable delays, rather than a genuine assessment of French performance. Unfortunately, the American records are often almost racist with regard to the French, and one account states
that they “seemed to have no idea of march discipline or coordination… blocking traffic for miles.” Nevertheless, the records clarify that traffic was congested across the entire front.⁵

Along the flanks of First Army, the Canadian Army cleared the area northwest of Lisieux, whilst Second Army eliminated the salient northwest of L’Aigle. It was thus that Twenty-First Army Group established a solid line facing east toward the Seine, which remained fifty kilometers away. As for Third Army, despite the myth of Patton’s rapid advance, the reality is that most of his force remained further west, and his eastern formations were essentially halted. Although some historians have claimed that Hitler was desperately seeking to block Patton from advancing toward Dijon, and thereby cutting the operational lines toward southern France, the reality is that this strategic objective was two hundred kilometers away.⁶

1st Division

This formation remained in reserve, with their continuing delay due to the ongoing movement of 4th Division, which was blocking roads eastward. Nevertheless, some movement was eventually completed by reconnaissance troops and various billeting details. Meanwhile, the division held an ordnance inspection, whilst the troops were kept busy with calisthenics, athletics, and hiking. Concurrently, organizational doctrine continued to undergo continual revision, and at least some battalions established Ranger platoons for "special" missions.⁷

4th Division

As noted, the infantry had previously enjoyed an extended period of rest, although this does not mean that morale was high. Indeed, at 07:00, elements of the division were ordered to prepare for movement, preceded by 102nd Cavalry Group, after which they remained in position until 19:00. This frustrating delay was almost certainly due to severe congestion further east. Regardless, not only was this a stressful experience, but the troops became increasingly forlorn,
as they realized that their movement would now be conducted at night, rather than during the
day. Although the records state that the troops were particularly dismayed at the thought of being
unable to view the picturesque French countryside, an equally likely concern was that they knew
it would thus be difficult to get much sleep before they were sent into combat. Meanwhile, the
weather was becoming steadily worse, such that their eventual movement was complicated by
treacherous conditions. Consequently, moving along wet and muddy roads, many of the trucks
skidded and crashed into ditches. ⁸

9ᵗʰ Division

Supporting the southern flank of Second Army, this formation was gradually shifted
northeast. At dawn, 4⁷ᵗʰ Regiment’s ¹ˢᵗ Battalion was thus motorized and deployed northwest of
Verneuil, where they were ordered to block the roads leading toward town. After unloading at
Gauville, the trucks were sent back to shuttle the remainder of 4⁷ᵗʰ Regiment. Subsequently, that
afternoon, 3⁹ᵗʰ Regiment’s ¹ˢᵗ and ²ⁿᵈ Battalions occupied positions around Vidame, south of
Verneuil, with ³ʳᵈ Battalion following on August 24. ⁹

That evening, 4⁷ᵗʰ Regiment was ordered to vacate Verneuil, prior to the arrival of British
troops, and they therefore prepared to move south toward Vidame. At this time, ³ʳᵈ Battalion was
currently enroute toward Gauville, and they were therefore diverted toward Vidame. Meanwhile,
6⁰ᵗʰ Regiment appears to have remained in place near Mortagne, thus shifting to the division’s
western flank, without actually moving. In this way, ⁹ᵗʰ Division moved laterally and remained
perpendicular with the front, thereby bridging ¹⁹ᵗʰ and ³⁰ᵗʰ Corps. Finally, ⁴ᵗʰ Cavalry Group was
detached, although they remained in position between Nonant and L’Aigle, observing the
advance of ³⁰ᵗʰ Corps. ¹⁰
Shortly after midnight, 230th Artillery was attacked at Gauciel. German infantry thus enveloped the battalion headquarters along an arc extending from east to southwest, with intermittent fire lasting until 03:00. Meanwhile, plans were made for the nearby A&B-Batteries to advance northward, shortly after dawn, in order to relieve the exposed headquarters. However, German activity was increasing by dawn, and the Germans began employing mortars and 20mm cannon.  

Therefore, the counterattack by A&B-Batteries began ahead of schedule, amidst intense German fire, with the artillerymen advancing as infantry. Meanwhile, within the sector of the battalion headquarters, Major Clement commandeered an armored halftrack and advanced on his own initiative. Likewise, a hastily organized squad under Captain Sandager (531st AA Artillery) advanced from the north. By this point, Colonel Vieman was occupying an attic from which he directed supporting fire from C-Battery, which was emplaced further south. Shortly thereafter, the German began to surrender, with prisoners stating that it was this barrage which caused them to lose hope of success. Ultimately, German casualties were approximately one hundred, whilst American losses were fourteen.  

During this engagement, no assistance was available from 120th Regiment’s 1st Battalion, which was located nearby at Haut-Cierrey. This was because the infantry were simultaneously engaged against German troops, within the forest along the N13. During the night, German machine-guns and cannon swept the N13 with tracer fire, and this highway thus acquired the nickname “lightning boulevard.” According to Captain Murray Pulver (B-Company), the situation was surreal, “frightening and weird.” Meanwhile, the battalion commander was pinned down by intense fire, alongside A&D-Companies, and the entire battalion was thus thrown into
confusion. However, by dawn, the Germans were withdrawing. Indeed, although the records do not explicitly draw this connection, it seems reasonable to conclude that these troops were moving toward Gauciel.  

Subsequently, 119th Regiment advanced northwest of Evreux and crossed the Iton against light resistance. By the end of the day, 1st Battalion occupied the small forest north of Aviron, whilst 2nd and 3rd Battalions occupied the large forest west of Aviron. Meanwhile, 120th Regiment cleared the western bank of the Eure, between St. Vigor and St. Aquilin. Subsequently, this formation was withdrawn inside the positions formerly held by 119th Regiment. However, one of the regiment’s companies remained near Reuilly, where they maintained observation over the D316. Likewise, two additional companies were detached to reduce various pockets of bypassed resistance.

Later that evening, it was decided that there was no longer any significant threat from the northeast, thanks to the efforts of 5th Armored Division. Consequently, 120th Regiment was shifted to face northwest, with 2nd Battalion occupying Boulay, 3rd Battalion occupying Gravigny, and 1st Battalion holding a line extending southwest from Sassey toward Huest. Meanwhile, 117th Regiment remained in reserve near Courdray and St. Aubin, although 1st and 2nd Battalions were displaced slightly northward. As for 3rd Battalion, they sent patrols into Evreux, where French partisans were engaging German troops.

Ultimately, although the division was now facing northwest, 30th Recon nevertheless moved northeast, encountering strong resistance at Plessis. Meanwhile, 105th Engineer Battalion was quite active, with A-Company removing minefields south of Evreux, whilst B-Company swept for mines within the city, and C-Company laid new minefields to support antitank defenses. Finally, we can once again see the difference between tank and tank-destroyer doctrine,
with 743rd Tank Battalion concentrated in reserve, whilst 823rd Tank Destroyer Battalion was “displaced forward in successive defensive positions to give close support to the infantry.”

August 24

On August 24, the Canadian Army enveloped Lisieux, with 1st Corps occupying Cormellies, and 2nd Corps at Bernay. Here, the Germans continued to impose the “maximum of delay by stubbornly fighting at key localities.” Further south, Second Army began crossing the zone of 19th Corps, with the leading elements of 43rd Division occupying the forest of Breteuil, at Vernon. Some indication of impending traffic congestion is given by the fact that this single contained nearly five thousand vehicles. As for Third Army, 35th Division moved forward to support 4th Armored Division at Montargis, whilst 7th Armored Division concentrated along the Seine, between Mennecy and Melun.

At dawn, Third Army’s 15th Corps was attached to First Army. Consequently, Patton’s nearest forces were now at Melun, fully a hundred and fifty kilometers from the German center, where Seventh Armee was withdrawing from Bernay toward Rouen. Meanwhile, Hodges met with representatives from 15th Corps, 19th Corps, and 30th Corps, in order to discuss the increasing congestion northwest of Paris. Indeed, 12th Corps was also approaching this area, and Hodges thus attended additional discussions with Bradley and Dempsey. Ultimately, in order to make space, 5th Armored Division was withdrawn southeast, after a limited advance from Gaillon toward Heudebouville, which was largely delayed by mud.

Meanwhile, this congestion attracted increasing attention from the Luftwaffe, which was beginning to conduct numerous airstrikes. Attempting to present this with a positive spin, newspapers thus remarked that “only swarms of German aircraft” were delaying the advance. Of course, the reality was that 2nd Armored Division was engaged in heavy combat south of
Elbeuf, which remained occupied by the Germans. Meanwhile, despite the approach of more than twenty Allied divisions, with five more divisions already positioned between Paris and Elbeuf, newspapers pretended that Patton had amassed “an even greater weight” southeast of Paris. In reality, Third Army deployed just four divisions (5th, 35th, 4th Arm, and 7th Arm) between Paris and Orleans.²¹

By the end of the day, 2nd Armored Division was advancing into Elbeuf, whilst placing interdicting fire upon the road toward Rouen. Unfortunately, the dense forest of Rouvray was firmly held by German infantry. Meanwhile, the streets of Elbeuf were reportedly clogged with piles of Germans killed by Allied bombardments, such that it was necessary to bring forward bulldozers in order to clear the roads. Ultimately, when historians speak of the escape of Seventh Armee from Falaise, whilst criticizing Bradley’s decision to halt Patton at Avranches, one should remember that a large percentage of this enemy force was killed or captured during the coming weeks.

1st Division

During the morning, this formation prepared for redeployment toward Chartres. Subsequently, 18th and 26th Regiments advanced in two columns, with the division headquarters at Thieulin by evening, although regimental movement was not completed until midnight. Meanwhile, due to a shortage of trucks, 16th Regiment was not able to move until the following morning. Nevertheless, 7th Corps directed that the division should be prepared to “overtake and follow without interval” 3rd Armored Division, which was advancing toward Melun. Subsequently, after crossing the river, 1st Division would be tasked with “cleaning out pockets of resistance left by the armor.”²²
9th Division

The division remained in reserve, at Vidame.23

30th Division

Having occupied Evreux, this formation was also in reserve, although they continued to engage isolated resistance. For example, a platoon from 119th Regiment was reinforced by engineers, machine-guns, and mortars, after which they cleared minefields and roadblocks near St. Aquilin. Throughout the day, both 30th Recon and 105th Engineer remained particularly active against such positions. Meanwhile, most of the troops were tasked with training and maintenance operations, whilst it began to rain heavily. Of course, 30th Division could have been ordered to continue advancing toward Rouen, but doing so would have aggravated the already severe congestion.24

4th Division

During the morning, this formation endured the “worst conditions of rain and darkness," whilst advancing toward Ablis.25 Aside from the weather, their movement was complicated by numerous roadblocks and blown bridges, along with throngs of French citizens, all of which blocked movement until the division finally received permission to use a different route.26 At approximately 10:00, amidst pouring rain, the column was thus halted for seven hours. It was only now, nearly a month after the break out from Normandy, that division records finally reported the disappearance of hedgerows, which were replaced by wheat fields.27

As the rain ceased, the shivering troops hastily wrung out their soaked clothes.28 Meanwhile, they advanced northeast through Arpajon, with 12th Regiment occupying Nozay, 22nd Regiment at Bretigny, and 8th Regiment around Courson. Concurrently, the artillery was
centralized northeast of Arpajon, near Leuville, whilst 102nd Cavalry Group continued patrolling northeast toward the Seine and Paris.

Ultimately, the division thus moved more than two hundred and fifty kilometers “without serious mishap,” although there were numerous minor incidents. For example, in addition to the aforementioned traffic accidents, Captain Paul Dupuis (12th Regiment’s E-Company) was seriously injured. Apparently, during the extended halt, Dupuis left the crowded trucks, and tried to get some sleep outside. Of course, he was careful to leave the road and lay down next to a tree. Nevertheless, a jeep ran him over. After Dupuis recovered from his injuries, he returned to his unit and fought at Echternach in December, where he was taken prisoner along with his entire company. According to Dupuis, prisoners of war had a “really rough” time.

August 25

On August 25, shortly after dawn, the leading elements of French 2nd Armored Division entered Paris, followed shortly thereafter by 4th Division. Within the city, there was widespread skirmishing, and during this fighting a member of the 5th Corps headquarters was killed. Meanwhile, according to some reports, Paris had already been liberated by Third Army. Of course, as Patton himself admitted, this was not true.

During the day, Hodges met with both Patton and Bradley, in order to clarify the boundaries between First and Third Armies, as the advance subsequently progressed across the Seine. Presumably, the principal issue involved the border between 3rd and 7th Armored Divisions, which were both moving through Melun. Afterwards, Hodges met once again with Dempsey and Corlett, where they discussed the movements of 12th, 15th, 19th, and 30th Corps. Meanwhile, the Canadian Army continued advancing northeast of Bernay, where the Germans were crossing the river between Havre and Rouen.
During the day, Second Army enveloped a large pocket of German troops at Conches, containing elements of five divisions, with assistance from First Army’s 28th Division which occupied the eastern flank. Clearly, this should be added to the tally of those who were previously trapped further west. Unfortunately, historians will never know exactly how many casualties Seventh Armee thus incurred, as these figures are “impossible” to calculate. Ellis estimated that at least 40,000 Germans were taken prisoner within the western pockets, and most sources agree that at least 10,000 additional casualties were thus inflicted. However, when assessing the overall Allied success, one must also include the losses which were sustained over the next few weeks, at Conche, Elbeuf, Evreux, Havre, Calais, Amiens, and Mons. Indeed, 2nd Armored Division reported that they had never seen so many dead Germans before, whilst First Army estimated they had inflicted an average of 5000 casualties per day since July 25th. Therefore, it seems somewhat absurd to demand that they should have somehow achieved an even greater success.

Ultimately, newspapers acknowledged the occupation of Paris, although nothing was said about the involvement of First Army, which was simply described as “other American forces.” Instead, newspapers continued to portray Third Army as the principal Allied force, with a map showing how the “hard-riding” eastern flank of the advance would continue directly toward the German border between Basel and Strasbourg. Meanwhile, the Canadian Army, Second Army, and First Army were apparently deployed merely to defend Third Army’s flank, with no indication that they would even cross the Seine. Indeed, either journalists had been completely misled by Patton as to the overall focus and direction of Allied operations, or perhaps this misinformation was deliberately intended to confuse the Germans.
Regardless, the thrust of Allied operations would not be east toward Metz, but rather northeast toward Brussels, Antwerp, and Aachen. Montgomery had decided this on August 18, and the basic concept was confirmed by Eisenhower on August 23. Although the traditional narrative asserts that Montgomery was driven by political concerns, and a desire to eliminate German rocket-bases, Montgomery stated quite clearly that his primary objective was to establish “a powerful air force in Belgium.” Meanwhile, far from playing a passive role, Montgomery envisioned First Army as a critical component of the advance, such that he argued unsuccessfully for the attachment of that formation to Twenty-First Army Group. Furthermore, he added “quite plainly” that he did not envision a major role for Third Army, which should retain a purely defensive role west of Troyes and Rheims, so that the main advance of “forty divisions” would have maximum logistical support. Unfortunately, Eisenhower modified this plan by allowing Patton to advance toward Metz once “necessary strength” was available.

Consequently, there was considerable ambiguity about the role of Third Army, and Patton came to believe that he not only had necessary strength, but that his advance was somehow more important than that through Belgium. As a result, Patton not only clamored for parity and even priority, but he actively encouraged his staff to quite literally steal supplies from First Army. Not only did this unnecessarily delay the advance of First Army, but it was also quite illegal. Certainly, if logistical shortages did severely disrupt First Army’s advance, the blame should be placed upon Patton, and not upon General John Lee. Indeed, within his memoir, Bradley noted that Lee had “the most exacting [administrative] task in the ETO,” and he was an effective commander with “bold executive talents.”

Although D’Este criticizes General John Lee’s supposedly inefficient supervision of the Allied supply effort, complaining that Lee unnecessarily wasted five battalions of infantry
guarding rear depots, there was a very legitimate reason for Lee’s concern. Somebody was
stealing a lot of supplies, and even selling them. The embarrassing reality is that troops from
Third Army were actually employing aircraft to locate First Army’s depots, where they would
then dispatch what D’Este admits were “raiding parties.” One story, which D’Este assumes is
just a rumor, but which is probably true, is that Patton would personally divert First Army’s
supply columns. Certainly, someone was doing so with substantial authority. Furthermore,
Patton knowingly allowed his logistics officer, Colonel Walter Muller to deliberately exaggerate
the logistical difficulties of Third Army, in order to trick Bradley into granting Patton more
supplies. On at least two occasions, Muller thus misrepresented the fuel situation by fully a
hundred thousand gallons.38

9th Division

Shortly after midnight, this formation was ordered to move from Vidame toward
Arpajon, southeast of Paris. Although immediate orders were thus given to 60th Regiment, the
reality was that “road clearance” was not readily available, and traffic congestion prevented any
movement before noon. Consequently, 60th Regiment was not in position until midnight.
Meanwhile, 47th Regiment began movement at 20:00, eventually occupying Marolles (southeast
of Arpajon). Presumably, 39th Regiment remained behind at Vidame due to insufficient
transportation.39

1st Division

During the morning, 18th and 26th Regiments began moving east from Courville toward
Etampes, preceded by 1st Recon. Meanwhile, other division elements had been moving all night,
with engineers arriving at Thieulin by 04:00, followed by the artillery at 05:00. Shortly after
noon, the headquarters was reestablished at Lardy, with 18th Regiment bivouacked between
Cerny and Alais, followed by 26th Regiment which understandably reported that this area was becoming congested. By that evening, 16th Regiment was also at Lardy, along with the 634th TD and 745th Tank Battalions, whilst the artillery coalesced near Villeneuve. Not surprisingly, after such a prolonged movement, 745th Tank Battalion reported that twelve of their tanks had not arrived, as they required maintenance.40

**30th Division**

Although 30th Division had been halted, they were now ordered to resume advancing toward Elbeuf, where 2nd Armored Division was encountering unexpectedly strong resistance.41 Indeed, the Germans were not merely defending themselves, but were aggressively counterattacking in an attempt to push American artillery away from Rouen. According to the situation map, 344th Division was thus tasked with the defense of Rouen, but the situation was complicated along 2nd Armored Division’s eastern flank, where 12th SS, 6th Fallschirmjäger, and 17th Luftwaffe held additional positions between Elbeuf and Vaudreuil. Meanwhile, elements of 116th Panzer and 2nd SS were moving northeast from Brionne toward Rouen.

At dawn, 117th Regiment advanced against little resistance, clearing the forested area northeast of Evreux.42 By the end of the day, 1st and 2nd Battalions thus occupied positions between Faulx and Bosc. Meanwhile, 3rd Battalion was dispersed into companies along the northern flank, with K-Company east of Amfreville, L-Company northwest of Verdun, and the rest of the battalion extending along a railroad.

Likewise, 119th Regiment advanced against slight resistance, moving further north and occupying the triangle formed by Canappeville, Hermier, and Jourdain. Although this represented an advance of ten kilometers, it was nevertheless several kilometers short of the regiment’s ultimate objective, which was to intercept roads leading east from Neubourg toward
Louviers and Vaudreuil. Meanwhile, along the western flank, 30th Recon spent the day clearing isolated German positions, but this taskforce was unable to seize a blocking position along the D133, at Quatremare.43 As for 120th Regiment, they remained in defensive positions at Evreux.44

Ultimately, there are two ways to portray this effort. Of course, there had been a failure to block the German escape through Rouen. However, we can examine a map, and thus note that the division advanced through nearly twenty kilometers of forested terrain. Although resistance had been relatively light, the infantry still had to pass through harassing fire from machine-guns and snipers, whilst vehicles were delayed by obstacles, debris, and the occasional minefield. Is it reasonable to have expected infantry to advance more than twenty kilometers under such conditions? Subsequently, during that evening, they could have continued advancing, but it was still another fifteen kilometers to Elbeuf. Therefore, it seems doubtful that this division was ever expected to reach Elbeuf and help block the German escape. Instead, they were merely positioned to bolster the rear of 2nd Armored Division, in order to make sure that formation could subsequently withdraw without difficulty.

4th Division

Shortly after midnight, orders were issued for 12th Regiment to enter central Paris, whilst 8th Regiment cleared resistance within the southern suburbs, and 22nd Regiment crossed the Seine at Corbeil. Of course, these nuanced details are somewhat more informative than the traditional narrative which simply states that the division “rolled through the capital” in what is often described as a parade.45

Before discussing these events, this seems an appropriate place to consider the theoretically ideal composition of the division’s three regimental combat teams, which had been freshly reorganized during the preceding period of rest. At this time, 8th Regiment was thus
supported by 29th Artillery, along with 4th Medical’s A-Company, 70th Tank Battalion’s A-Company, 893rd TD Battalion’s A-Company, and a platoon from 4th Engineer’s A-Company. Similarly, 12th Regiment was supported by 42nd Artillery, along with 4th Medical’s B-Company, 70th Tank Battalion’s B-Company, 893rd TD Battalion’s B-Company, and a platoon from 4th Engineer’s B-Company. Likewise, 22nd Regiment was supported by 44th Artillery, along with 4th Medical’s C-Company, 70th Tank Battalion’s C-Company, 893rd TD Battalion’s C-Company, and a platoon from 4th Engineer’s C-Company.46

Having examined this organization, one cannot help but notice the way in which the division evenly dispersed its support formations. In particular, they did not concentrate their two battalions of tanks as a heavy cavalry reserve. Apparently, the division saw little reason to employ such vehicles en masse, which certainly contradicts the classic cliché of blitzkrieg. Perhaps, if the staff of 4th Division had been able to rewrite the organizational doctrine of the US Army, they would have assigned a tank company as an integral component of every infantry regiment. Quite simply, although generations of amateur strategists have scoffed at the notion that tanks should be dispersed as infantry support vehicles, this is precisely what experienced soldiers were doing.

Subsequently, 8th Regiment’s 1st Battalion was tasked with the seizure of bridges at Choisy and Alfortville. Meanwhile, 2nd Battalion occupied positions facing west from Longjumeau, observing a fortified German position at Palaiseau, which was apparently centered within the forest east of the Ecole Polytechnique. Here, the Germans had emplaced the usual combination of infantry, tanks, and artillery. Finally, 3rd Battalion was dispatched to secure various airfields, including those at Bretigny, Toussous, and Orly. This was not as simple as it sounds, and elements of 47th Division (reinforced with tanks) not only defended the airfield at
Bourget until August 27, but they then counterattacked and reoccupied the objective. Later that evening, shortly before midnight, 22nd Regiment’s 3rd Battalion (minus one company, but reinforced by a company from 8th Regiment, plus 70th Tank Battalion’s C-Company) was dispatched toward Monthlery, where they enveloped Palaiseau from the southeast. 47

As for 12th Regiment, beginning at 06:00, 3rd Battalion moved forward to clear an assembly area for the rest of the regiment. Subsequently, led by 1st Battalion, the regiment planned to move north through Athis-Mons, toward central Paris via Villejuif, thus following the line of the N7 toward the Place d’Italie. However, being unable to deploy amidst severe congestion, it was decided to allow 3rd Battalion to lead this entire advance.48 The records thus emphasize the “frantic acclaim” and “exuberant... demoniacal ecstasy” of the citizenry which jammed the streets in a “wild ocean of humanity,” such that it took several hours for the regiment to advance just a few kilometers.49

This exuberant reception became relatively violent, with hard fruits being lobbed aimlessly at the infantry, who were trapped within their trucks. According to one report, “If a man was not kissed a hundred times, it was because he had a bad seat.” Meanwhile, the civilians distributed alcohol, and boarded the trucks with a “carnival spirit.” Consequently, the civilian presence became a “major problem” and the troops were disorganized by constant harassment from civilians, “especially the mademoiselles.” Indeed, personnel deployed as road guides were literally picked up and carried away, amidst kissing and cheering. Subsequently, the medical detachment reported that this "Paris Incident" would certainly result in a number of cases of venereal disease. However, no such incidents actually occurred.50

Ultimately, by 13:00, 12th Regiment occupied central Paris, where a base of operations was established between the Palais de Justice and the Hotel du Levant, encompassing the St.
Michel bridge. Upon arrival, Colonel James Luckett met with representatives from the Paris police and French 2nd Armored Division, these being respectively Captain Pisani and Colonel Billotte. Afterwards, Luckett observed some of the ongoing skirmishing. Indeed, regimental records thus claim that the arrival of 5th Corps disrupted an organized German force of fifteen thousand troops, which was preparing to make a strong defensive effort. Subsequently, that evening, snipers opened fire in the area of 1st Battalion, near the Place d’Italie. Concurrently, crossing the Seine and advancing further north, 38th Cavalry Squadron encountered resistance within the large cemetery of Père Lachaise. Finally, shortly after midnight, the Germans bombarded the city. Although no casualties were suffered by 4th Division, the Germans thus destroyed more than five hundred buildings, triggering a large fire which illuminated much of the city. Of course, the Allies had also bombed Paris, killing thousands of civilians.51

As for 22nd Regiment, they were tasked with establishing a bridgehead across the Seine at Corbeil. Consequently, at 03:00, 3rd Battalion arrived at a staging point along the Rue Feray, three kilometers from the river. Incongruously, this road leads to a bridge which is now known as the Pont de l’Armee Patton, which is just southeast of the Avenue du General Patton. However, since this area was actually cleared by First Army, one can only hope that the local government might rename their bridges to something more historically accurate.52

Having occupied Corbeil, 22nd Regiment was deployed to protect the construction of a treadway, at the site of the modern bridge honoring Patton. Unfortunately, the local community remains unaware of the efforts made by L-Company. At 09:00, this force attempted to cross upstream of the construction site, moving from the railyard toward the chateau of St. Germain. They thus incurred fifteen forgotten casualties. Likewise, G-Company attempted to secure a
crossing at Champrosy, where they were halted by 20mm and 40mm cannon, which were emplaced along the northern bank.\textsuperscript{53}

Subsequently, between Corbeil and Champrosy, the entire northern bank was brought under heavy suppressing fire. This included assistance from 377\textsuperscript{th} AA Artillery, with opposing antiaircraft units directly engaging one another. Meanwhile, 102\textsuperscript{nd} Cavalry Squadron’s A-Troop crossed south of Corbeil, proceeding northeast toward Lieusaint. They were followed by B-Troop, which moved north toward the forest of Senart. Consequently, that afternoon, A-Troop cut the German line of communications, during a heavy engagement at Lieusaint. Shortly thereafter, employing continued suppressing fire, 2\textsuperscript{nd} Battalion established a bridgehead at Champrosy, led by G-Company. That evening, 1\textsuperscript{st} and 3\textsuperscript{rd} Battalions crossed the river, although 3\textsuperscript{rd} Battalion subsequently recrossed and was dispatched to assist 8\textsuperscript{th} Regiment.\textsuperscript{54}

\textbf{August 26}

On August 26, Hodges met with Collins, in order to discuss the advance of 7\textsuperscript{th} Corps across the Seine. Whereas 4\textsuperscript{th} Division had made their own crossing between Corbeil and Champrosy, 7\textsuperscript{th} Corps was crossing at Melun, where Third Army had already emplaced bridges. However, according to Collins, Third Army had done a poor job of constructing these bridges, and it was therefore necessary to build new bridges. Perhaps this criticism was unfair, although it seems entirely plausible that Patton was excessively pressuring his engineers to complete construction as rapidly as possible. Indeed, Patton was photographed here, and newspapers thus emphasized that he was the first American commander to cross the river.\textsuperscript{55} Although this may have been factually accurate, it was hardly of strategic significance. Quite simply, Hodges could have easily crossed at Mantes on August 24, although doing so would have required him to waste time driving around in dense traffic.\textsuperscript{56}
Within newspapers and historic accounts, it seems as if Third Army swept the area north from Melun, clearing the eastern outskirts of Paris. After all, Patton was photographed here! However, at dawn, as the leading elements of 3rd Armored Division’s 33rd Armored Regiment moved north from Melun, they were ambushed and 3rd/CCB soon found itself within an “inferno of horror.” Meanwhile, a number of troops had crossed the river during the night, falling asleep along the northern banks of the Seine, only to be killed by a German bombardment, “One was cut completely in halves… A second gazed numbly at his hand which had been shot off…” Clearly, although 7th Armored Division crossed the Seine at Melun, this formation did not move north. Fortunately, Captain John Haldeman was credited with suppressing a “momentary panic,” although his company was pinned down for four hours within a “grove of death.”

Instead of seeking publicity, Hodges travelled to the headquarters of 15th Corps, where he helped coordinate operations between 30th and 79th Divisions. Having thus met with General Haislip, Hodges once again met with Dempsey, regarding the advance of Second Army. Finally, Hodges also met with Colonel Benjamin Dickson who reported upon the capture of the German military-governor, Dietrich von Choltitz. Apparently, Choltitz was “damn glad” to have surrendered, and personally made almost no effort to defend Paris, although he stated that the city would have assuredly been destroyed without the timely arrival of First Army.

Concurrently, the Canadian Army cleared an area south of the Seine, between Elbeuf and Havre, with 4th Canadian Armoured Division relieving 2nd Armored Division, at Elbeuf. Further south, 43rd Division transited the zone of 19th Corps, occupying positions at Vernon. However, German troops would continue to occupy Rouen until August 30, whilst the position at Havre was not eliminated until September 12. Indeed, as late as August 31, more than ten thousand German troops were continuing to operate along the southern bank, firing upon Allied troops.
along the northern bank. These facts indicate that it would not have been easy for 19th Corps to continue advancing.\textsuperscript{59}

Ultimately, “American armored forces of the Third Army” were wrongly credited with having “rolled in” to liberate the French capital. Third Army thus occupied headlines against exceedingly light resistance, with journalists gleefully emphasizing that Patton was now “racing” toward Germany, just as he had previously been on the verge of capturing Paris for approximately two weeks. More accurately, 7th Armored Division expanded their bridgehead at Melun, where 7th Corps subsequently began crossing. Further east, on the extreme flank, 4th Armored Division was supported by 5th and 80th Divisions, clearing the area between Fontainebleau and Troyes, and thus preparing an eventual advance toward Chalons.\textsuperscript{60}

\textit{30th Division}

With the approach of 15th Division, 30th Division was directed southeast toward Mantes, in order to assist 79th Division. By evening, 119th Regiment’s 1st Battalion thus occupied the forest northwest of Breuil, 2nd Battalion held the ridge southeast of Breuil, and 3rd Battalion occupied the forest southwest of Vert. Meanwhile, 117th Regiment’s 1st Battalion occupied Fontenay, with 2nd Battalion at Perdreauville. Unfortunately, there was not sufficient transportation available to move 3rd Battalion. Likewise, 120th Regiment remained at Evreux, within the congested zone of Second Army, because “there just weren’t enough trucks available.” That evening, the division was attached to 15th Corps.\textsuperscript{61}

\textit{4th Division}

Occupying Paris, 4th Division focused upon securing bridges and airdromes, whilst screening against infiltration. During the day, 8th Regiment’s 1st Battalion thus guarded bridges at Choisy and Ivry. Meanwhile, 2nd Battalion and elements of 3rd Battalion encircled the German
position at Palaiseau with motorized patrols. The rest of 3rd Battalion held various strategic sites, with K-Company stationed at Montlhery alongside 22nd Regiment’s 3rd Battalion, whilst L-Company occupied the Ivry railyard. Finally, additional elements of 8th Regiment’s 3rd Battalion guarded airfields, adding Velizy to those already occupied.  

Concurrently, 12th Regiment continued to engage scattered resistance throughout southeastern Paris. Meanwhile, during the early morning, Father Fries (2nd Battalion’s chaplain) became the first American to say mass at Notre Dame. Afterwards, the regiment cleared the forested park of Vincennes, from which patrols were dispatched northeast. Subsequently, G-Company encountered a German strongpoint within the fort at Villers-sur-Marne. This position was placed under observation, although the Germans withdrew that night. Finally, that night, the regimental position at Vincennes was bombarded by German aircraft. Luckily, no casualties were inflicted, as there were large quantities of ammunition stored here.

Finally, 22nd Regiment spent the morning occupying their bridgehead across the Seine, between Corbeil and Champrosy, whilst engineers constructed additional bridges. Subsequently, avoiding the faulty bridges at Melun, elements of 3rd Armored Division began crossing through this area. Afterwards, the regiment began withdrawing from the northern bank, with the exception of a single company which remained behind. That evening, 1st and 2nd Battalions were thus concentrated between Orangis and Evry, with 3rd Battalion returning that evening.

9th Division

At dawn, 39th Regiment began moving toward Arpajon. Later that afternoon, 47th Regiment’s 3rd Battalion was attached to 3rd Armored Division and crossed the Seine at Tilly, near Melun. Subsequently, 3rd Battalion helped clear the forested area around Epinay, so that bridges could be placed across the Yerres. Meanwhile, the rest of the division began moving.
southeast from Arpajon toward the Seine, with 39th and 60th Regiments concentrated at Melun, and 47th Regiment located between Tilly and St. Fargeau.65

1st Division

Previously, it had been decided that the division would concentrate at St. Fargeau, after which they would cross into the forest of St. Assise. However, as noted, there was considerable uncertainty regarding the status and quality of bridges over the Seine, and this would require a “distinct change in plans.”

It was suggested that perhaps it would be possible to cross at Melun, where 3rd Armored Division was reportedly building new bridges. However, it was subsequently reported that there were no bridges available at Melun, due to severe congestion. Meanwhile, it was confirmed that there was a bridge available at Tilly, but that the area was completely "bogged" and rendered largely impassable. Finally, that afternoon, it was confirmed that four bridges would be made available to 1st Division. These were at Tilly, north of Tilly, Evry, and Champrosy.

Preparatory to crossing, 16th Regiment coalesced southwest of Evry, 18th Regiment concentrated west of Tilly, and 26th Regiment gathered west of Corbeil. However, due to severe congestion, this redeployment was not completed until that evening. Meanwhile, 745th Tank Battalion reported that they were unable to move, as their tanks required maintenance. Nevertheless, seeking some kind of tangible progress, 7th Corps helpfully urged, “Start any time you want. Go with tanks.” Subsequently, 1st Division responded, “We can’t move... we can’t push infantry up.” The division added that even if they were to be somehow teleported across the Seine, they would still be utterly useless, as they would remain passively trapped behind the congestion of 3rd Armored Division.66
Summary

Between August 23 and 26th, 1st Division was redeployed from Mace toward the Seine, at Melun. Concurrently, proceeding through difficult weather, 4th Division occupied Paris, facing heavy resistance at Corbeil, and at various locations around the capital. Meanwhile, supporting 3rd Armored Division, 9th Division crossed the Seine at Melun. Finally, as 19th Corps withdrew from the area of Evreux, 30th Division was attached to 15th Corps at Mantes.
Between August 27 and 29th, First Army incurred 1690 combat casualties. Although central Paris had been occupied, it was still necessary to clear German forces which occupied the suburbs. Consequently, 30th and 79th Divisions were heavily engaged at Mantes, alongside 2nd Armored Division, whilst 3rd Armored Division finished crossing the Seine at Melun, followed by 1st and 9th Divisions. Meanwhile, advancing through Paris, 4th and 28th Divisions cleared the northern outskirts, with 5th Armored Division.1

Once again, historians have neglected these events, merely mentioning a rapid advance which brought 4th Division “far beyond the outmost limits of Paris.” Within Blumenson’s account, the emphasis during this period is completely upon Third Army, and the advance of First Army is barely mentioned. However, Blumenson does note that the effort at Mantes was supported by thirty-five artillery battalions, which suggests intense resistance.2

August 27

On August 27, Hodges visited 7th Corps, where 3rd Armored Division was advancing more rapidly than expected, having reached Soissons and Meaux after clearing initially heavy resistance. Afterwards, Hodges met with the chief of staff for 5th Corps, Colonel Matchett, discussing operations between Paris and the Aisne. That evening, Hodges also met with Dempsey. Although the combat formations of 19th Corps had been removed from the zone of Second Army, it was necessary to discuss lingering support elements, such as an ordnance battalion which required road clearance.3

During the day, newspapers reported that the Allies had crossed the Seine, and indeed there had been crossings southeast of Paris, whilst Second Army’s 43rd Division crossed at
Vernon. However, the situation at Mantes shows that German resistance was more than a merely sporadic effort by ragged defenders. Indeed, although the Germans were said to be “capable of fighting only delaying actions,” such defensive efforts were quite effective.4

30th Division

Before dawn, 117th Regiment began crossing the Seine near Mantes. Subsequently, by noon, 1st Battalion had relieved elements of 79th Division, occupying the forested ridge between Limay and Guitrancourt, facing 18th Luftwaffe Division. That afternoon, 2nd Battalion advanced through 1st Battalion, clearing light resistance to seize positions along the heights between Guitrancourt and Brueil-en-Vexin. Later that evening, it became apparent that there was a gap within the lines of 2nd Battalion, and elements of 1st Battalion were therefore inserted as reinforcement. Meanwhile, 3rd Battalion remained in reserve south of Limay. Concurrently, 120th Regiment was redeployed from Evreux occupying positions south of Mantes.5

As for 119th Regiment, they began crossing at dawn. By noon, 1st and 2nd Battalions were established east of 117th Regiment, with 2nd Battalion anchored upon the river. That afternoon, they advanced toward Oinville and Hardricourt. However, they quickly encountered strong resistance from entrenched German infantry who defended with “great tenacity,” and who were supported by artillery, mortars, and large numbers of automatic weapons. Consequently, the advance stalled along a line extending from Issou toward Juziers, five kilometers short of the intended objective. Subsequently, seeking to continue this effort, B-Company advanced against severe opposition, and was forced to withdraw.6

Further east, 119th Regiment’s recon platoon attempted to advance northeast along the riverbank. Shortly thereafter, they were pinned down by heavy fire from multiple directions, with additional German troops firing machine-guns from the southern bank of the Seine. Fortunately,
Lieutenant Agnew LeFevre organized a solid defensive position, with assistance from G-Company.⁷

4th Division

During the day, 22nd Regiment moved north into central Paris, where they found that the populace remained troublesome and overly enthusiastic, such that the regimental column was repeatedly forced to halt, enroute toward Vincennes. Afterwards, the division advanced northeast toward the forested region which encircles Coubron. However, 12th Regiment remained behind within Paris, where they guarded bridges.⁸

The advance of 8th Regiment began that afternoon, with 2nd and 3rd Battalions moving toward Montfermeil. This was conducted against sporadic resistance from infantry and occasional tanks. However, stiff resistance was encountered southeast of Montfermeil, around 108, where the Germans had converted the eighteenth-century Moulin du Sempin into a fortified position. After determined effort, 1st Battalion was finally able to force the Germans to withdraw, although continued resistance was encountered within nearby villages, most notably along the D34 at Chelles.⁹

Concurrently, 22nd Regiment advanced toward Livry, initially facing slight resistance. Once again, a triangular pattern was adopted, with 1st Battalion on the left, 2nd Battalion on the right, and 3rd Battalion in reserve. This triangular pattern was inverted within the leading battalions, where a single motorized company advanced in front of each battalion. Meanwhile, 4th Recon patrolled further north and reported that the Germans were established within the forest of Sevran. Ultimately, resistance was thus negligible until the regiment reached this position, at which point they were halted by an increasing volume of defensive fire.¹⁰
1st Division

Shortly after dawn, the division headquarters began pressuring its formations to “go as soon as you can... Get thoroughly prepared to fight through woods and towns. You will have a hard job if the enemy is there... stay away from buildings.” After crossing the Seine, 16th Regiment advanced through Draveil, 18th Regiment passed through Savigny, 26th Regiment approached Quincy, and 1st Recon patrolled toward Lesigny. During this movement, no resistance was encountered, except near Lieusaint. Nevertheless, the advance was severely delayed by elements of 3rd Armored Division which were “all over the road.” Indeed, during the crossing of 18th Regiment, traffic was completely halted along the bridges, whilst 26th Regiment reported a “jam on the roads.” Amidst such confusion, contact with 5th Artillery was temporarily lost. 11

Two hours later, 18th Regiment was moving through Quincy toward Brie, and 26th Regiment was further north, near Santeny. Meanwhile, 16th Regiment advanced west around the forest of Senart, following the Seine north toward St. Georges, and then northeast toward Emerainville. Concurrently, 1st Recon reached Pontcarre, where they were stuck in traffic behind 3rd/CCB.

Ultimately, 18th Regiment’s 1st Battalion reported that this was a truly “epic” day, during which the “sweating toiling infantry” advanced under a hot sun, whilst passing vehicles showered them with dust. After thus marching forty kilometers under miserable conditions, this battalion was placed in trucks and transported another thirty kilometers, finally arriving southeast of Meaux (at Villemareuil). Similarly, the records of 2nd Battalion describe this as the “toughest march of the war in France,” during which there were several cases of heat exhaustion. Likewise,
the records of 3rd Battalion provide such commentary, whilst remarking upon the vast quantities of abandoned German equipment which littered the road and delayed traffic.\textsuperscript{12}

\textit{9th Division}

At dawn, 9th Recon began crossing the Seine at Tilly and Melun, followed by 39th Regiment, with 47th and 60th Regiments crossing that afternoon. Of course, this was done without opposition, since 3rd and 7th Armored Divisions had already cleared the area.\textsuperscript{13}

Subsequently, 9th Division began advancing northward, preceded by 9th Recon at a distance of six kilometers, with elements of 4th Cavalry Group and 3rd Armored Division operating across the frontage. During this advance, isolated groups of German infantry were encountered within the various forests, although these quickly withdrew or surrendered. By evening, the division thus occupied a line extending fifteen kilometers between Tournan and Rozay. Along the western flank, 47th Regiment (without 3rd Battalion) occupied the forested area between Tournan and Chatres, with the regimental headquarters established at the chateau northwest of Liverdy. Further east, the records have little to say about the other regiments, presumably because German resistance was concentrated along the western flank, where 17th SS Division was withdrawing toward Meaux.

During the advance, a platoon of tank destroyers captured several dozen German prisoners north of Evry, who were subsequently turned over to a patrol from 47th Regiment’s 1st Battalion. This patrol actually had to be ordered backwards in order to retrieve these prisoners, as the front had already passed by. This incident thus serves as a reminder of the way in which an advance is like a tidal surge, typically passing around hard centers of resistance, which are steadily eroded by the advance of subsequent formations. As seen repeatedly, the Germans routinely defended in depth, allowing advanced formations to proceed, whilst ambushing
subsequent forces. Indeed, during the day, 47th Regiment thus captured more than two hundred German troops. If these had truly been Nazi fanatics, armed with machine-guns and antitank weaponry, then the advance would have been far more difficult, encountering the same difficulties which plagued the Germans in Russia.14

Although Third Army is traditionally seen as leading the advance with armored columns, the situation map actually shows 9th Division ahead of 7th Armored Division. Was this correct? Were Patton’s tanks actually lagging behind the infantry of First Army? Certainly, the records of 9th Division report the presence of 3rd Armored Division, but they do not mention 7th Armored Division. Meanwhile, the records of 3rd Armored Division pointedly state that they were definitely ahead of 7th Armored Division. Apparently, moving behind First Army, 7th Armored Division shifted east toward Provins, and then northeast toward Montmiral. This was undoubtedly done to ease traffic congestion further west, and this is probably what Hodges and Patton had discussed on August 25.

August 28

On August 28, Hodges met with Haislip, in order to discuss the “fairly tough scrap” near Mantes. Subsequently, he also met with Bradley. Although the supply situation had been deemed critical for several weeks, this appears to be the first time that the issue was directly emphasized within a discussion between First Army and Twelfth Army Group. At this time, Bradley stated that Hodges was “to keep going just as far as he could.” Afterwards, Hodges once again met with Gerow, discussing the advance of 5th Corps toward the Aisne. Meanwhile, 7th Corps reportedly made “whirlwind speed” with leading elements of 3rd Armored Division approaching Laon.15

Although 15th Corps faced heavy resistance, as did Twenty-First Army Group, journalists claimed that the “tattered remnants” of Seventh Armee were now “trapped” thanks to the
advance from Mantes and Vernon.\textsuperscript{16} Of course, an examination of 30\textsuperscript{th} Division shows that the situation was not quite so simple. Meanwhile, journalists reported that Third Army “thundered” and “shot” past the outskirts of Paris, although four divisions of First Army (1\textsuperscript{st}, 4\textsuperscript{th}, 9\textsuperscript{th}, and 3\textsuperscript{rd} Arm) were interspersed between Paris and 20\textsuperscript{th} Corps. Nevertheless, these accounts stated that elements of Third Army had thus reached the Meuse at Lagny. Perhaps, during the initial crossing of 7\textsuperscript{th} Armored Division, patrolling elements of Third Army did pass through this area. However, elements of 3\textsuperscript{rd} Armored Division were soon seventy kilometers northeast of Lagny, whilst 9\textsuperscript{th} Division was forty kilometers east at Rebais. Considered the considerable congestion throughout this area, it seems improbable that Third Army had substantial forces operating so deep within First Army’s zone.

\textit{30\textsuperscript{th} Division}

During the morning, 117\textsuperscript{th} Regiment advanced into the forest north of Brueil. Along the western flank, 2\textsuperscript{nd} Battalion thus cleared light resistance at Hazeville. Meanwhile, advancing through the open fields around Lainville and through the forest between Guyon and Avernes, 1\textsuperscript{st} Battalion was delayed by machine-guns, tanks, and artillery. Finally, 3\textsuperscript{rd} Battalion was in reserve, southeast of Lainville.\textsuperscript{17} Concurrently, 119\textsuperscript{th} Regiment advanced toward a line extending northwest from Hardricourt toward Oinville. This advance was conducted against harassing fire from numerous snipers, with 1\textsuperscript{st} Battalion in the center, 2\textsuperscript{nd} Battalion to the southeast, and 3\textsuperscript{rd} Battalion to the northwest. By noon, having accomplished this task, 119\textsuperscript{th} Regiment continued north along the D43 toward Fremainville. However, 1\textsuperscript{st} and 3\textsuperscript{rd} Battalions soon encountered strong opposition, and 3\textsuperscript{rd} Battalion was thus halted within the forest northwest of Seraincourt, whilst 1\textsuperscript{st} Battalion was halted within the forest southwest of Gaillon (which is now a golf course). Meanwhile,
facing lighter opposition, 2nd Battalion managed to advance somewhat further, occupying the fields northeast of Gaillon.\textsuperscript{18}

Finally, by "shuffling" organic transportation assets, 120th Regiment crossed the Seine and assembled near Porcheville. Subsequently, during the afternoon, they advanced eastward through 119th Regiment, moving toward the forested ridge north of Evecquemont. With 30th Recon leading this effort, strong resistance was encountered from entrenched infantry, supported by heavy defensive fire from machine-guns and mortars. Indeed, the Germans were strongly positioned to the north, at Tessancourt. Consequently, their advance was halted, with 3rd Battalion at Meulan, whilst 1st and 2nd Battalions remained behind at Mezy. Undoubtedly, the principal tactical problem hindering this advance was posed by the narrow forested ridge extending northeast from Meulan toward Evecquemont, which severely canalized the axis of advance, as the Seine flows less than a half kilometer south of the ridge.\textsuperscript{19}

\textit{4th Division}

At 05:00, 4th Division once again endured an aerial bombardment, although no casualties were inflicted as the troops were protected within air-raid shelters. Subsequently, they “continued the attack and reached objectives, consolidating thereon.”\textsuperscript{20}

During the morning, 8th Regiment advanced northeast without resistance. By noon, 1st Battalion reached the D34, northeast of 108. This battalion then waited, whilst 2nd Battalion advanced toward Vaujours, where the Route Stratégique (D129) was occupied that evening. Meanwhile, as a gap expanded between 1st and 2nd Battalions, 3rd Battalion was now inserted, moving northeast and maintaining contact patrols along either flank. Ultimately, aside from some artillery fire, there was no significant opposition encountered during this advance. Consequently, patrols were extended further northeast, as far as the Ourcq canal which bisects Villeparisis and
Mitry-le-Neuf (as well as the forest of Sevran), and then following that line eastward toward its intersection with the A104 (northwest of the Château de Morfonde).²¹

The advance of 8th Regiment was accompanied by that of 22nd Regiment, which faced entrenched German infantry. 1st Battalion thus cleared the division’s northwestern flank, where they occupied a line extending east from Aulnay toward the forest of Sevran. This line bulged northeast toward the Schuman roundabout. Further east, 2nd Battalion advanced against moderate resistance, clearing the forest and crossing the Ourcq. This effort was preceded by aggressive patrols, supported by heavy artillery. In reserve, 3rd Battalion remained at Livry, with the exception of K-Company which was ordered forward against moderate resistance, where they established an OPLR (Outpost Line of Resistance) within Villepinte. This position was centered along the D115, northeast of the Schuman roundabout. During the night, they continued with extensive patrolling. Ultimately, comparing the experiences of 8th and 22nd Regiments, it thus seems that the Germans had initially established a line facing southwest from Aulnay and Sevran toward 108 and Chelles, and they then pivoted so that the line subsequently faced south between Roisy and Mitry-Mory.²²

Finally, advancing shortly before noon, 12th Regiment moved along the eastern flank, leaving 1st Battalion behind to guard bridges near Vincennes. Subsequently, after facing spasmodic resistance, 2nd and 3rd Battalions occupied the forested region between Claye and Villevaude. A typical incident during this advance is related within the records of 2nd Battalion, “We ran into a defended house and pounded it with artillery.” Afterwards, during a “black stormy night,” the troops experienced considerable difficulty, and a sergeant was thus evacuated after falling down a stairway.²³
1st Division

Advancing behind 3rd Armored Division, this formation eliminated bypassed resistance. Shortly after dawn, one such pocket was identified by 1st Recon’s 3rd Platoon, which reported fifteen German vehicles and approximately a hundred infantry, moving through the forest east of Pontcarre. Subsequently, by noon, the leading elements were along the Marne, between Esbly and Boutigny. There was congestion at Esbly, where both 16th and 26th Regiments were trying to cross the same bridge. Eventually, 26th Regiment was ordered to move northeast and cross exclusively at Meaux. Meanwhile, leading the advance, 18th Regiment was already across the Marne, occupying positions extending northeast from Trilbardou toward Penchard. Finally, with German troops advancing east from Claye, 1st Battalion occupied a line at Charny, facing west toward Fresnes.24

9th Division

Also advancing behind 3rd Armored Division, 9th Division encountered very little resistance, as they moved thirty kilometers northeast, occupying a line between Pierrelevee and Rebais. During this day, the only significant combat event was at dawn, near Tournan. Apparently, a group of approximately twenty Germans had been rallied by an officer, and this desperate force attempted to move through 47th Regiment’s C-Company. However, after a brief skirmish, the Germans were convinced to surrender. Subsequently, possibly because of this incident, 60th Regiment took over the western flank of the advance, whilst 47th Regiment (without 3rd Battalion) cleared the forest around Tournan. Afterwards, 47th Regiment was shuttled forward to a reserve position, southwest of Coulommiers.25
August 29

On August 29, Hodges observed the advance of 28th Division, which paraded through central Paris. Meanwhile, 19th Corps assumed command over the bridgehead at Mantes, with the headquarters of 15th Corps returning to Third Army. Further west, Second Army consolidated bridgeheads at Vernon and Vaudreuil, and the Canadian Army made similar efforts northeast of Elbeuf. During the morning, emanating from Vernon, 11th Armoured Division began advancing against light resistance and heavy rain. Nevertheless, antitank artillery did delay their progress.26

As for Third Army, admirable progress was made, with 4th Armored Division northeast of Sens, and the four divisions of 20th Corps advancing northeast of Thierry. Meanwhile, 35th Division defended the eastern flank, along the Yonne south of Sens. However, although six German divisions faced Third Army, approximately twenty divisions were defending between Soissons and Havre. Furthermore, the Germans facing Third Army were concentrated across the river from 35th Division, such that 20th Corps was advancing into territory which was hardly defended by the remnants of a single division, Panzer Lehr. Meanwhile, First Army’s 3rd Armored Division kept pace along the northern flank of Third Army, such that there is no reason to assert that Patton’s progress was more significant.

It seems that clear journalists confused 3rd Armored Division with Third Army, thus stating that Patton’s forces were advancing through Meaux and Thierry, both of which were firmly within the zone of First Army. In theory, elements of 7th Armored Division may have advanced toward Meaux, but the records of 3rd Armored Division clearly state that Meaux was “captured” by First Army. Likewise, these records state that a detachment, under Captain Theodore Black, “zoomed” past a column from 7th Armored Division, reaching Thierry first on August 27. Confirming these events, Captain Black received a letter of gratitude from the mayor
of Thierry. First Army thus “outmaneuvered” Patton. Meanwhile, although no German divisions were reported to be operating near Reims, newspapers predicted that Patton was now on the verge of a “vast new encirclement.” Of course, there would be an encirclement at Mons, but this would involve First Army.27

30th Division

During the morning, 119th Regiment resumed advancing against what initially amounted to light opposition. 1st Battalion thus moved through Seraincourt toward Rueil, whilst 3rd Battalion advanced through Jambville toward Fremainville. Meanwhile, 2nd Battalion held the eastern flank at Gaillon. At Fremainville, 3rd Battalion (Colonel Brown) encountered a miniature Stalingrad, when a strong German force was found to be entrenched within a factory. This ferocious resistance was not reduced until antitank artillery was brought forward to fire directly into the buildings, whilst elements of 1st Battalion provided flanking fire from the fields east of town. Subsequently, resistance continued, and infantry teams cleared the factory “room by room” during close combat.28

Concurrently, 2nd Battalion began to advance northeast toward Condecourt. At first, no resistance was encountered. However, along the outskirts of town, E-Company was trapped within the crossfire of German machine-guns, where they endured bombardment from mortars and artillery. Unfortunately, the American mortars were out of position, having been left behind due to the deceptively rapid advance. Consequently, the mortar commander, Lieutenant Earl Fay, was dispatched rearward to bring his platoon forward. Taking a jeep, Fay moved several hundred yards along a road which was now covered by German fire, from hidden positions which had been unnoticed during the initial advance. Along the way, Fay stopped to rescue three wounded American soldiers. Subsequently, once the mortars were finally brought forward, Sergeant Unger
(F-Company) was cited for directing fire even after being shot in the hip, whilst blood poured from his nose. Similarly, Lieutenant Harold Clifford (197th Artillery) was wounded and yet continued to operate as an observer.29

That afternoon, with 2nd Battalion pinned down, and 3rd Battalion exhausted from their struggle for Fremainville, the Germans predictably launched a counterattack, moving against 2nd Battalion from the east, and 3rd Battalion from the north. Immediately prior to this, within the area of E-Company, German paratroopers were observed preparing to advance. Acting quickly, the company commander believed that there was a more defensible position a hundred meters ahead. E-Company thus charged forward in a vain attempt to preempt the German advance, but they were instead pinned down in the open. A few minutes later, the Germans began to advance, with numerous infantry emerging from various concealed locations. Faced with enemy forces advancing from close range, two members of E-Company understandably surrendered. Meanwhile, the company commander rose to his feet and was instantly shot down. This incident bears mentioning, whenever anyone hears the notion that the best defense is a good offense, or that combat commanders need to make quick and aggressive decisions. Such clichés are frequently invalid, and E-Company should clearly have remained on the defensive.30

Fortunately, after heavy fighting, E-Company eventually forced the Germans to withdraw. Credit for initially halting the German advance was later given to the machine-gunners. In this regard, Sergeant Charles Curtis was cited for his effective placement and observation, as well as for evacuating the wounded. Furthermore, Private Harold Gilbert was credited with killing many of the advancing infantry, before they killed him as well. Meanwhile, American artillery and mortars played a decisive role and forced the Germans to withdraw.
Unfortunately, within the official history, these events were simply abstracted into a “hammering” upon the Germans.\textsuperscript{31}

Subsequently, the advance resumed, and that evening 119\textsuperscript{th} Regiment occupied a line with 2\textsuperscript{nd} Battalion in the fields west of Longuesse, and 3\textsuperscript{rd} Battalion southwest of Themericourt. Meanwhile, 1\textsuperscript{st} Battalion was shifted east from Reuil, and occupied defensive positions northwest of Condecourt. Ultimately, the difficulties which 119\textsuperscript{th} Regiment thus faced along their eastern flank are indicative of significant German strength northeast of Meulan, which certainly helps to explain the situation facing 120\textsuperscript{th} Regiment.\textsuperscript{32}

Indeed, 120\textsuperscript{th} Regiment’s 1\textsuperscript{st} and 3\textsuperscript{rd} Battalions moved forward against determined resistance from a system of strong-points held by elements of 6\textsuperscript{th} Fallschirmjäger and 18\textsuperscript{th} Luftwaffe Divisions. By that evening, they finally reached the previous day’s objectives, with 1\textsuperscript{st} Battalion occupying the woods southeast of Condecourt (still held by the Germans), whilst 2\textsuperscript{nd} Battalion cleared the forest area northeast of Evecquemont. Meanwhile, after presumably advancing through the open area between Gadancourt and Menucourt, 3\textsuperscript{rd} Battalion held advanced positions near Courdimanche, where they spent the night engaged with German infantry who occupied entrenchments and concrete fortifications.\textsuperscript{33}

The most serious situation within the zone of 120\textsuperscript{th} Regiment was at Villette. Here, C-Company endured heavy casualties, inflicted by a series of counterattacks which continued throughout the day and night, whilst the Germans maintained a steady bombardment of the American position. During this struggle, casualties included two platoon commanders, the commander of B-Company, the battalion operations officer, and Lt.Colonel William Bradford. Meanwhile, the supporting tanks were destroyed, which resulted in havoc amongst the demoralized infantry, as the now leaderless platoons were pinned down by direct fire from
antitank artillery. Indeed, this situation became so bad, that the battalion medical officer refused to dispatch stretcher-bearers to evacuate the wounded.34

Fortunately, a complete disaster was prevented by Lieutenant James Mosby (C-Company), who crawled a hundred meters under fire to destroy an antitank cannon with grenades. However, the platoons remained pinned down and were soon surrounded by enemy infantry. Eventually, B-Company dispatched a reinforcing platoon under Lieutenant Edward Hunn. Ultimately, Hunn managed to break through the German lines and organized a defensive position, with the assistance of heavy concentrations from supporting artillery.35

Finally, 117th Regiment remained in reserve within the forest southwest of Avernes, until that afternoon when 1st Battalion advanced toward Gadancourt. Meanwhile, the regimental recon platoon was also actively employed. With 3rd Battalion advanced toward Courdimanche, this platoon moved southeast through Boisemont, clearing the large loop via which the Seine bends south towards Poissy. Ultimately, although this area was found to be undefended, this seems an excellent example of how the recon platoon operated as an independent taskforce.36

4th Division

Before dawn, the advance began amidst a heavy downpour, although traffic congestion soon halted movement for several hours. Meanwhile, elements of 8th Regiment patrolled along the Ourco, followed at daylight by the advance of 1st Battalion toward Villeparisis. Subsequently, 2nd and 3rd Battalions advanced through 1st Battalion, with 2nd Battalion moving further north to cross the canal and occupy Mitry-le-Neuf, whilst 3rd Battalion moved northeast to secure the line of the A104, after which both battalions advanced toward Mitry-Mory. At first, there was no enemy contact, although heavy resistance confronted both battalions that afternoon. Consequently, Mitry-Mory was not occupied until nearly midnight.37
Likewise, 12th Regiment’s 2nd and 3rd Battalions dispatched patrols during the pre-dawn hours, detecting enemy positions extending northwest from Claye toward Mitry-Mory. By noon, these battalions were advancing against light resistance, with 2nd Battalion moving through Charny toward Cuisy, whilst 3rd Battalion moved through Messy toward Montge. Ultimately, what this achieved was to block any German attempt to retreat due east from Mitry-Mory, thereby forcing the Germans to withdraw northeast toward Dammartin and St. Mard.38

Concurrently, 12th Regiment’s 1st Battalion was temporarily attached to 3rd Armored Division, but was returned that evening. Subsequently, this battalion was inserted at Belleville, thereby cutting the N2 northeast of Mitry-Mory. Presumably, this was accomplished by moving northwest via St. Soupplets. That this was an awkward situation is indicated by the battalion records, which note that the successful advance was mostly a matter of luck, as the Germans had fortuitously and unexpectedly withdrawn. Such comments certainly reinforce a sense that the German withdrawal was not induced by the inexorable advance of overwhelming Allied strength, but was instead part of a deliberate and gradual withdrawal conducted at a pace largely determined by the defenders.39

Finally, 22nd Regiment was led by 2nd and 3rd Battalions, in a highly coordinated advance against determined resistance. During the first phase of operations, 1st Battalion patrolled along a line extending from Bourget northeast toward the park of Sausset (between Aulnay and Villepinte). These patrols confirmed that small groups of German infantry were operating throughout this area. Meanwhile, 2nd Battalion advanced northeast along the northern edge of the canal, approaching Mitry-le-Neuf from the west, and securing the forested area which surrounds the boulevard of Lénine (east of the D40). Arriving shortly before noon, 2nd Battalion was briefly halted amidst a mortar barrage, whilst 3rd Battalion moved through Villepinte and occupied
Tremblay, along the outskirts of what is now the De Gaulle airport. This advance was aided by 70th Tank Battalion, which established a semi-circular position facing north of Tremblay. Finally, 2nd Battalion pivoted north and occupied positions northeast of Tremblay. As for 1st Battalion, they occupied a reserve position at Villepinte.40

Furthermore, 4th Recon also advanced at dawn, patrolling various roads which traverse the forest between St. Mard and St. Soupplets. These patrols were soon engaged within the forest west of St. Soupplets. Elements of 4th Recon also entered Dammartin. As one might readily imagine, with the Dammartin-St. Mard corridor being the only practical escape route, the presence of American troops within Dammartin caused a panic amongst the retreating infantry. Consequently, 4th Recon inflicted numerous casualties. Subsequently, that afternoon, 4th Recon was bolstered by the arrival of 747th Tank Battalion, and both formations advanced toward Belleville, where they reinforced 12th Regiment’s 1st Battalion.41

Ultimately, although the traditional narrative emphasizes the rapid movement of tanks and mechanized infantry, the reality is that much of this advance was done on foot, and the records thus speak of “sore and blistered feet.” Indeed, a medical report noted that approximately fifteen to twenty percent of the troops were suffering from fungal infections of trichophytosis.42

1st Division

Shortly after dawn, this formation began advancing northeast. By 10:00, 26th Regiment was thus reported to be near Neufchelles. The way this fact was recorded provides some insight into the communications difficulties which were being experienced. Indeed, this particular report was actually part of a radio communication between 18th and 26th Regiments, and 1st Division was only incidentally able to intercept the information, as they did not have direct contact with either regiment.43
Subsequently, 26th Regiment’s 3rd Battalion advanced toward Cotterets, whilst the rest of the regiment remained at Neufchelles. At Cotterets, the leading recon platoon was engaged by German infantry and artillery, although this force withdrew as 3rd Battalion approached. Ultimately, the records indicate that the purpose of 26th Regiment’s advance was to enable a motorized battalion from 18th Regiment to pass through the zone of 26th Regiment, after which they were to continue toward Soissons and reinforce 3rd Armored Division. Meanwhile, that division was consolidating a bridgehead, north of the Aisne.44

Concurrently, 16th Regiment advanced toward Betz via Acy-en-Multein. Meanwhile, reflecting congested further east, 9th Division requested the usage of roads within 1st Division’s sector, which 1st Division firmly rejected as this would lead to increased congestion within their own zone. Undoubtedly, 9th Division’s request was motivated by the same factor which encouraged 1st Division’s refusal, which was that an “urgent” message had been sent out by 7th Corps, demanding a more rapid advance.45

9th Division

Once again, this formation advanced without significant opposition. During the morning, 39th and 60th Regiments began crossing the Marne and occupied positions extending from Chezy-en-Orxois toward Thierry, where elements of 48th Division were reported. Subsequently, once sufficient transportation became available, the division began shuttling 47th Regiment (without 3rd Battalion) into the area southeast of Lucy, near the Aisne-Marne American Military Cemetery. Regimental records note that although traffic congestion was less than initially expected, it was still necessary for the infantry to dismount and walk. Indeed, the trucks were severely delayed by a bottleneck formed by the single bridge at Jourarre, and this congestion did not ease even after the river had been crossed.46
Summary

Between August 27 and 29th, 30th Division faced considerable resistance as they expanded the bridgehead at Mantes. Concurrently, operating northeast of Paris, 4th Division also faced substantial difficulty, whilst the troops were clearly exhausted from their long ordeal. Meanwhile, marching amidst intense heat, 1st Division advanced from the Seine toward Soissons. Finally, operating on the eastern flank of First Army, 9th Division proceeded toward Laon.
CHAPTER 12
FROM PARIS TOWARD BELGIUM

Between August 30 and September 1, First Army incurred 476 combat casualties as they advanced toward Belgium. Although resistance had lessened, the Germans still waged a steady delaying action within the forests northeast of Paris, where 4th and 28th Divisions were engaged alongside 5th Armored Division. Further west, resistance briefly dissipated within the zone of 19th Corps, only to sharply increase when 30th Division dispatched a mobile taskforce toward Cambrai. Ultimately, this was thus the pursuit, following a supposedly routed enemy which nevertheless managed considerable resistance. Indeed, the troops of First Army knew better than to believe that their enemy was fleeing. 4th Division thus warily prepared for a counteroffensive near Compiègne, whilst 9th Division anticipated similar efforts near Soissons. Ultimately, although they continued to withdraw, the Germans would show considerable defensive capability over the next few weeks.¹

August 30

On August 30, Hodges met with Corlett, in order to discuss the advance from Mantes. Apparently, Corlett had received orders to transfer to Third Army and join the advance toward Metz, but this decision was quickly reversed and Hodges instead ordered Corlett to advance toward Tournai. Ultimately, Eisenhower, Montgomery, and Bradley had concluded that since Patton had still not secured Brest, and since logistics was becoming a concern, that the advance should definitely proceed toward Antwerp.²

At this time, newspapers reported that Patton’s “whirlwind armor” had occupied Soissons. However, in reality, 1st Division occupied Soissons, whilst 3rd Armored Division was to the northeast at Laon, with 9th Division east of Soissons. Meanwhile, 4th Cavalry Group
advanced north of Laon, where Colonel Joseph Tully would subsequently be tasked with bridging the growing gap between First and Third Armies.³

Ultimately, although journalists stated that Third Army’s occupation of Reims had created a “solid block” across the German retreat, it was really 7th Corps which deserved credit for severing the roads between Rouen and Reims. Indeed, this was done in the face of three German divisions (48th, 2nd Pz, and 9th Pz), whereas no divisions were at Reims. Subsequently, the advance of 7th Corps had an immediate impact upon the German withdrawal, and several trains were thus intercepted as they attempted to move eastward.⁴ Consequently, with the Ardennes blocking the area north of Reims, German troops would now have to withdraw through Belgium. Therefore, 7th Corps was directed toward Mons, thereby blocking the route from Amiens toward Brussels.⁵

Concurrently, Second Army and the Canadian Army expanded their bridgehead between Elbeuf and Vernon, although the Germans retained a salient within the forest of Lyon. Further east, Third Army continued to advance northeast, with the main effort conducted by 20th Corps, although no significant resistance was encountered. Thus far, Third Army had not been significantly delayed by any fuel shortages, as air transports were delivering five hundred tons per day to Orleans. Nevertheless, it was clear that there would be some delay, and Bradley suggested to Patton that it might make sense to halt at Chalons, although Patton insisted on continuing another seventy kilometers to Verdun.⁶

Although Third Army would be subsequently delayed along the Meuse, Chester Wilmot has emphasized that the significance of this has been exaggerated. By September 2, although Patton hid the truth from Bradley, Third Army had captured three hundred tons of fuel from a German depot, which was sufficient to propel Patton toward the Moselle. Therefore, through
good fortune, the advance was more rapid than anyone could reasonably have expected. However, by August 31, it was known that the Germans were already concentrating near Metz, where patrols had identified 3rd and 15th Panzergrenadier Divisions, alongside 17th SS Division.

Therefore, even if more fuel had been available, Third Army did not have a realistic chance of blitzing past Metz. Even if that had somehow happened, there is no reason to doubt that the Germans would have halted Third Army along the Saar. Consequently, it is simply absurd to think that Patton could have then smashed through another hundred kilometers of rugged forest, in order to somehow reach the Rhine, at Mainz. Nevertheless, Patton insisted that the “most momentous error of the war” was the decision to advance toward Antwerp, and he insisted that he could have instead occupied Berlin.7

30th Division

This formation cleared the area north of Pontoise. During the morning, 117th Regiment thus advanced against sporadic resistance, with 3rd Battalion moving twenty kilometers along the eastern flank, toward positions west of Hedouville. Meanwhile, 1st and 2nd Battalion encountered strong resistance near Epiais, with 2nd Battalion occupying the forest north of town, whilst 1st Battalion continued toward Vallangoujard.

Likewise, 120th Regiment made a substantial advance between 117th Regiment and the Seine, with 2nd Battalion occupying Nesles, 3rd Battalion positioned southwest of town, and 1st Battalion advancing northwest of Parmain. Immediately prior to this effort, medics accepted a request from German troops in Condecourt and therefore administered assistance.8 However, a German platoon subsequently defended the town. Afterwards, 120th Regiment concluded that the Germans were voluntarily sacrificing themselves, in order to facilitate the withdrawal by fighting
a desperate delaying action. Indeed, prisoners stated that they had made no arrangements for their own retreat.9

Finally, advancing in the center against light resistance, 119th Regiment’s 1st Battalion cleared positions between Longuesse and Vigny, whilst 2nd Battalion occupied Condecourt and established contact with 120th Regiment. Subsequently, 3rd Battalion advanced northeast through Sagy toward Genicourt, whilst 1st and 2nd Battalions moved even further toward Mazieres. However, by evening, 119th Regiment was enveloped by the convergent advance, and elements of all three regiments were thus intermingled.10

4th Division

By dawn, patrols confirmed that the Germans had withdrawn. During this period, the only force engaged was a squad of infantry.11 Subsequently, 8th Regiment advanced with 1st Battalion on the left, 3rd Battalion on the right, and 2nd Battalion following 1st Battalion.12 Facing no opposition, they proceeded fifteen kilometers from Mitry-Mory toward positions northwest of Nanteuil. Likewise, 12th Regiment met with no opposition, ultimately occupying the forest northeast of Nanteuil, with 1st Battalion in reserve at Peroy.13 As the records note, this meant that 12th Regiment moved thirty kilometers on foot.14

Some commentary regarding this maneuver comes from a Lieutenant Piper, who was the assistant operations officer for 12th Regiment’s 2nd Battalion. As Piper explained, his task was to maintain a “running contact patrol” between 2nd Battalion, 3rd Battalion, and various outposts. Meanwhile, he was ordered to find a route through the woods north of Cuisy. Having done so, Piper returned to discover that 2nd Battalion had already departed, taking the “long way” through St. Soupplets. Consequently, Piper managed to reach the initial objective two hours before his battalion. Later that day, he was dispatched to reconnoiter the forest south of Crepy, where he
located a sizable German force at Rouville. However, since he had not been given a radio, the Germans were able to withdraw before an artillery strike could be arranged.¹⁵

Likewise, 22nd Regiment advanced without opposition, leaving a single battalion to hold Dammartin. Subsequently, the rest of the regiment trailed 8th Regiment as a refused flank, establishing positions facing northwest, toward the forest of Ermenonville.¹⁶ Meanwhile, 4th Recon screened this advance, establishing a line extending from Gilocourt toward Cotterets. However, this advanced position was more than fifteen kilometers away, and 4th Recon was therefore withdrawn as large numbers of German troops remained active throughout this area.

These deployments show that although the axis of advance was northeast toward Germany, the primary threat was posed by German forces which lay toward the northwest. Indeed, elements of German 47th Division, 348th Division, and 116th Panzer Division had been reported between Nogent and Compiegne. In theory, although these divisions were retreating, it was possible for them to counterattack, perhaps moving from Verberie toward Nanteuil. Consequently, divisional artillery was prepared to “mass all fires” along the western flank. Meanwhile, 70th Tank Battalion was concentrated at Nanteuil. Additional tank formations, under the ad-hoc command of 3rd Armored Group, were likewise stationed northeast of Nanteuil, at Peroy.

Ultimately, the Germans defended the forest of Ermenonville with some strength. Consequently, 5th/CCB was inserted between 4th and 28th Divisions, clearing German forces between Senlis and Chantilly. 85th Cavalry Squadron attempted to support this effort, moving north through Baron, presumably hoping to cut the German retreat northeast of Senlis. However, they encountered antitank defenses around the D100/1324 junction, and Lt.Colonel Kent Fay was thus killed. Denigrating the importance of these efforts, newspapers claimed that the sole
purpose for the German defense was because Hitler, irrational as always, wanted to retain the
ground upon which France had signed the surrender in 1940.17

1st Division

During the morning, this formation was once again advancing behind 3rd Armored
Division, with the immediate objective being to secure bridges across the Aisne at Soissons,
Vailly, and Comin. This advance took them through Buzancy, where a memorial cemetery
commemorates the division's experiences there during July of 1918. Meanwhile, although 7th
Corps urged haste, the advance was delayed by continued congestion.18

During the afternoon, 18th Regiment was concentrated at Acy, southeast of Soissons.
Leaving one battalion at Cotterets, 16th Regiment advanced to the southwest of Soissons,
between Saconin and Coeuvres. Although the divisional records do not mention any resistance,
the records of C-Company note that they suffered three casualties during a bombardment.
Eventually, 26th Regiment advanced across a bridge at Pommiers, with one battalion moving
toward Pasly and thereby blocking roads leading from the west and northwest. Meanwhile,
elements of 16th Regiment crossed the Aisne at Venizel. Subsequently, 18th Regiment advanced
directly through Soissons and occupied the heights around Cuffies. Afterwards, 2nd Battalion was
motorized and dispatched toward Laon, where they were attached to 3rd Armored Division.
Finally, 3rd Battalion occupied positions northeast of Soissons, near Vregny, where they faced
harassing fire from snipers.19

The records of 18th Regiment's 1st Battalion reflect upon how this area was so heavily
defended during 1918, and yet it was now seized "without a shot being fired," although clearly
some shots were fired. In particular, it was noted that B-Company occupied "strongly prepared"
fortifications, which had had been inexplicably abandoned. Although contemporaries naturally
viewed this with a sense of relief and satisfaction, with hindsight we can readily see that this was actually a very ominous development. The Germans were deliberately withdrawing, instead of fighting piecemeal for every inch of terrain. Clearly, although historians like to emphasize that the insane Hitler refused to allow his commanders to retreat, this was an instance in which the Germans were most definitely conducting a rational strategic withdrawal. Consequently, when they finally chose to make a determined defense, they would do so with considerable strength. Nevertheless, at the time, journalists simply felt that this withdrawal meant that the war over.20

9th Division

During the morning, 60th Regiment was ordered to advance another fifty kilometers northeast, in order to cross the Aisne and occupy the crossroads at Cerny. This advance had to be made once again by “shuttling,” which reinforces the notion that an overall deficiency in trucks was a far more limiting factor, than was any immediate lack of gasoline. As for 9th Recon, they were responsible for patrolling the roads west of 60th Regiment. These patrols extended toward Conde (north of the Aisne), and further north toward 3rd Armored Division.21

Upon arrival, 60th Regiment employed an instructive triangular formation, with one battalion creating a firm roadblock at Cerny, whilst the other battalions held refused flanks within the forested terrain, south of the D18. In this way, should the Germans attack in sufficient strength from the north, the battalion at Cerny could easily withdraw toward Comin, covered by supporting fire from the battalions along either flank. Meanwhile, if the Germans advanced along the D18 from either the west or east, they would be exposed to flanking fire as they approached the battalion at Cerny. In this way, by forming a triangle rather than a line, 60th Regiment was situated to handle attacks from multiple directions.
Indeed, this triangular deployment was echoed at the divisional level, with 39th and 47th Regiments forming a base immediately south of the Aisne. Consequently, suppose that a large German force advanced toward Cerny from the west. Naturally, such a force would have dispatched elements eastward from Vailly, along the D925, in an effort to seize Comin and thereby trap 60th Regiment north of the Aisne. However, 47th Regiment was established around Chasemy, from which they would be able to place interdicting fire along the D925, in much the same way that 60th Regiment’s flank battalions could fire upon the D18. Ultimately, although there was no great likelihood of such a counteroffensive, such defensive formations were prudently adopted on a routine basis.22

August 31

On August 31, Hodges met with Bradley, who urged First Army to continue moving north with “all possible speed,” in order to intercept German forces which were attempting to move east toward Aachen. With this in mind, plans were also made for an airborne operation near Tournai, on September 3, and Hodges was naturally expected to support that effort. Consequently, the axis of advance for 7th Corps was shifted from Mezieres toward Mons, although elements of 3rd/CCA continued as far east as Rethel, whilst 3rd/CCB cleared Montcornet and Vervins. From Vervins, the advance would subsequently proceed north along the N2, toward Avesnes and Maubege.23

Further west, the Canadian Army cleared a line extending from Rouen toward Neufchatel, trapping elements of four German divisions near Havre. Meanwhile, Second Army dispatched three armoured divisions toward Amiens, threatening to envelop an additional six German divisions, which predictably maintained “a lot of scattered resistance.” This effort was supported by the advance of 19th Corps, with 2nd Armored Division operating northeast of
Beauvais. As for the advance of Third Army’s 20th Corps, 7th Armored Division established a bridgehead across the Meuse at Verdun. Although this was certainly a significant achievement, it was hardly more impressive than the advance of 3rd Armored Division.24

During the day, newspapers attempted to correct their previous reports, “belatedly” admitting that it was First Army which had occupied Soissons. However, instead of fighting toward Soissons, First Army had supposedly “rested and regrouped” whilst Third Army “carried the brunt.” Consequently, Patton’s “blinding speed” continued to dominate the narrative, and reporters stated that “apparently” First Army had merely advanced through Third Army, only now reaching the front. Likewise, although 4th Division had fought its way northeast along the N2, between Paris and Soissons, journalists apparently believed that this entire area had been swept clear by Third Army.25

30th Division

During the morning, 117th Division resumed advancing, with 3rd Battalion encountering light resistance near Tillet. Subsequently, 1st and 3rd Battalions established positions extending southeast from Bury toward Rousseloy, with 2nd Battalion south of Bury. Meanwhile, 119th Regiment struggled forward amidst severe congestion, eventually occupying the triangle formed by Neuilly, Crouy, and Fresnoy.26

Along the eastern flank, 120th Regiment’s 3rd Battalion encountered light resistance near St. Leu, after which they advanced north along the western bank of the Oise, occupying the forest west of Nogent. Meanwhile, 1st Battalion was northeast of Oise, with 2nd Battalion occupying the forest between St. Vaast and Rousseloy. The records of 120th Regiment emphasize that this nearly thirty kilometer advance was made entirely on foot, whilst the regiment was
In other words, despite extreme mechanization, the advance proceeded at a pace no faster than that of a crippled old man. This certainly reminds me of an opening scene from the satirical film *Office Space*, in which the protagonist is stuck in traffic, watching an elderly individual pass by. One might also think of *Generation Kill*, which depicts the American invasion of Iraq in 2003. In all three cases, we can see that the “rat race” automobile culture has not produced the kind of speed and independence which patriotic historians depict. Unfortunately, if Americans continue to embrace an optimistic view of warfare, they will continually be dismayed by the grim reality. Indeed, during this relentless forced march, one soldier noted that blood was now oozing from their socks. What we can thus conclude, is that if Americans want to truly understand warfare, they must move away from a simplistic triumphalist depiction with its swelling orchestral score and false sense of victory.²⁸

Ultimately, although 30th Division benefited from the advance of 2nd Armored Division, facing little more than disorganized resistance and the occasional bombardment, 79th Division was forced to “plough” through stronger resistance along the western flank. Presumably, the Germans were thus concentrated within the forest encircling Marines.²⁹

*4th Division*

During the morning, 8th Regiment advanced northeast, led by 2nd Battalion and supported by 5th/CCA. Although no opposition was initially encountered, prepared defenses were encountered that evening within the forest of Compiègne. Consequently, 1st Battalion was ordered to cover the western flank by establishing a line facing the forest. Subsequently, by midnight, the advance was halted four kilometers southwest of Pierrefonds. This was done
because the Germans maintained enough strength to wage successful “delaying action” based upon a series of “easily defended points.” In other words, the casualties during this period were not low because the Germans did not maintain resistance, but because the Americans avoided resistance.30

Concurrently, 12th Regiment was supported by 5th/CCA and 893rd TD Battalion. This taskforce cleared the forest of Retz (which envelops Cotterets), and then halted between Vivieres and Puiseu, although elements of 2nd Battalion advanced further north toward Soucy. Within the forest, 12th Regiment discovered a massive German logistics base, containing hundreds of buildings. Subsequently, French civilians looted this area, where they were particularly interested in obtaining parachutes, which were converted into clothing. Meanwhile, as the Germans had stockpiled ammunition throughout the forest, and remembering their near disaster at Vincennes, 12th Regiment anticipated a bombardment and the infantry were ordered to entrench themselves.31

Discussing these events, the aforementioned Lieutenant Piper noted that the observation tower used during General Mangin’s offensive (July 1918) was once again being used, as one could see for miles from the top of this structure, located southeast of Puiseux. Meanwhile, Piper was tasked with monitoring three observation posts closer to the front, near Soucy, where he directed artillery strikes against suspected German positions. However, Piper later admitted, “I never did find out what actual damage had been done.” However, we do know the effects of a German barrage which hit 2nd Battalion’s F-Company, killing nine.32

As for 22nd Regiment, they initially remained behind near Ermenonville, and it was planned that this regiment would eventually be dispatched to secure a bridgehead across the Aisne. However, due to the limited progress of 8th Regiment and 5th Armored Division, which
was attributed to “badly congested roads and increasing enemy resistance," this plan was
cancelled and 22nd Regiment was instead concentrated within a reserve position near Vez, west
of Cotteret. Likewise, the attached pool of tanks was located here, between Fresnoy and Vez.
Meanwhile, 4th Recon was concentrated along the western flank, indicating continued concern
about German intentions.  

1st Division

As 7th Corps turned north, this division was ordered to establish a line screening the
western flank, extending from Soissons toward Liesse. Indeed, 4th Division was delayed
southwest of 1st Division, and there was thus a gap west of 7th Corps. Not only were elements of
348th Division located here, but 21st Panzer Division was operating between Noyon and St.
Quentin.

During the morning, 18th Regiment moved northeast toward Laon, in order to join 2nd
Battalion. Meanwhile, 16th Regiment advanced north, with their trailing battalion moving from
Cotterets toward new positions, between Soissons and Laon. During this advance, sporadic
artillery fire inflicted three casualties. Although resistance was thus relatively light, it was hardly
non-existent, and the principal purpose of such bombardments was to delay the advance, by
forcing the infantry to take cover. Finally, 26th Regiment defended the bridges at Soissons.

That evening, 18th Regiment was at Laon facing west, with 1st and 2nd Battalions in town,
and 3rd Battalion north of Liesse. Concurrently, 1st Recon established roadblocks extending
northward from Laon, toward Crecy and Marle. However, this effort was halted near
Autremencourt, where patrols were bombarded by German troops in Marle. Fortunately, shortly
before midnight, 24th Cavalry Squadron arrived and began clearing the town.
Throughout the day, there was considerable concern about various bunkers, located throughout this area. These were to be destroyed, in order to prevent the Germans from reoccupying them. Indeed, the area between Soissons and Laon is heavily forested, and there were isolated German formations dispersed here, which might at any moment delay the advance by occupying fortified positions and thereby blocking supply routes. However, according to 1st Engineer, these fortifications were very elaborate and their destruction was impossible. Nevertheless, the division headquarters insisted, “We want those pillboxes destroyed... Orders are they will be destroyed.”

Ultimately, it was entirely plausible that 348th Division and 21st Panzer Division might have sacrificed themselves, reoccupying Soissons and forcing elements of 3rd Armored Division to return south, thereby facilitating the German withdrawal through Belgium. We can thus see once again, that the advance was no mere matter of pushing troops forward, as commanders had to be consistently wary of counterattacks. Although it might sound improbable that seemingly routed German units could seriously threaten to envelop both 1st Division and 3rd Armored Division, this is precisely what they were about to do.

9th Division

During the day, increasing resistance was encountered from scattered teams of infantry and tanks, primarily from 48th Division and 2nd Panzer Division. Regardless, rapid progress was made north of Reims, with 60th Regiment moving forty-five kilometers toward Rozoy, where 2nd Battalion was finally halted by a German roadblock. Subsequently, advancing under mortar fire, 1st Battalion deployed on the flank, and together they cleared the town, whilst patrols were dispatched southeast toward Rubigny. Meanwhile, 39th Regiment occupied Logny, dispatching patrols north toward Wadimont and southeast toward Hauteville. Finally, once again
emphasizing that fuel shortages were not the primary concern, 47th Regiment (without 3rd Battalion) was delayed by both congestion and vehicle shortages, although they eventually established a reserve position northeast of Dizy. As for 9th Recon, they patrolled the area formed by Rubigny, Signy, and Rethel. 37

September 1

On September 1, Hodges met with Collins and Gerow. Once again focusing upon forthcoming operations, Hodges discussed plans to move east toward Aachen, once the advance into Belgium was complete. Meanwhile, with 19th Corps moving northeast and 7th Corps moving due north, the advance of 5th Corps was blocked by the convergence of these formations. This meant that 5th Corps would once again be shifted laterally, eventually advancing between 7th and 20th Corps. However, this was not the only factor blocking the advance of 5th Corps. Indeed, moving northeast of Valenciennes, 5th Armored Division’s 81st Tank Battalion was firmly halted by snipers, machine-guns, rockets, and antitank artillery. They concluded that further efforts would have resulted in “exorbitant” casualties. 38

Concurrently, the Canadian Army completed their encirclement of Havre, with infantry approaching Dieppe, whilst tanks continued toward Abbeville. Meanwhile, Second Army advanced further north toward Arras, with continued support from 19th Corps. As for Third Army, they were temporarily halted along the Meuse, due to fuel shortages. However, although Patton believed that this delay allowed the Germans to concentrate at Metz, those forces were already in position. As Martin Blumenson stated with some surprising exasperation, “Although it might have seemed to the Third Army that its brief halt had allowed enemy units to gather, the German defenders did not spring from Hitler’s head full grown and fully armed as did Athena from Zeus.” 39
During the day, First Army received some long overdue attention from journalists, who erroneously stated that the army was northeast of Reims, where they were supposedly “storming” through Sedan and Mezieres. In reality, six German divisions held this area: 48th PzL, 2nd Pz, 9th Pz, 12th SS, and 17th SS. Presumably, the reason for this confusion was that First Army had announced the arrival of 7th Corps along the Belgian border, and journalists wrongly assumed that the corps had continued northeast from Laon. However, as noted, 7th Corps was instead moving toward Maubege. Subsequently, although journalists celebrated the “fantastic ease” with which the advance continued, the following days would clearly show that the Germans remained capable of strong resistance. As First Army thus stated in an intelligence report, the Germans were not expected to continue withdrawing indefinitely, and they would inevitably “delay upon favorable terrain.”

30th Division

During the morning, this formation assembled along the western bank of the Oise, opposite Creil. From here, they planned a “spectacular” advance toward Tournai, where Fifteenth Armee was headquartered. In order to expedite this advance, a taskforce was formed under Brigadier William Harrison, consisting of 125th Cavalry, 30th Recon, 743rd Tank Battalion, 119th Regiment’s 1st Battalion, 118th Artillery, and A-Company from both 105th Engineer and 823rd TD Battalion. This force subsequently advanced west without opposition, with 125th Cavalry Squadron preceding the taskforce by approximately an hour, and 30th Recon patrolling the flanks.

By noon, after reaching Mello, the advance proceeded northeast toward Cambrai, passing through Clermont, St. Denis, and Roye. Meanwhile, the rest of 119th Regiment followed behind the taskforce, and they were followed in turn by 120th Regiment, with continuous movement.
throughout the night. As for 117th Regiment, they remained at Creil until September 3, where they rested and conducted maintenance. However, the primary reason for this delay was that “there just were not enough trucks to go around.” Indeed, the only way enough trucks had been found to move two regiments, was by immobilizing the artillery. This same expedient was adopted at higher levels of command, and fully eighteen artillery battalions were thus converted into transport companies, which still didn’t provide sufficient vehicles. Furthermore, routine maintenance was delayed, "ala Patton" in order to make even more trucks available. However, even had sufficient trucks been procured, there is little reason to think that this would have greatly increased the rate of advance, as traffic congestion was already a chronic problem.42

During the advance, there was initially no resistance along the axis of advance. However, along the eastern flank, 125th Cavalry Squadron’s A-Troop was eventually met near Roye by a “burst” of automatic weapons fire. Subsequently, German halftracks were encountered, along with a medium tank, whilst a platoon of infantry occupied Carrepuis. From this point onward, “similar actions took place at almost every town along the way.”43

At Peronne, along the Somme, the Germans defended the bridge with a “fairly strong” defensive force, although this was eventually eliminated with the help of 2nd Armored Division’s 82nd Recon Battalion. Subsequently, after crossing the river, 30th Recon defended the bridge whilst the rest of the division continued advancing. Meanwhile, the troops experienced the onset of cold weather, accompanied by rain and high winds.44

4th Division

8th Regiment was tasked with clearing the eastern edge of the forest of Compiegne, extending north from Pierrefonds toward the Aisne at Berneuil. During this effort, 1st Battalion was initially held in reserve, with 2nd Battalion occupying Pierrefonds, and 3rd Battalion...
continuing further north, followed by 1\textsuperscript{st} and 2\textsuperscript{nd} Battalions. Facing no significant opposition, 2\textsuperscript{nd} Battalion crossed the Aisne that afternoon, whilst 4\textsuperscript{th} Engineer repaired a railroad bridge at Vic, and constructed a foot bridge at Berneuil.\textsuperscript{45}

Concurrently, 12\textsuperscript{th} Regiment (without 1\textsuperscript{st} Battalion) was combined with elements of 5\textsuperscript{th}/CCA, 70\textsuperscript{th} Tank Battalion, and 893\textsuperscript{rd} TD Battalion. Commanded by Brigadier Eugene Regnier, this taskforce was expected to cross the Aisne, although “troubles encountered in traffic control” led to the dissolution of the group that afternoon. Once again, Lieutenant Piper has provided an interesting anecdote from these events, noting that he shot down a German observation balloon, apparently after General Barton personally ordered him to do so. As for 1\textsuperscript{st} Battalion, A&C-Companies spent the morning ensuring that the forest of Retz was completely cleared of German troops, whilst B-Company was dispatched on a separate mission near the forest of Compiegne, presumably southwest of Pierrefonds.\textsuperscript{46}

Subsequently, after traffic conditions improved, a smaller taskforce was composed around 12\textsuperscript{th} Regiment’s 1\textsuperscript{st} Battalion, and they crossed the Aisne at Vic, moving north toward Cuts. Presumably, continuing along the D145, this formation cleared the ridge north of Vic, after which they encountered resistance “from the woods on both sides,” perhaps near Moulin. Eventually, that evening, this resistance was eliminated with support from tanks.\textsuperscript{47}

Likewise, 22\textsuperscript{nd} Regiment formed a taskforce under Brigadier George Taylor, which included elements of 5\textsuperscript{th}/CCA, 801\textsuperscript{st} TD Battalion, 893\textsuperscript{rd} TD Battalion, 747\textsuperscript{th} Tank Battalion, and 4\textsuperscript{th} Recon. This force was assembled and prepared within the “seemingly impossible short time” of just two hours. Advancing northeast, they subsequently reached Soissons by noon. Afterwards they moved northwest, absorbing “Combat Command Burton” at Epagny. Presumably, this refers to a taskforce under Lt.Colonel William Burton of 5\textsuperscript{th} Armored
Division’s 46th Armored Infantry Battalion. Finally, they advanced northeast along the D13 toward St. Mard, where they were temporarily halted by a destroyed bridge over the Oise-Aisne canal.48

Nevertheless, the advance continued, and the taskforce cleared resistance between Coucy and Chauny. At this point, Taskforce Taylor was split into two sections. The eastern section was placed under Colonel C.T. Lanhan and moved toward Laon and then Crecy. Here, they were once again halted by a destroyed bridge, and the column was forced to "coil" into nearby fields. Meanwhile, the western section was under Lt.Colonel John Ruggles and they cleared the German position at Chauny, where 1st Battalion was credited with a critical role. Subsequently, the western column moved east, and was eventually delayed along the Oise at Fere, by German artillery and yet another destroyed bridge. By midnight, after crossing the river, the western column was occupying positions near Pouilly, southwest of Crecy.49

At this time, prisoners from German 704th Regiment confirmed that they were seeking to retreat as rapidly as possible toward the northeast, where they intended to establish a defensive line. However, as 8th Regiment noted, this did not mean that the intervening advance would be easy, since the terrain was becoming increasingly mountainous whilst the roads were extremely poor. Furthermore, although the front was “not in any sense continuous," the Germans were still capable of maintaining strong defensive forces which were adequately supported by artillery. 8th Regiment thus concluded that the Germans were successfully delaying the advance whilst reinforcing their positions around Aachen, where they clearly intended to fight “more tenaciously than previously.”50
**1st Division**

During the day, 18th Regiment advanced north toward Marle, in order to relieve 4th Cavalry Group. This was completed that afternoon, with 18th Regiment’s 1st Battalion experiencing mild resistance from German infantry, between Dercy and Marle. Although the division records emphasize the struggle for Marle, it was apparently at Dercy where the fighting was most intense, at least according to battalion records. Here, the newly formed ranger platoon was deployed, in conjunction with C-Company and various tank elements, all of which cooperated to eliminate a troublesome antitank cannon, which had already inflicted several casualties. Following behind, 2nd Battalion investigated reports of German troops around Voyenne and Erlon. These reports were quickly confirmed by F-Company, which thus suffered four casualties, whilst the rest of 2nd Battalion occupied Toulis.51

Concurrently, 16th Regiment occupied positions southeast of Marle, near Autremencourt. Meanwhile, 26th Regiment occupied positions northeast of Marle, between Bosmont and Burelles. Afterwards, 3rd Battalion advanced toward Vervins, where they were briefly attached to 47th Regiment.52

**9th Division**

As 3rd Armored Division moved north toward Maubege and Mons, this formation cleared the eastern flank of 7th Corps. During the morning, 39th Regiment advanced toward Hirson, but was delayed by a destroyed bridge at Morgny, where there was considerable congestion. Subsequently, 1st Battalion forded the river, whilst the rest of the regiment was redirected through Cuiry and Coign. Shortly thereafter, 1st Battalion endured heavy artillery fire, but occupied Hirson that evening.53
Concurrently, 47th Regiment (without 3rd Battalion) advanced toward Vervins, moving against light resistance. Upon reaching Vigneux, the congested column was split, with 1st Battalion continuing north along the D966, whilst 2nd Battalion moved northeast along the D36 toward Nampcelles. Once again, delays were encountered as the bridge north of Nampcelles was destroyed, as was the bridge at Braye. Nevertheless, 2nd Battalion eventually forded the Hurtaut. Subsequently, 1st Battalion occupied Vervins, whilst 2nd Battalion occupied Landouzy. This brought 2nd Battalion through Plomion, which the Germans had burned whilst murdering numerous civilians. As the records state, “Sadistic evidence was everywhere.”

Finally, along the eastern flank, 60th Regiment moved northeast from Rozoy, with assistance from 9th Recon. By noon, 1st Battalion occupied Brunehamel, whilst 3rd Battalion continued toward Aubenton. Shortly thereafter, elements of 3rd Armored Division passed through 3rd Battalion and attempted to clear Aubenton, but they were forced to retreat after encountering an “unwelcome mat” composed of artillery, tanks, and rockets. Eventually, whilst 3rd Armored Division maintained pressure from the south, 3rd Battalion advanced from the west, at which point the Germans finally withdrew. Ultimately, just as 1st Division reported an ominous increase in German resistance, so did 9th Division. Indeed, over the next four weeks, 60th Regiment alone would incur twelve hundred casualties.

Summary

Between August 30 and September 1, 30th Division cleared the area northwest of Paris, and proceeded northeast toward Cambrai. Concurrently, operating along the western flank of 5th Armored Division, 4th Division proceeded toward the forest of Compiègne. Meanwhile, facing scattered resistance, 1st Division moved northeast from Soissons toward Vervins. Finally, facing heavier resistance, 9th Division proceeded from Laon toward Hirson.
CHAPTER 13
TOURNAI, ST. QUENTIN, MONS, AND PHILIPPEVILLE

Between September 2 and 4th, First Army incurred 674 combat casualties. Previously, the Germans had withdrawn from the Seine, between Rouen and Paris, moving toward the Somme at Amiens. Meanwhile, various formations continued to occupy the coast between Rouen and Abbeville, where they delayed the Canadian advance. Fortunately, Second Army’s advance was prioritized over that of Third Army, and 11th Armoured Division was thus able to advance toward Amiens, which was occupied by noon on August 31. This effort was supported by 2nd Armored Division, 7th Armoured Division, and the Guards Division. Consequently, four tank divisions were blocking the withdrawal through Amiens.¹

Nevertheless, the enemy managed to make a desperate defense northwest of Amiens, where 7th Armoured Division was bogged down amidst the combined resistance of five infantry divisions. Meanwhile, 21st Panzer and 2nd SS waged a delaying action between Arras and St. Quentin. This bought time for 9th, 10th, and 12th SS to withdraw toward Tournai, whilst 348th Division and 116th Panzer made a converging withdrawal from Compiègne toward Valenciennes. By September 2, the Germans had thus been able to concentrate nine divisions between Lille and Mons, with five more between Beaumont and Mezieres. Consequently, 7th Corps was directed toward Charleroi, in an attempt to prevent these concentrations from joining at Namur.

Within the zone of 7th Corps, 3rd Armored Division moved north from Vervins, followed by 1st Division, with 9th Division along the eastern flank. Further west, 30th Division advanced toward Cambrai, followed by 79th Division, and supported by 2nd Armored Division. Finally, in the center, 4th and 28th Divisions moved toward St. Quentin, whilst 5th Armored Division continued toward Valenciennes.
However, the notion of a pursuit, rather than an interdiction, gives an impression that this advance was simply a matter of chasing down a routed rabble. Instead, what subsequently occurred was more like a confused collision, akin to the battles of Cynoscephalae and Salamanca. Although the Americans were victorious at Mons, the enemy nearly overwhelmed 26th Regiment. With a few more hours of preparation, they might have thus achieved a victory which forced 7th Corps to withdraw and allowed the withdrawal to proceed. Unfortunately, the official history of 1st Division fails to discuss this major crisis, merely stating that there was “five days of battle.” Ultimately, had the advance of Third Army been prioritized instead, more than 30,000 German troops would have easily been able to withdraw toward Aachen.²

By ignoring the continued strength of German resistance, historians have created a false notion that the advance could have proceeded more quickly, if only more fuel had been available. There is some certainly truth to this, and Patton should therefore be criticized for disrupting the logistics of First Army. However, these shortages merely risked delay, although First Army managed to continue advancing.

According to Blumenson, 3rd Armored Division was halted by fuel shortages on September 3. Instead, the records focus upon a frenzied attack during which the rear elements were committed as reinforcements which “fought heavy actions alongside the combat infantry.” According to Collins, this was thus a “wild melee.” Nevertheless, Blumenson minimized the seriousness of this situation, stating merely that “hunting was excellent” whilst the “slightly bored” tank crews merely waited for fuel. Even had unlimited fuel been available, was it actually possible for 3rd Armored Division to move toward Liege, when it was heavily engaged at Mons? Even if this were possible, should they have thus abandoned 1st Division?³
September 2

On September 2, First Army crossed the Belgian border, with 19th Corps approaching Tournai and 7th Corps approaching Mons. Consequently, due to the unexpectedly rapid pace of this advance, the proposed airborne operation at Tournai was cancelled. Meanwhile, Hodges met with Eisenhower, Bradley, and Patton, and they discussed the logistical situation. There was also debate regarding the allocation of roads, namely the N508 between Orchai and Tournai, along with additional roads extending northeast from Tournai. Although this area was within the zone of 19th Corps, Second Army was given priority so that they could advance toward Brussels.4

Was this advance truly more important than Patton’s proposed advance toward Metz? Indeed, ignoring the importance of intercepting the German retreat at Mons, the value of First Army’s advance toward Aachen hinges upon the wisdom of Montgomery’s advance toward Brussels. When considering this issue, five factors seem salient:

1) Brussels had far more economic and political significance. 2) Metz and Brussels are equidistant from both the Rhine and Berlin. 3) The plains northeast of Brussels are more favorable to a continued advance, especially when contrasted with the rugged terrain east of Metz. 4) By emphasizing the southern flank, the Allied line would wheel northwest, effectively trapping Twenty-First Army Group along the coast. In contrast, by advancing along the northern flank and pivoting northeast, the Allies could follow geographic contours and thereby establish a line extending between Hamburg and Basle. 5) By emphasizing the northern flank, the Allies could attempt to seize the port of Antwerp, which made sense considering that Patton had still not captured Brest, and consequently the Allies were suffering from logistical difficulties. These reasons explain why First Army was ordered to support Twenty-First Army Group, and clearly
they should have been directly attached to Montgomery’s command, instead of waiting until the crisis of December.

During the day, although there was heavy fighting across First Army’s frontage, newspapers continued to emphasize Third Army. Supposedly, Patton would be across the German border within hours, “advancing at a pace never equaled in military history.” In reality, it would not be until December that Third Army would manage to cross the German border, where they were firmly halted by “some of the stiffest resistance yet experienced.” ⁵

**30th Division**

Shortly after midnight, Taskforce Harrison began to encounter considerable resistance near Fins, a hundred kilometers northeast of Mello. During the subsequent advance from Fins toward Masnieres, the taskforce was repeatedly forced to halt by ambushes and roadblocks. Meanwhile, although the withdrawal of German artillery further west had been successfully blocked, these batteries were still capable of firing and did so. ⁶

At dawn, 30th Recon’s 3rd Platoon engaged a German transport column, between Ribecourt and Beaucamps. Meanwhile, at Masnieres, the bridge over the Scheldt was defended by German infantry, machine-guns, a 20mm cannon, and minefields. Initially engaged at 03:00, it took four hours before this position was eliminated. Eventually, a platoon from 743rd Tank Battalion advanced through a minefield and outflanked the antitank artillery, although one tank hit a mine. However, just a half hour later, the taskforce was once again ambushed at Cambrai, where a similar position was encountered. ⁷

During this engagement, Brigadier Harrison was near the front of the column, behind two armored cars. Unfortunately, a 20mm cannon quickly destroyed the leading vehicles, including Harrison’s jeep, and the wounded general was thus forced to crawl several hundred yards under
heavy fire. Subsequently, Colonel Edwin Sutherland assumed temporary command, until General Hobbs arrived and took over. Meanwhile, the advance remained halted until 743rd Tank Battalion once again intervened, with two companies providing suppressing fire from the south, whilst the third company advanced along the eastern flank. Of course, when it requires an entire tank battalion to clear a position, it becomes quite clear that the enemy is capable of significant resistance.8

Finally, with the assistance of 119th Regiment’s 3rd Battalion, the taskforce advanced through Cambrai, only to realize that the enemy had reoccupied positions further south. Consequently, 3rd Battalion was ordered to return and once again clear the road, after which 823rd TD Battalion’s A-Company established a defensive position here, which they held until September 5. By noon, these tank destroyers were needed, as German tanks were arriving from the west. 9

Eventually, the taskforce continued northeast, engaging six armored cars near Iwuy. Although the Germans are generally portrayed as retreating, it should be noted that these cars were approaching from the southeast, and were thus counterattacking. Subsequently, at Douchy, the taskforce helped the FFI, who were besieging enemy troops within a large house. Eventually, an American tank fired into the building, and the Mongolian infantry finally surrendered. Meanwhile, the advance continued through Denain, where they were delayed by snipers, and this resistance became heavier at Valenciennes. After the leading reconnaissance troops passed through town, antitank artillery ambushed the tanks, and their crews refused to advance until Major Herlong (1st Battalion) proceeded forward in a jeep. Such moments appear to be of critical importance, and the advance might have seriously faltered if Herlong had suffered the same fate as Harrison.10
That evening, the taskforce continued northwest of Valenciennes, passing through St. Amand and crossing the Belgian border at Bleharies. They then advanced toward Tournai, where they encountered a “swarm” of defenses at St. Maur. It was not until midnight that this position was eliminated by the combined strength of 119th Regiment and two tank battalions. Meanwhile, 30th Recon enveloped the area east of Tournai, facing heavy resistance at Havines. They subsequently established roadblocks, and one of these was attacked, losing two armored vehicles and incurring nine casualties, including a captain. Subsequently, fighting continued throughout the night, with German troops firing from within the town, where they still held the northern bank of the Scheldt.11

Ultimately, 119th Regiment’s 1st Battalion occupied positions south of Tournai, with 3rd Battalion along the Scheldt at Chercq, and 2nd Battalion located further west, at Esplechin.12 This position was surrounded on all sides by German troops, and the division controlled only a “thin strip” along the N507, between Tournai and St. Amand.13 Meanwhile, 120th Regiment continued advancing throughout the night, facing fire from snipers and isolated enemy squads. Consequently, there was scattered fighting at Peronne and St. Amand. Ultimately, although newspapers claimed that Patton was conducting the longest and fastest advance in history, 119th Regiment claimed that they deserved credit for the longest and fastest “opposed” advance.14

4th Division

At dawn, 377th AA Artillery engaged eleven “flying... robot bombs,” two of which were damaged and crashed south of Cotterets, near Rademont. A military-police officer was thus nearly killed. Subsequently, 8th Regiment began advancing behind 5th/CCA, although they were halted for several hours by a destroyed bridge over the Oise, at Fere. It was not until later afternoon that the river was finally crossed, after which the regiment occupied the area of
Itancourt, southeast of St. Quentin. Likewise, 12th Regiment was halted by the destruction of a bridge at Bretigny. After the advance finally resumed, they began to encounter increasing resistance near St. Quentin. Finally, B-Company assisted 4th Recon and cleared the city.15

Concurrently, 22nd Regiment (still organized as Taskforce Taylor) also advanced, following the completion of a bridge over the Serre, at Crecy. Initially, the eastern section moved northeast of St. Quentin, followed by the western section. During this movement, moderate resistance was encountered from infantry, tanks, and other armored vehicles. After passing through Guise, the columns split south of the Iron, with the western column moving toward Hanappes and Wassigny. During this advance, several German vehicles were engaged and destroyed, and the column eventually halted east of St. Souplet.16

However, the eastern column continued moving north. Upon reaching Etreux, they intervened in a firefight between FFI and German forces. Subsequently, the column advanced through a series of German positions. At Groise, a German tank-destroyer drove across the road, cutting through an American column and destroying a truck. Fortunately, American tank-destroyers were located nearby, and the German tank was forced to continue eastward. By evening, the column was approaching Landrecies and the Sambre-Oise canal. Although the main bridge had been destroyed, K-Company crossed via a railroad, capturing a depot and establishing a roadblock which interdicted movement toward the forest of Mormal.17

1st Division

Shortly after midnight, 26th Regiment’s 3rd Battalion relieved elements of 47th Regiment at Vervins. Subsequently, the rest of 26th Regiment followed 3rd Battalion, occupying positions between Vervins and Burelles. Later that morning, 18th Regiment began to advance north along the western flank, with the recon platoon encountering intense defensive fire from positions at
Chevennes, Richaumont, and Leme. Nevertheless, the advanced continued, and the leading 1st Battalion described this as a “rip-snorting moving scrap,” during which stubborn German infantry offered stiff resistance. Likewise, 2nd Battalion was engaged at Marly and Esqueheries. Ultimately, 18th Regiment occupied positions between Nouvion and Beaurepaire, facing west toward Barzy. Further east, 26th Regiment continued advancing, occupying positions at Avesnes. Finally, along the southern flank, 16th Regiment was located between Leme and Chigny, within the area cleared by 18th Regiment.18

9th Division

During the morning, 39th Regiment moved north from Hirson, following a column of 3rd Armored Division, which was soon halted north of Anor by minefields, infantry, and tanks. At this point, the American tanks withdrew and moved west toward the N2. Afterwards, 3rd Battalion was engaged between Anor and Eppe, advancing through the forest northeast of Trelon, where they cleared a series of roadblocks. Meanwhile, 2nd Battalion was followed by 1st Battalion, moving northeast through Momignies and encountering resistance near Macon, along the Belgian border. Subsequently, these battalions proceeded north toward Eppe, under fire from German tanks which remained along the heights north of Macon.19

As for 47th Regiment (without 3rd Battalion), they advanced north from Vervins toward 243, between Liessies and Solre (within the forest northwest of Eppe). Leading this advance through Capelle toward Wigneheies, the recon platoon was forced to withdraw when confronted by infantry and tanks, although 1st Battalion cleared the town. Subsequently, the recon platoon moved northeast and engaged additional resistance north of Glageon, and in the forest south of Felleries. Meanwhile, 1st Battalion advanced north toward Sains, whilst 2nd Battalion cleared Glageon. Here, 47th Regiment was temporarily halted, being once again blocked by elements of
3rd Armored Division. Although these vehicles were apparently out of fuel, it should be noted that it wasn’t technically fuel which was halting the infantry. Instead, the real problem was that there were simply too many vehicles upon the road, thus creating a dense traffic-jam. Nevertheless, movement was resumed later that afternoon, and 243 was eventually occupied. Consequently, although fuel certainly delayed this advance, they still reached their objective.  

Finally, 60th Regiment occupied Macon, after which 3rd Battalion moved east toward Chimay. Meanwhile, 1st and 2nd Battalions cleared the heights northeast of Macon, which the Germans had “infested” with considerable strength. Examining a map of this area, it seems clear that this was done to support 39th Regiment’s advance toward Eppe, as the road toward Eppe was particularly vulnerable northwest of Macon, where the forest closes around the D83/283 junction. Indeed, this same effort was mirrored at the corps level, as 9th Division was thus clearing the forest east of the N2, in order to facilitate the advance of 3rd Armored Division.  

September 3  

On September 3, Hodges met with Montgomery, Bradley, and Dempsey. Once again, they examined the boundaries between First and Second Army. Of course, if First Army had simply been attached to Twenty-First Army Group, this issue could have been resolved more quickly. Ultimately, they decided to withdraw 30th Division from Tournai, thus facilitating the advance of 30th Corps toward Brussels. Meanwhile, the advance of 7th Corps had blocked 5th Corps. This resulted in a decision to “cross columns,” such that 5th Corps was redeployed along the right flank of 7th Corps, advancing through Sedan and Luxembourg.  

At this time, newspapers reported the supposedly “flimsy” resistance which delayed 30th Division between Cambrai and Tournai. Meanwhile, Patton continued “racing” forward, and
journalists speculated that Hitler would soon be forced to admit that Third Army was inside Germany. Indeed, according to a supposedly authoritative source, “Patton’s over the border.”

During the day, Allied air forces achieved what appears to be the most effective interdiction thus far, with nearly two thousand German vehicles reportedly destroyed. Surprisingly, according to several pilots, this phase of operations was far more significant than the events of mid-August. Meanwhile, 3rd Armored Division and 1st Division completed another major encirclement, with approximately 30,000 German troops eventually surrendering near Mons. Of course, according to Blumenson, approximately the same number of German troops had previously escaped from Flers.

Therefore, considering the encirclement at Conches, the heavy fighting near Rouen and Amiens, alongside the encirclements at Havre, Calais, Amiens, and Mons, it seems very clear that the Allies had compensated for any theoretical shortcomings at Falaise. Indeed, the commanders of Seventh Armeé had certainly not escaped. General Hausser was thus injured on August 19, and his successor, Eberbach, was captured near Amiens on August 31.

30th Division

30th Division: At dawn, the Guards Division passed Tournai, reaching Brussels five hours later. Meanwhile, although 30th Division had been ordered to withdraw, it was still necessary for infantry to clear the city. Consequently, there were “hot street fights” as 119th Regiment’s 1st Battalion advanced with assistance from the partisan White Army. In support, 2nd and 3rd Battalions dispatched patrols northeast of town. Likewise, 125th Cavalry Squadron moved north and occupied the forested area of St. Aubert, with lines extending southwest toward Froyennes, and southeast toward Melles.
As for 120th Regiment, arriving at Tournai before dawn, 1st and 3rd Battalions were deployed east of town, within the triangle formed by Warchin, Gaurain, and Antoing. Meanwhile, 2nd Battalion was placed southwest of Gaurain, near what is now a large strip-mine. Within this area, 2nd and 3rd Battalions encountered considerable resistance. Once 120th Regiment had thus arrived, the attached truck companies were turned around and ordered to retrieve 117th Regiment, which remained at Creil.29

30th Division would later complain that they were not provided with enough fuel for their advance toward the Meuse. However, these trucks were now driven more than a hundred and fifty kilometers away from Aachen, because there were insufficient vehicles to move the entire division simultaneously. If the fuel thus wasted had been available to move east, then 30th Division would have arrived along the Meuse at least one day sooner, assuming that increased congestion did not delay the advance.30

4th Division: During the day, 8th Regiment’s 3rd Battalion advanced against scattered resistance, clearing what subsequently became a “main supply route,” between St. Quentin and Wassigny. This implies that they cleared the D8 between St. Quentin and Bohain, and the D28 between Bohain and Wassigny. Presumably, German troops were encountered within the forest of Mennevret. It thus seems that First Army was preparing to funnel a large proportion of its supplies through Mantes and St. Quentin, thereby avoiding congestion at Melun, Meaux, and Soissons, where major rivers constricted the supply routes.

In support of 3rd Battalion, 1st and 2nd Battalions moved due north, clearing the area between St. Quentin and the Oise. Meanwhile, 12th Regiment occupied St. Quentin, with 1st Battalion securing bridges and the northwestern suburb of Fayet. Indeed, there was concern that
the Germans might attempt to advance southeast toward St. Quentin, in an attempt to sever the lines of 7th Corps. Although this seems improbable, the area northwest of St. Quentin was essentially devoid of Allied troops, whilst formations such as 30th Division had only swept the roads, leaving isolated German formations in their wake. There was thus uncertainty about how many German troops remained between St. Quentin and Arras.31

As for 22nd Regiment (still organized as Taskforce Taylor), they consolidated positions south of the forest of Mormal. This entailed an advance northwest toward the D959, between Cambresis and Landrecies. The eastern column therefore crossed the canal at Landrecies, moving southwest along the D959. Subsequently, strong resistance was encountered, although this was eliminated with the assistance of airstrikes, such that a German battalion was reportedly annihilated within the forest northeast of Pommereuil. Meanwhile, the western column was not informed of the regimental plan until noon, due to communication difficulties. Belatedly, this formation finally advanced northwest toward Cambresis, where they pivoted northeast toward Pommereuil.32

1st Division

Shortly after midnight, 3rd Armored Division requested the assistance of an infantry battalion, and 26th Regiment’s 1st Battalion was therefore ordered toward Bavay, Boussu, and Mons, with an infantry company to be paired with a tank company at each location. However, by noon, this Mons Battalion was still south of Bettignies, where they were delayed by increasing resistance. Once again, it thus seems that the Germans had allowed the leading tank formations to advance, only to ambush subsequent forces, such that 1st Division was now separated from 3rd Armored Division.33
Indeed, there was heavy fighting around Mons. Reflecting upon this crisis, Private Ed Dowling later stated, “Three times we asked for help… [The Germans] scattered and began to work us over… More troops came over the hill and we thought they’d flank us… The whole Spearhead Division was up against the same situation…” The records thus emphasize that this was a “great” and “profound” victory, during which the forward headquarters was nearly overrun during an attack which “threatened to overwhelm” the entire division. Unfortunately, historians approach such victories as a foregone conclusion, failing to understand that the situation might have suddenly deteriorated.34

During the morning, 26th Regiment’s 2nd and 3rd Battalions advanced north from Avesnes toward Maubege. Along their western flank, 18th Regiment moved from Nouvion toward Bavay, presumably passing through Aulnoye. They were followed by 16th Regiment, which was ordered to continue north of Maubege. Subsequently, the headquarters of 18th Regiment would notice with some confusion that their 2nd Battalion was not following orders, and was instead establishing defensive positions facing west, between Bergues and Aulnoye. Eventually, it was realized that 1st Division had directly ordered this battalion to protect the western flank of 16th Regiment, without informing 18th Regiment. Meanwhile, 16th Regiment continued north toward Bettignies, where 26th Regiment’s 1st Battalion was attached, as 16th Regiment was now ordered to “take command of situation… and fight force into Mons.”35

Concurrently, 18th Regiment’s 1st Battalion was approaching Bavay. Here, a “large number” of German troops were withdrawing northeast toward Bettignies, whilst German artillery was firing from within the forest of Mormal. Meanwhile, a battalion of antiaircraft artillery defended Bavay, and the town was not cleared until later that afternoon. The records of 3rd Battalion emphasize that they were only able to advance with considerable assistance from
artillery and aerial bombardments. Although several hundred Germans eventually surrendered, 18th Regiment thus incurred numerous casualties, including four officers. Subsequently, after attaching I-Company to 1st Battalion (which occupied Bavay), the remainder of 3rd Battalion occupied defensive positions east of Bavay, in order to maintain contact between 1st Battalion and Maubege. However, German troops remained active throughout this area. Consequently, during the night, both battalions were enveloped and subjected to considerable harassing fire.36

As for 26th Regiment’s 1st Battalion, they were pinned down north of Bettignies, until reinforcements arrived from 16th Regiment’s 3rd Battalion. Meanwhile, 16th Regiment’s 1st Battalion was in reserve north of Maubege, whilst 2nd Battalion moved northwest, in an attempt to outflank the Germans via the forest north of Feignies. After 2nd Battalion was also pinned down, 3rd Battalion established a defensive position north of Bettignies, whilst 26th Regiment’s 1st Battalion was withdrawn and shifted further west, where they advanced into the forest north of Longueville. Subsequently, the rest of 26th Regiment also advanced northwest, establishing positions near Riez. Concurrently, 16th Regiment’s 1st Battalion was ordered to make an additional effort along the eastern flank, moving northeast through Bersillies toward Givry.37

Finally, facing increasing pressure along both flanks, the Germans withdrew from Bettignies. However, when 16th Regiment attempted to resume advancing, they soon encountered a second defensive line just a few kilometers further north, at Bourdon. Consequently, they were once again halted by strong resistance. Frustrated by this continued delay, 7th Corps urged 1st Division to motorize a battalion and reinforce 3rd Armored Division at once, although 1st Division noted that they lacked sufficient vehicles. Ultimately, it was not until nearly midnight, when the leading infantry battalion was able to reach Mons, whilst heavy
fighting continued further south. Indeed, twenty thousand German troops were now on the verge of overrunning 1st Division.\textsuperscript{38}

\textit{9th Division}

At this time, staff officers correctly deduced that the Germans intended to make their “strongest delaying action” along the Meuse, with additional German forces projecting westward along the Sambre, between Namur and Charleroi. Although historians might talk about a race to Germany, the reality is that this was thus a race toward Namur. Consequently, the axis of advance for 7th Corps was once again shifted. Whereas 3rd Armored Division had previously been the \textit{schwerpunkt} toward Mons, it was now hoped that 9th Division might cross the Meuse between Givet and Dinant, with 4th Division crossing between Givet and Mezieres.\textsuperscript{39}

At dawn, 39th and 47th Regiments advanced eastward, although there were only sufficient vehicles to mobilize the leading battalion of each regiment. Moving along the northern flank via Solre, 47th Regiment’s 2nd Battalion encountered resistance along the Belgian border, at Beaurieux, although this was bypassed. Subsequently, 2nd Battalion proceeded through Grandrieu, and continued east toward the N53 between Rance and Beaumont. Upon reaching the N53, 2nd Battalion encountered German infantry within positions extending northeast toward St. Gery. Eventually, 2nd Battalion cleared this resistance and occupied the small forest east of Barbencon. Meanwhile, 1st Battalion moved northeast from Grandrieu, encountering German infantry, tanks, and rocket artillery, concentrated at the N596/597 junction. Afterwards, 1st Battalion occupied the area northeast of Beaumont.\textsuperscript{40}

That evening, 47th Regiment was halted, ostensibly because of a lack of fuel. However, it is to be doubted that this significantly limited the advance, which could not have proceeded much further as night was approaching. Furthermore, even at this limited pace of just fifteen
kilometers per day, 9th Division should theoretically have been able to reach Aachen by September 13, if not for continued resistance.\textsuperscript{41}

Concurrently, 39th Regiment advanced northeast from Eppe, moving through Rance and Froidchapelle. By noon, 2nd Battalion was engaged against an infantry battalion at Cerfontaine, which was supported by artillery. This delayed the advance for two hours. Gradually, the Germans withdrew toward Philippeville, which they successfully defended, after an additional delaying action at Eglises. That evening, 3rd Battalion managed to envelop the northern flank, pushing northeast through scattered resistance and occupying Florennes.\textsuperscript{42}

As for 60th Regiment, 1st Battalion was temporarily assigned to 4th Cavalry Group. Meanwhile, advancing at dawn, 2nd Battalion moved east from Chimay, turning north at Couvin. No resistance was encountered until south of Mariembourg, which the Germans defended with infantry and artillery, whilst the bridge across the Brouffe was destroyed. Eventually a flanking movement was made from the west, using an improvised bridge, after which the advance resumed. However, at Neuville, German resistance once again halted the advance. Here, a double envelopment was successfully employed, after which the regiment was entrenched south of Philippeville.\textsuperscript{43}

Unfortunately, the records do not clarify which German units were resisting this advance, but one likely candidate is 12th SS Division. Although the situation map actually shows this force lingering near Hirson, the division suddenly appears at Aachen on September 6. Presumably, the situation map reflects the presence of isolated formations which remained in the forest south of Chimay, whilst the bulk of the division withdrew northeast toward Philippeville. Meanwhile, the troops encountered around Beaumont might have included elements of 347th Division, which held positions southwest of Charleroi.
September 4

On September 4, First Army continued to reorient itself eastward, facing twelve German divisions between Tournai and Mezieres. Eight of these divisions held an arc extending from north of Tournai and then southeast toward Charleroi and Beaumont. As for Third Army, although they were halted along the Meuse at Verdun, fuel shortages should not be cited as an explanation for Patton’s subsequent difficulties at Metz. Indeed, dispatching patrols toward the Moselle, 2nd Cavalry Group was already reporting that the river was “strongly held” by the enemy.44

Although the Germans were thus prepared to fight a pitched battle along the Moselle, newspapers reported that Third Army’s tanks were already across the river at Pert, more than twenty kilometers behind German lines. Of course, it’s entirely possible and even probable that scattered reconnaissance patrols had found their way around the northern flank, penetrating between Panzer Lehr and 17th SS. However, it was wholly untrue that Patton’s forces were now “driving on eastward.” These accounts boldly insisted that Metz was “taken by default,” as the “mossy” fortifications were assuredly unmanned. Likewise, as First Army approached Aachen, similar predictions were made, thus fueling an erroneous belief that both armies could have achieved victory if only they had been nominally faster.45

30th Division

During the day, 119th Regiment remained at Tournai, although 1st Battalion was moved out of the city, occupying St. Maur. Subsequently, 119th and 120th Regiments conducted maintenance and training. That evening, 120th Regiment dispatched a reinforced platoon toward Maubray, where civilians had reported scattered German troops, who were soon located and engaged.46 Afterwards, continuing to receive numerous reports of German activity, G-Company
was dispatched toward Antoing. As for 117th Regiment, they spent most of the day north of Creil, awaiting transportation. These finally arrived that afternoon, and the regiment began moving toward Tournai.47

Ultimately, although 30th Division was thus fairly inactive, they continued to play a critical role along the front. Indeed, three German divisions were still operating to the northeast, between Ronse and Ath, whilst five additional divisions were operating to the northwest, between Lille and Kortrijk. Consequently, 30th Division was thus positioned to defend Tournai, should these forces attempt to cut the lines of 30th Corps, which extended northeast from Tournai toward Brussels. Likewise, to the southwest, 79th Division occupied positions between Tournai and Orcheis, thus blocking any German effort to move southwest from Lille toward Valenciennes.

Indeed, five of these divisions were mobile: 21st Panzer, 116th Panzer, 2nd SS, 9th SS, and 10th SS. By September 7, all of these divisions had thus successfully continued eastward, concentrating near Aachen, which meant that 116th Panzer, 2nd SS, and 10th SS somehow managed to pass through or around the zone of 30th Corps. Although historians typically dismiss the strength of these divisions, when combined they still mustered a substantial number of tanks, alongside mechanized infantry and artillery. It was this kind of potential threat which led 4th Division to prepare for a counterattack at St. Quentin.

4th Division

Much like 30th Division, this formation remained between St. Quentin and Landrecies, where they conducted mop-up operations. The situation was thus relatively calm for 8th and 12th Regiments, which spent most of the day catching up with administrative requirements, although patrols were dispatched to intercept scattered enemy forces. However, at dawn, 22nd Regiment’s
1st Battalion was detached and ordered to move approximately fifty kilometers southeast toward Brunehamel, in order to reinforce 102nd Cavalry Group. Likewise, 5th/CCA was also detached, moving east toward Hirson. Finally, the rest of 22nd Regiment moved north from Landrecies and engaged German forces within the forest of Mormal, where they were supported by 4th Recon and elements of 747th Tank Battalion, 801st TD Battalion, and 893rd TD Battalion.\(^\text{48}\)

\textit{1st Division}

Shortly after midnight, 16th Regiment’s 1st Battalion reported that they were finally at Mons, but that they were encountering heavy resistance. Meanwhile, 1st Recon reported that significant German forces were concentrating south of Bavay, near Berlaimont. Indeed, a column of German infantry was moving north toward the positions of 18th Regiment, although they were eventually dispersed by machine-gun and artillery fire. However, at 03:00, continued German pressure forced the withdrawal of 1st Recon, which reported the presence of German tanks and infantry at Hargnies. The situation was even worse further north, within the zone of 26th Regiment, where the regimental train was ambushed at Rieu, and the regiment was completely enveloped. Indeed, the situation was becoming a “mess,” and 1st Division laconically stated, “could use armored help.” Subsequently, 3rd Armored Division would thus dispatch a battalion southward.\(^\text{49}\)

By dawn, 7th and 188th Artillery were deploying southeast of Mons, near Mesvin, where they were presumably firing in support of 26th Regiment. Meanwhile, attempting to provide additional assistance, 16th Regiment redirected elements of 1st Battalion southwest from Mons, moving along the N544 toward Sars, only to discover that the road was completely blocked by numerous abandoned vehicles. Subsequently, as engineers were brought forward, the division reported, “Situation not clear. A lot of infiltration. Slow communication...” Although this report
confidently claimed that “everything is under control,” 26th Regiment stated that their artillery was endangered. Meanwhile, the regimental headquarters was pinned down and surrounded by enemy vehicles, whilst ammunition was desperately requested.\textsuperscript{50}

Therefore, 18\textsuperscript{th} Regiment began concentrating an emergency taskforce, whilst 1\textsuperscript{st} Recon was ordered to move north “as fast as they could go.” Subsequently, 18\textsuperscript{th} Regiment dispatched their taskforce through Riez, in order to relieve 33\textsuperscript{rd} Artillery. Meanwhile, 18\textsuperscript{th} Regiment’s engineers were fired upon by German infantry who had barricaded themselves within a nearby factory. Indeed, the rear was now swarming with infiltrators, and it became necessary to dispatch G-Company toward Neuf-Mesnil, where approximately two thousand enemy troops were attempting to organize within the forest of Hoyaux. Meanwhile, another company had to be deployed south of Bavay, in order to halt additional forces which were continuing to advance north through the forest of Mormal. Once confronted, the enemy refused to surrender and instead merely withdrew back into the forest. Presumably, it was at this point that 4\textsuperscript{th} Division’s 22\textsuperscript{nd} Regiment was ordered northward.\textsuperscript{51}

As German forces massed within the forest, 18\textsuperscript{th} Regiment’s 1\textsuperscript{st} and 3\textsuperscript{rd} Battalions were ordered to "button up" with road blocks facing in all directions. Subsequently, in a movement reminiscent of the battle in 1914, 1\textsuperscript{st} Battalion sent a company to flank the forest via the western D932, whilst 3\textsuperscript{rd} Battalion did so via the eastern D961. Meanwhile, 2\textsuperscript{nd} Battalion was ordered northeast toward Sars, in order to assist 26\textsuperscript{th} Regiment, which continued to face considerable pressure. Finally, that afternoon, 1\textsuperscript{st} and 3\textsuperscript{rd} Battalions were ordered to clear the forest, although no progress was made.

That evening, attempting to assist 26\textsuperscript{th} Regiment, 18\textsuperscript{th} Regiment’s E-Company was engaged at Sars, alongside the regimental cannon company, where they attempted to block a
large column of infantry. Heavy fighting continued until dawn, during which E-Company was steadily forced to retreat, until a platoon from G-Company arrived as reinforcement. During this fighting, communications were broken between the infantry and artillery, and German infiltrators were thus able to penetrate inside the defensive lines. Newspapers appear to have recognized this “severe fighting,” although they wrongly stated that it was taking place north of Sedan, rather than south of Mons.\textsuperscript{52}

\textit{9\textsuperscript{th} Division}

During the morning, 47\textsuperscript{th} Regiment (without 3\textsuperscript{rd} Battalion) was designated as the division reserve, with 1\textsuperscript{st} Battalion at Beaumont whilst 2\textsuperscript{nd} Battalion occupied Philippeville. Subsequently, that afternoon, 2\textsuperscript{nd} Battalion advanced northeast toward St. Gerard. This movement was preceded by the recon platoon, which intercepted a column of several hundred infantry, moving north toward Florennes. Once engaged, these infantry dispersed within the forest on either side of the N98. Subsequently, light tanks were brought forward, along with a company from 2\textsuperscript{nd} Battalion, and approximately seventy-five Germans eventually surrendered.\textsuperscript{53}

Upon reaching St. Gerard that evening, 47\textsuperscript{th} Regiment was ordered to return south, to Flavion. One can only assume that such detours served to limit the rate of advance far more than did any shortage of gasoline. Regardless, the reason for this reversal was that reconnaissance elements had observed the situation around Namur, where they reported that all the bridges were blown, whilst the town was defended by a reinforced German battalion. Nevertheless, newspapers stated with conviction that Namur had been cleared.\textsuperscript{54}

Concurrently, 39\textsuperscript{th} and 60\textsuperscript{th} Regiments advanced toward the Meuse, where they also reported that all the bridges had been destroyed, except for a damaged and heavily defended bridge at Dinant. By that evening, 39\textsuperscript{th} Regiment’s 2\textsuperscript{nd} Battalion was thus at Dinant with 3\textsuperscript{rd}
Battalion at Anhee, where both battalions were halted amidst a heavy interdictory barrage. Meanwhile, 60th Regiment advanced into the area northwest of Givet, with 2nd Battalion enduring a bombardment near Agimont, whilst 3rd Battalion occupied Maurenne. Finally, 1st Battalion was released from 4th Cavalry Group, and they subsequently occupied a reserve position at Rosee.55

Summary

Between September 2 and 4th, 30th Division was heavily engaged at Cambrai and Tournai. Concurrently, 4th Division crossed the Aisne and occupied St. Quentin. Meanwhile, following 3rd Armored Division from Vervins toward Mons, 1st Division faced increasingly heavy resistance. Finally, advancing along the northern edge of the Ardennes, 9th Division was engaged at Philippeville.
CHAPTER 14
INCREASING AND STUBBORN REAR-GUARD ACTION

Between September 5 and 7th, First Army incurred 1156 combat casualties, as the Germans defended the Meuse. Meanwhile, from a line extending northwest between Hirson and Tournai, First Army pivoted toward a line extending northeast between Sedan and Maastricht. By now, one might think, that the Germans were surely defeated, having already been defeated several times. However, examining the efforts of 9th Division along the Meuse, it becomes apparent that the enemy remained incredibly dangerous and resilient.¹

Nevertheless, Blumenson argued that logistics was the primary source of friction, whilst resistance was supposedly light. However, this is not supported by the records, which rarely mention fuel shortages without simultaneously emphasizing the rugged terrain, poor weather, and consistently strong resistance. Indeed, on September 5, 3rd Armored Division faced a sharp engagement at Namur. After the leading tanks passed through, subsequent columns were delayed by stiff resistance from bypassed positions, reminiscent of the situation at Brecey. On September 6, the division faced increased resistance, and on September 7 they were still fighting. On September 8, German defenses were even heavier at Liege, and a leading "ace" was killed by a sniper. Panicking amongst the narrow streets, one tank backed over four civilians.

Although the advance of 3rd Armored Division inflicted heavy casualties, which included two German generals, it still took an entire day to clear Liege, after which their subsequent advance was delayed by “organized and heavy resistance,” which soon became “serious.” The division history thus concluded, “The war seemed practically over. However, it was not time for rejoicing…”²
September 5

On September 5, the Germans continued to withdraw toward the Meuse, with 113th Cavalry Group advancing toward Wavre, and clearing the area between Mons and Brussels. Meanwhile, 2nd Armored Division cleared the area between Tournai and Mons. Further east, 9th Division and 3rd Armored Division established a line along the Meuse, extending south from Namur toward Dinant. Further south, 4th Division and 5th Armored Division also occupied the Meuse, between Givet and Sedan, whilst 102nd Cavalry Group advanced along the southeastern flank toward Mezieres. Concurrently, along the western flank, the Canadian Army encircled elements of seven German divisions south of Calais, whilst Second Army expanded their corridor between Lille and Brussels, advancing northwest toward Louvain and Antwerp.3

30th Division

During the day, columns from 11th Armoured Division passed through Tournai, enroute toward Brussels. Meanwhile, Tournai was turned over to elements of 50th Division’s 69th Brigade, thus freeing 30th Division for operations elsewhere.4

As a British column was passing 120th Regiment’s 3rd Battalion, near Antoing, a hidden German halftrack suddenly emerged from the forest, fleeing the approaching tanks. Upon encountering the roadblocks of 3rd Battalion, the Germans abandoned their vehicle at the edge of town, after setting it ablaze. Packed with ammunition, the halftrack soon erupted into a veritable “volcano.” This panicked the local populace, which frantically dashed about attempting to rescue their property. Subsequently, Lieutenant Edward Hill (3rd Battalion S-3) and two sergeants risked their lives in order to prevent casualties. Nevertheless, heavy damage was caused to nearby buildings, and several individuals were injured.5
During the day, 119th and 120th Regiments continued reorganizing, conducting maintenance, and replenishing stockpiles. As for 117th Regiment, finally arriving from Creil, they established positions southeast of Tournai. 1st Battalion was thus concentrated near Maubray, 2nd Battalion was at Audemez, and 3rd Battalion remained south of the Scheldt, northwest of Rouillon. Now that 117th Regiment had arrived, efforts were made to prepare the subsequent advance. However, there are no major roads leading east from Tournai, and that area was already congested by 2nd Armored Division. Therefore, portions of the division would have to be redeployed before movement could proceed. Consequently, 30th Recon moved toward Valenciennes, where they were concentrated within the suburb of St. Saulve. From this location, they initiated reconnaissance northeast, toward Mons.6

1st Division

Initially, orders were given to establish an outpost northwest of Mons, at Ath, whilst establishing a line facing north along the Haine, extending east from Mons toward Charleroi. However, during the night, 18th Regiment’s 2nd Battalion remained heavily engaged, northeast of Bavay. Meanwhile, 16th Regiment was engaged northwest of Mons, and was unable to advance toward Ath. Unfortunately, there is a gap in the available records, which resume that afternoon with 26th Regiment operating southwest of Mons, whilst 18th Regiment’s 3rd Battalion was clearing the area of Rieu. During this movement, 3rd Battalion reported that their progress was very slow, due to an immense amount of debris.7

Unfortunately, due to continued resistance along the western flank, 1st Division was thus unable to fulfill their orders, and they instead focused upon consolidating their positions. By the end of the day, despite the efforts of 18th and 22nd Regiments, approximately a thousand German troops remained within the forest of Mormal. Nevertheless, seeking to avoid congestion, 7th
Corps once again ordered 1st Division to prepare for movement toward Charleroi, as 2nd Armored Division was steadily approaching Mons. The occupation of Ath was thus assigned to 2nd Armored Division, and 16th Regiment’s mission was reduced to clearing the area between Lens and Tertre.8

4th Division

During the day, 8th and 12th Regiments were concentrated at St. Quentin, after which they moved a hundred kilometers east, toward the Meuse. Meanwhile, 22nd Regiment’s 2nd and 3rd Battalions remained behind, where they were engaged against isolated resistance. Concurrently, 1st Battalion continued to operate with 102nd Cavalry Group.9

Ultimately, 8th Regiment’s 1st Battalion occupied Revin, 2nd Battalion was at Laifour, and 3rd Battalion cleared Montherme. A bridge was secured at Montherme, whilst the river at Revin was deemed to be fordable. Likewise, 12th Regiment occupied positions along the Meuse, with 1st Battalion at Vireux and 2nd Battalion at Fumay. There was also a bridge available at Fumay, where it was reported that a single German mortar shell had been fired in an unsuccessful attempt to destroy the bridge.10

However, at Vireux, the bridge had been destroyed. Consequently, whilst C-Company used ladders to span the remnants, A-Company used rowboats obtained from the local populace. Meanwhile, 1st Battalion’s vehicles had to make a twenty kilometer detour through Fumay, in order to rejoin the battalion along the eastern bank. Once 1st and 2nd Battalions had thus crossed the river, 3rd Battalion was brought forward to relieve 2nd Battalion. Subsequently, 2nd Battalion advanced toward Hargnies, where 38th Cavalry Squadron was engaging German infantry and tanks.11
Previously, the Belgian resistance had confirmed that the Germans intended to defend the Meuse. Indeed, it was estimated that a reinforced German regiment was thus holding a line extending south from Namur. Not only were these troops supported by tanks and artillery, but the records repeatedly emphasize that the infantry were well-equipped with a large number of flamethrowers, both personal and vehicular. Furthermore, “the terrain favored the defense...”

Nevertheless, an amphibious assault was ordered to begin at midnight, with 39th Regiment crossing at three locations. There were thus two crossings north and south of Godinne, where the river forms a natural salient, and a third crossing between Anhee and the isle of Yvoir. However, the northern crossing failed, with 1st Battalion facing withering fire which destroyed twelve of the fifteen boats like “ducks in a shooting gallery,” presumably inflicting considerable casualties. The only part of 1st Battalion which crossed was a group of twenty infantry, including the commander of A-Company, all of whom were killed or captured.

Concurrently, attempting to cross south of Godinne, 39th Regiment’s 2nd Battalion was unable to launch their boats, due to the steepness of the river bank. Meanwhile, during the southern crossing, 3rd Battalion was able to proceed against light resistance. This effort was greatly aided by a rickety catwalk which the Germans had neglected to destroy. Meanwhile, the crossing was shielded along the northern flank by the undefended isle of Yvoir, whilst the river bent southeast and thus reduced fire from the eastern bank. Nevertheless, heavy fire was soon encountered as 3rd Battalion attempted to expand their beachhead.

During the afternoon, 2nd Battalion feinted toward the strongly defended bridge at Dinant, after which they moved back north and crossed behind 3rd Battalion. Supported by concentrated artillery fire, 2nd Battalion gradually advanced into the forest northeast of Houx. However, heavy
enemy fire continued to dominate the area, and 15th Engineer’s A-Company was unable to construct a bridge.\textsuperscript{15}

\textit{60th Regiment also attempted to cross at midnight, although this was delayed until 02:00 because sufficient boats were not available. Along the southern flank, 2nd Battalion crossed north of Heer, once again making use of an island. Further north, 3rd Battalion crossed at Hermeton, with their initial objective being to clear Hastiere so that engineers could construct a bridge.}\textsuperscript{16}

Both of 60th Regiment’s battalions met severe resistance. During the northern crossing, 3rd Battalion faced heavy fire, and then advanced with “extreme difficulty” toward Blaimont, which the Germans successfully defended. Further south, E-Company was caught in the middle of the river by heavy fire, and they turned around and crossed within the zone of F-Company. Meanwhile, the rest of 2nd Battalion was pinned down by German mortars and machine-guns. Eventually, some of the infantry managed to work their way up a steep embankment, where they were promptly taken prisoner and used as hostages, such that the Germans induced approximately fifty to surrender.\textsuperscript{17}

Upon finally reaching the eastern bank, the commander of E-Company reported that he had lost all contact with the rest of the battalion, and that it was impossible to ascend the bank under heavy fire. Indeed, attempting to reach the top for himself, this officer was soon incapacitated by a series of “innumerable” grenade explosions. Clarifying these events somewhat, a report from H-Company stated that the remnants of F&G-Companies had somehow managed to clear the bank before E-Company landed, after which the Germans simply “closed the gap” behind the advancing infantry.\textsuperscript{18}

Eventually, E-Company also managed to clear the bank, although they were soon surrounded and forced to entrench without regaining contact with their battalion. Dispatching
patrols through gaps in the German lines, E-Company gradually realized the “astounding” truth that there was a powerful enemy force between them and the other companies. Indeed, F&G-Companies were mauled within the forest, where they were under direct fire from a “veritable hornet’s nest” of German infantry, tanks, and artillery. Less fortunate troops were completely “cut off” within the surrounding fields. 19

Inevitably, one of 2nd Battalion’s companies evaporated during a German counterattack. Shortly thereafter, the entire battalion dissolved, although survivors regrouped south of Hermeton, within the zone of 3rd Battalion. These two battalions thus suffered heavy losses, incurring more than three hundred casualties. Indeed, 80% casualties were reported within F&G-Companies. Although this has been described within the official regimental history as a “heroic stand,” a more sober analysis thus referred to the action as completely “disastrous.” According to the division history, both battalions were “all but overwhelmed” in a battle “which well could form the basis for a dramatic motion picture script.” If such a film were made about First Army, and done accurately, the narrative would clearly be exceedingly grim. 20

During the day, 47th Regiment remained in reserve, after 1st Battalion spent an undoubtedly exhausting night, marching thirty kilometers from Beaumont to Flavion. Meanwhile, 3rd Battalion did not return until noon, from their extended assignment with 3rd Armored Division, during which they had participated in the fighting at Mons. Consequently, this regiment played only a diversionary role, with G-Company firing upon positions across the river from Vireux, whilst F-Company (supported by tanks) made a similar effort at Dinant. 21

Considering the difficulties encountered, it does not seem unreasonable to conclude that this diversionary effort was unsuccessful. As a particular point of criticism, it should be noted that the threat of a crossing at Vireux was almost certainly not a concern for the German
commander. Not only was this position fully fifteen kilometers from Heer, but it would have been essentially impossible to move northeast from Vireux, as the forested heights tower more than two hundred meters above the town, with a single road leading southeast toward Hargnies.\textsuperscript{22}

Indeed, later in the day, elements of 4\textsuperscript{th} Division’s 12\textsuperscript{th} Regiment actually crossed at Vireux, and there is no evidence to suggest that this distracted the Germans further north. Therefore, 47\textsuperscript{th} Regiment’s diversionary effort should perhaps have been focused at Dinant, in conjunction with the efforts of 39\textsuperscript{th} Regiment’s 2\textsuperscript{nd} Battalion. It is rather surprising that no significant effort was made in the center, although German defenses here were apparently quite strong. With this in mind, one might thus compare the situation with that at Salerno in 1943, where a dangerous gap was likewise left between two endangered bridgeheads.

Later that evening, 47\textsuperscript{th} Regiment’s 1\textsuperscript{st} Battalion was moved toward Heer, followed by 3\textsuperscript{rd} Battalion. Meanwhile, 2\textsuperscript{nd} Battalion dispatched G-Company toward Onhaye, in order to intercept German patrols which were infiltrating westward, after crossing the Meuse between Dinant and Waulsort.\textsuperscript{23}

September 6

On September 6, rather than fixating upon fuel shortages, Hodges remarked that First Army should be able to occupy Aachen, with ten days of good weather. Indeed, the fuel crisis was already ending, and several train-loads had already arrived at Soissons. However, it was raining steadily, and the advancing convoys were thus delayed by “mucky” roads. Ultimately, it doesn’t appear that Hodges was optimistically making a serious statement about his ability to advance, but rather he was making a pointed observation about the increasingly problematic weather. It is thus noteworthy that even with ideal conditions, Hodges did not anticipate an advance of more than three kilometers per day.\textsuperscript{24}
Nevertheless, the BBC reported that there was “every reason” to believe that the war would soon be over, as Hitler was supposedly dead, whilst other sources claimed that Germany had surrendered. Likewise, journalists echoed unconfirmed reports that the Allies had captured both Aachen and Saarbrucken, with Third Army “stabbing” toward Strasbourg. However, admitting some uncertainty, these claims were contrasted with statements that Third Army was actually stalled along the Moselle, where they were “blocked” by heavy defensive fire.25

During the day, 2nd Armored Division advanced east between Brussels and Mons, whilst 1st Division occupied Namur, thus facilitating the advance of 3rd Armored Division which continued toward Liege. Further east, between Liege and Aachen, elements of ten German divisions were already concentrating. Although these forces were certainly exhausted, their strength was significant considering that they were being opposed by a single Allied division, which still had to cross a major river. Further west, the Canadian Army continued to engage German forces near Calais, whilst Second Army occupied Gent.

As for Third Army, they were finally engaged between Verdun and Metz. Arguably, aside from the seemingly endless struggle for Brest, this marked the beginning of Third Army’s participation in major combat operations. Unfortunately, fuel shortages became a scapegoat, to hide the fact that Patton failed to achieve what might otherwise have been a truly impressive achievement. Indeed, Patton’s career was marked by such near briliancies: Casablanca, Maknassy, Messina, Brest, Avranches, Metz, and Hammelburg. In every case, if Patton had advanced rapidly, it would be difficult to deny his genius. However, in every case, he truly failed to show any special competence. Meanwhile, speculating upon the unusual silence from Third Army, journalists observed that there must be some “sensational” development taking place.
These reporters therefore speculated that Patton was crossing the German border, along a
frontage of more than a hundred and fifty kilometers.\textsuperscript{26}

\textit{30\textsuperscript{th} Division}

This formation conducted training exercises, as preparation for subsequent operations
further east. Each battalion thus practiced assaulting a fortified position, during which an
emphasis was placed upon the employment of flamethrowers and rockets.\textsuperscript{27}

\textit{1\textsuperscript{st} Division}

During the morning, operations were temporarily halted due to the congested advance of
2\textsuperscript{nd} Armored Division. Subsequently, the infantry began moving east toward Charleroi, where
18\textsuperscript{th} and 26\textsuperscript{th} Regiments relieved 24\textsuperscript{th} Cavalry Squadron’s B-Troop amidst a “rousing reception”
from the local populace. As for 16\textsuperscript{th} Regiment, they remained at Mons, where they continued to
face scattered resistance.\textsuperscript{28}

That evening, the following report was sent to 7\textsuperscript{th} Corps, “There is a shortage of gas, and
can barely carry out mission for tomorrow.” It was thus that 1\textsuperscript{st} Division acknowledged logistical
concerns, although there was still sufficient fuel, even if just barely so. With similar language,
30\textsuperscript{th} Division would acknowledge having a “barely acceptable” supply. Indeed, fuel supplies
were routinely supplemented by draining the thousands of German vehicles which littered this
area. Ultimately, such statements imply that the fuel shortage was more of an inconvenience,
rather than a truly critical problem.\textsuperscript{29}

\textit{9\textsuperscript{th} Division}

After an extremely difficult river crossing, 9\textsuperscript{th} Division occupied two small bridgeheads.
Meanwhile, between these positions, the Germans still controlled a fifteen kilometer stretch of
the Meuse, between Dinant and Waulsort. Despite the presence of 47\textsuperscript{th} Regiment’s G-Company,
at Onhaye, aggressive German patrols were thus able to cross the river and interdict the rear. Likewise, along the northern flank at Godinne, German troops crossed the river and attacked 39th Regiment’s A-Company. Meanwhile, with four battalions isolated along the eastern bank, it was of paramount concern that 9th Division still did not control any bridges. This meant that the logistical situation was becoming critical, as only a bare minimum of food and water was available. Fortunately, 3rd Armored Division was able to cross the river at Namur, and Taskforce-King was therefore dispatched along the eastern bank.30

Within the northern bridgehead, across from Anhee, 39th Regiment’s 2nd and 3rd Battalions continued to face stiff resistance amidst difficult terrain, despite supporting fire from 1st Battalion (which remained along the western bank). Subsequently, B-Company was moved across that evening, followed by A-Company later that night. Meanwhile, efforts to complete a bridge continued to be unsuccessful, with the engineers suppressed by sustained machine-gun and mortar fire. Indeed, after the destruction of numerous boats during the original crossing, the engineering task was greatly complicated. Furthermore, German tampering with sluices had made the situation even more precarious, by lowering water levels and exposing rocks which endangered the remaining vessels. Possibly, this tampering might have also increased the current.31

Fortunately, Taskforce-King arrived that afternoon. These tanks were subsequently assigned to 3rd Battalion, and the combined force moved toward Dinant, with one column moving directly south along the river, whilst a second column advanced from the northeast, via Loyers. By evening, these columns were halted by remaining German resistance, and the Germans still occupied Dinant. Meanwhile, an American antiaircraft formation was pinned down near Godinne, by heavy German fire from across the river. Fortunately, A-Company was able to
intervene and rescued the column. However, the Germans subsequently crossed the river and once again attacked A-Company, which finally withdrew southward and crossed the river.\textsuperscript{32}

Concurrently, beginning before dawn, 60\textsuperscript{th} Regiment’s 1\textsuperscript{st} Battalion crossed the Meuse south of Hermeton, and established a defensive line facing south and extending east toward Blaimont. Meanwhile, still recovering from the previous day, 2\textsuperscript{nd} Battalion held positions along the western flank, near the river. Finally, 3\textsuperscript{rd} Battalion advanced east with elements of 1\textsuperscript{st} Battalion, making a renewed effort to clear Blaimont. That afternoon, Blaimont was thus occupied following five hours of bitter combat against infantry, tanks, and halftracks equipped with flamethrowers, during which German counterattacks were able to recapture the village twice. The records emphasize that the evacuation of casualties was greatly complicated by a sustained German bombardment. Such interdicting fire must have been highly effective, considering that the entire regiment was crammed into an area of one square kilometer.\textsuperscript{33}

After Blaimont was finally occupied, 1\textsuperscript{st} Battalion (with K-Company) was tasked with defending this position, where fighting continued. Meanwhile, 3\textsuperscript{rd} Battalion (without K-Company) moved north toward Hastiere, advancing through rugged and practically impassable terrain. Here, they faced numerous German patrols operating amidst entrenched machine-guns, with support from incessant artillery fire. Upon reaching Hastiere, 3\textsuperscript{rd} Battalion was subjected to an increasingly intense bombardment. This was followed by a series of counterattacks, during which there was ferocious hand-to-hand combat against infantry equipped with flamethrowers. Fortunately, with Hastiere eventually cleared, engineers were finally able to construct a bridge. Meanwhile, 3\textsuperscript{rd} Battalion turned around and advanced into the forest south of Blaimont, where they were soon halted by renewed defensive fire. Later, the entire regiment was thus recognized by Collins for achieving “one of the most difficult tasks of this war.”\textsuperscript{34}
As for 47th Regiment, 1st Battalion attempted to cross before dawn, where 60th Regiment’s 2nd Battalion had previously crossed. Unfortunately, they accidentally landed upon the island north of Heer, from which they were forced to retreat under heavy fire from the eastern bank. Subsequently, 3rd Battalion was instead ordered to cross at Hermeton, followed by the badly mauled 1st Battalion. Meanwhile, having faced heavy fire during their original crossing, 47th Regiment understandably planned to support their second attempt with a correspondingly heavy bombardment of the eastern bank. However, as there was no communication across the river, they were unaware that 60th Regiment’s 2nd Battalion was concentrated within the planned zone of bombardment, just east of German positions which remained along the river. Fortunately, this bombardment was cancelled after a Sergeant McClintock (60th Regiment’s E-Company) infiltrated through the German lines, swam across the river, and dramatically reported this situation to the astonished headquarters of 47th Regiment.35

Eventually, 47th Regiment successfully crossed the river at Hermeton, employing an improvised raft from logs and oil-drums, which was used to ferry jeeps and antitank artillery. Subsequently, moving southeast from Blaimont, 3rd Battalion was ambushed near the N915/989 intersection, receiving fire from mortars and 20mm cannon, located within the forest further east. Consequently, they remained heavily engaged for the rest of the day, facing a series of fanatical counterattacks. Meanwhile, 1st Battalion attempted to move due south through the forest. However, after crossing two streams which flow northwest toward the island north of Heer, 1st Battalion was also ambushed. The Germans subsequently enveloped A&C-Companies, with half of C-Company surrendering. Eventually, 1st Battalion withdrew northwest toward the Meuse and back across the N989, where they were pinned down.36
Finally, 47th Regiment’s 2nd Battalion spent most of the day in reserve at Flavion, with the exception of a single company which was dispatched toward Waulsort, in order to block German troops who were continuing to cross the river, via a dam. That evening, once engineers completed a bridge, 2nd Battalion was moved across the river and occupied positions southeast of Hastiere, where they were joined by a pair of tank platoons. These vehicles helped 2nd Battalion eliminate lingering resistance around Hastiere, after which the tanks moved south to assist 1st Battalion. Meanwhile, G-Company was ordered back across the Meuse, in order to reestablish their position at Onhaye, as German patrols were still crossing the river.37

4th Division

Shortly after midnight, 12th Regiment’s 2nd Battalion occupied the heights east of Hargnies, during which a number of civilian bodies were discovered within the burning village. The records note that these individuals had been murdered by the Germans. Lest one question whether German troops were truly complicit in this atrocity, one should certainly note that the Germans burned this very same village during the previous war! Describing such incidents during that conflict, a German soldier wrote, “When one sees the ravaged villages, one can form some idea of the fury of our soldiers. There is not a house intact... Dead people were lying in heaps, shot after trial by martial law. Little pigs were running about looking for their mothers, dogs were left chained up with nothing to eat or drink, and the houses were burning above them... A spirit of pure vandalism exists... My heart grieves for the inhabitants.” Such was the tragic fate of both Hargnies and Plomion.38

During the morning, 4th Division continued advancing northeast into Belgium, where fuel shortages became an increasing concern, although unfavorable terrain was still seen as the major problem. Indeed, the vehicles of one battalion were halted by a stream which completely blocked
movement, after which the infantry advanced on foot. It was eventually reported that a bridge was available, and therefore the vehicles prepared to cross, after which they realized that the bridge was actually destroyed.39

Despite such difficulties, 8th Regiment continued advancing behind 102nd Cavalry Squadron. By noon, they were encountering light resistance within the forest, southwest of St. Pierre. Subsequently, scattered resistance continued to delay the advance, with 1st Battalion encountering heavy resistance southeast of St. Pierre, where the N935 branches east toward St. Denis.

Similarly, 12th Regiment was preceded by 38th Cavalry Squadron, advancing through various pockets of resistance. Leaving a company to defend Hargnies, 2nd Battalion advanced toward Gedinne amidst a German bombardment. Unfortunately, the Germans had blown the bridge across the Huille at Rienne, and SS troops defended the objective. Eventually, 38th Cavalry managed to flank Rienne from the south, whilst G-Company advanced from the west, although the Germans successfully withdrew. As Lieutenant Piper recalled, “We entered from the west, just as a cavalry patrol entered from the south, and both of us watched an enemy tank disappear in the distance.” Meanwhile, 1st Battalion forded the river north of Rienne, after which they proceeded northeast toward Vencimont.40

Finally, 22nd Regiment’s 2nd and 3rd Battalions remained north of St. Quentin, where they guarded against infiltration by German forces which continued to operate between Cambrai and the forest of Mormal. Likewise, a hundred kilometers away, 22nd Regiment’s 1st Battalion played a similar role along the division’s southeastern flank. This battalion thus faced light resistance within the forest east of Bogny, where they established defensive positions extending toward the
D13/131 junction, thereby blocking German units which were attempting to move north from Mezieres.\textsuperscript{41}

Ultimately, the afternoon ended with an autumn downpour which soaked the troops, after which a cool brisk breeze heralded the inevitable approach of winter. This thus marked the start of a “tough [and] grueling” week, during which there would be almost continuous precipitation.\textsuperscript{42}

\textbf{September 7}

On September 7, Hodges met with Lieutenant Gaylord Hodenfield of \textit{Stars and Stripes}, whom Eisenhower had dispatched to provide publicity for First Army. Presumably, it was Hodenfield who inserted a brief statement into the daily Associated Press article, arguing that the “real battle for Germany” was being fought by First Army, and not Third Army. Meanwhile, although fuel shortages caused delays, progress remained “good” and 3\textsuperscript{rd} Armored Division was thus approaching Liege. Indeed, at this time, fuel shortages primarily affected only the flanks, although 2\textsuperscript{nd} Armored Division nevertheless managed to continue advancing east of Louvain. Even had this formation managed to reach Maastricht, it would have been halted by four German divisions. Meanwhile, 5\textsuperscript{th} Armored Division was halted for half the day, although the infantry of 28\textsuperscript{th} Division continued to advance.\textsuperscript{43}

Further west, the Canadian Army continued operations near Calais, whilst Second Army solidified positions between Gent and Antwerp, with the Guards Division advancing eastward into the area north of Hasselt. As for Third Army, they remained firmly halted along the Moselle. Are we to believe that fuel alone delayed this advance, or did the presence of six German divisions have a far more decisive role? Attempting to answer this question, journalists insisted that the brief logistics delay allowed the “confused” Germans to “regroup and reorganize.”
However, the Germans had not merely been withdrawing from before Third Army, but they had also transferred 3rd and 15th Panzergrenadier Divisions from Italy. Consequently, the Germans had established a strong defensive line before Patton could have ever arrived. Indeed, according to Wilmot, the real tragedy is that Eisenhower gave Patton enough fuel to even try and capture Metz, instead of firmly halting Third Army at Verdun.44

30th Division

At dawn, the division began motorized movement, from Tournai toward positions southeast of Brussels, with 120th Regiment arriving by noon, followed by 117th and 119th Regiments. Facing no resistance, these regiments advanced along three different routes, with the general axis of advance being southeast toward Valenciennes, then east toward Mons and Louviere, and finally northeast through Nivelles.45

Along the northernmost route, 120th Regiment moved along “mucky country roads” between Enghien and Soignies, in order to avoid congestion which blocked the N7 between Tournai and Brussels. Eventually, 120th Regiment passed along the northern edge of the Waterloo battlefield, where a temporary headquarters was established at the Lion’s Mound. Subsequently, 120th Regiment occupied the triangle formed by Hulpe, Ohain, and Bourgeois. Further south, 117th Regiment held the forest west of Louvain, and 119th Regiment occupied the forest east of Genappe. Finally, 743rd Tank Battalion concentrated near Lasnes, with 30th Recon southwest of town. Once the division had thus established these “defensive assembly areas,” reconnaissance was conducted not by 30th Recon, but rather by 105th Engineer Battalion. The reason for this was because the engineers were assessing the quality of roads and bridges along the intended axis of advance.46
Ultimately, although fuel shortages certainly delayed this advance, 30th Division could not have hoped to blitz across the Meuse at Maastricht. Nor could they have magically pushed their way through the dense congestion at Liege.

1st Division

During the morning, 16th Regiment was dispersed between Mons and Louviere, with 2nd Battalion along the western flank at Quevy. Meanwhile, 18th Regiment occupied positions south of Charleroi, whilst 26th Regiment was further north, near Gosselies. Subsequently, the infantry began advancing along the northern banks of the Sambre/Meuse, although heavy congestion impeded their advance.47

Although most of the division moved eastward, 18th Regiment dispatched a taskforce west toward Thy (near Quevy), where a German battalion with two tanks was besieged by Belgian resistance. No explanation is given as to why 18th Regiment was thus employed, rather than 16th Regiment’s 2nd Battalion, although the obvious reasoning appears to be that 16th Regiment was expected to lead the advance.48

Ultimately, little opposition was encountered, although 1st Recon was engaged north of Sombreffe. By evening, 16th Regiment established a line extending north from Huy toward Wansoul, with 3rd Battalion projected east toward Ampsin. Meanwhile, 18th Regiment was northeast of Namur and 26th Regiment was between Jemeppe and Gembloux.49

9th Division

During the night, both prisoners and civilians testified that the Germans had withdrawn from Dinant. However, when 39th Regiment’s 3rd Battalion advanced at dawn, it became clear that delaying forces remained within the medieval citadel. Nevertheless, Dinant was cleared by
noon. Subsequently, 39th Regiment moved northeast toward Dorinne, although a company was left to defend Dinant.\textsuperscript{50}

Concurrently, 47th Regiment’s 2nd Battalion continued to occupy defensive positions at Hastiere, whilst 1st Battalion moved east, followed by 3rd Battalion. Naturally, this advance was preceded by the recon platoon, which operated with elements of 4th Cavalry Group. During the afternoon, they encountered an 88mm cannon, northeast of Hulsonniaux, where it defended a bridge across the Lesse. The recon troops infiltrated behind this gun and pinned the crew down, whilst light tanks from 4th Cavalry Group advanced and destroyed the gun. Subsequently, as 3rd Battalion passed through Celles, a heavy tank was encountered northeast of town. Once again, tanks were brought forward to destroy this target. Afterwards, 1st Battalion cleared the area east of Ciney, whilst 3rd Battalion occupied positions further north.\textsuperscript{51}

Simultaneously, 60th Regiment’s 3rd Battalion led the regiment along a route north of 47th Regiment, engaging German positions within the forest west of Boiseille, which delayed the column for two hours. Subsequently, 60th Regiment occupied the forest south of Soviet. Meanwhile, 9th Recon was initially tasked with screening the Lesse, between Anseremme and Houyet. Afterwards, they moved forward and established a “line of observation” extending in an arc from Conjoux toward Ciney, and then northwest toward Courriere. Ultimately, however, it was the artillery which was credited with playing the most significant role during this advance, having inflicted severe casualties via a “steady rain of death and destruction.”\textsuperscript{52}

\textit{4th Division}

During the day, the advance was delayed by more than mere shortages of gasoline. The division thus reported “increasing and stubborn rear-guard action” which was exacerbated by both the terrain and a series of destroyed bridges. Weather was also cited as a prominent concern.
Indeed, a heavy downpour had caused severe mud, such that one battalion reported that all fifty of their vehicles had to be towed by a single bulldozer.\textsuperscript{53}

During the morning, 8\textsuperscript{th} Regiment advanced through scattered resistance, until 1\textsuperscript{st} Battalion was halted by increased resistance, northeast of Villance. Meanwhile, to the southwest, 2\textsuperscript{nd} Battalion occupied the junction at Paliseul, where eight roads intersect. Afterwards, 1\textsuperscript{st} Battalion continued to advance through Libin and occupied the railway south of Poix. Concurrently, 12\textsuperscript{th} Regiment advanced toward Rochefort, with 1\textsuperscript{st} and 3\textsuperscript{rd} Battalions respectively occupying Chanly and positions southwest of Wellin. Likewise, 2\textsuperscript{nd} Battalion moved east from Fays and occupied the crossroads north of Transinne, which was described as a textbook position with excellent fields of fire. As for 38\textsuperscript{th} Cavalry Squadron, they continued further east toward Smuid.\textsuperscript{54}

At Wellin, 12\textsuperscript{th} Regiment’s 1\textsuperscript{st} Battalion found it difficult to prevent the exuberant populace from hindering combat operations, although the Belgian resistance was quite helpful. Subsequently, having planned to spend the night in Wellin, the battalion was instead ordered to continue toward Tellin, where they encountered an “all night party” which the exhausted troops desperately avoided. In other words, despite fuel shortages, this regiment was actually advancing ahead of schedule. As for 22\textsuperscript{nd} Regiment’s 2\textsuperscript{nd} and 3\textsuperscript{rd} Battalions, they finally joined the rest of the division, reaching Graide by midnight. Meanwhile, 1\textsuperscript{st} Battalion advanced east from Bogny toward the crossroads of Menuchenet, northeast of Mogimont.\textsuperscript{55}

According to the amusing anecdotes of Lieutenant Piper, apparently operating as a liaison between 2\textsuperscript{nd} Battalion and 38\textsuperscript{th} Cavalry Squadron, his daily misadventures began when a local farmer accused him of being a German. Afterwards, he visited Daverdisse, where he reported delicious pie and good wine. Eventually, having returned to 2\textsuperscript{nd} Battalion, Piper was ordered to
conduct reconnaissance toward Libin, where a strong German position had been reported. However, upon reaching Libin, Piper found that the town was instead occupied by the headquarters of 8th Regiment, which had also advanced ahead of schedule.²⁵-six

Summary

Between September 5 and 7th, 30th Division reorganized at Tournai and protected the base of Second Army’s advance toward Brussels. Subsequently, they began moving east toward Maastricht. Concurrently, after consolidating at Mons, 1st Division began moving east toward Liege. Meanwhile, redeploying from St. Quentin, 4th Division advanced toward Bastogne, along the southern flank of 9th Division. Finally, 9th Division crossed the Meuse at Dinant, facing extremely heavy resistance.
CHAPTER 15
APPROACHING AACHEN

Between September 8 and 10th, First Army incurred 498 combat casualties, as the Germans withdrew from the Meuse toward Aachen. According to Blumenson, there had been no coherent defense thus far, and “not even the most pessimistic prophet” would have asserted that it might take much longer to achieve victory. Nevertheless, First Army continued to report increasing resistance, particularly from artillery, whilst the extensive fortifications further east were seen as a looming problem with no easy solution. Far from optimistic, the records of 3rd Armored Division thus state that the prevailing mood was quite grim.¹

Indeed, First Army had its share of pessimists, and Corlett thus informed Hodges that he was becoming “rather worried” about the situation north of Liege. As Corlett wrote in his memoirs, “We were stretched to the breaking point…” Of course, although everyone naturally hoped for the best, the truth of the matter is that nobody could be certain how strongly the enemy would resist, although past experience suggested an obvious answer.²

The assumption was that resistance would be heavy, and Collins emphasized the “formidable” fortifications, noting that there was “no way of knowing” what might happen. Consequently, Collins informed Hodges that fuel was hardly the critical factor, as ammunition was far more important. Indeed, First Army’s artillery would soon be firing a thousand tons per day. Furthermore, Collins stated that additional fuel would have done very little to improve his mobility, as the enemy had already established numerous antitank obstacles. Meanwhile, he noted that his infantry were increasingly and understandably reluctant to advance.³

Likewise, the British were becoming quite concerned about the situation at Aachen. On September 10, when Montgomery ordered Second Army to begin planning for an advance
toward Arnheim, Dempsey instead suggested that Second Army might be better employed alongside First Army. In contrast, Montgomery’s thinking seems to have been that the advance toward Aachen was a frontal assault which had “no chance” of success, and regardless the enemy could withdraw toward Köln and the Rhine. Therefore, Montgomery sought to outflank what he correctly saw as a nearly impregnable position.4

Although Blumenson asserted that the Westwall was seen as a bluff, and as nothing more than a “bally-hooed” Maginot Line, Colonel Benjamin Dickson stated on September 3 that the fortifications were believed to be in good condition, and the area was known to be saturated with antitank obstacles. Furthermore, the Germans were constructing entrenchments and other earthworks. Meanwhile, strong forces were withdrawing toward these positions. Consequently, after clearing Liege and advancing east, 3rd Armored Division consistently reported heavy resistance. By September 10, they thus faced extensive minefields.5

Simultaneously, a hundred kilometers away, 5th Armored Division reported that their progress through Luxembourg was also slowed by minefields, which surrounded “numerous roadblocks, craters, and blown bridges.” On September 9, the advance was delayed all afternoon, west of Lëtzebuerg, where 34th Tank Battalion was ambushed and lost two tanks. Subsequently, eight P47 "tank-busters" strafed and bombed the heavy German tanks, but failed to damage them. Finally, tank-destroyers were brought forward, but once again the German armor proved too thick. The Germans only withdrew that evening, after the Americans brought forward a massive 155mm cannon.

Afterwards, on the morning of September 10, 34th Tank Battalion was once again ambushed, losing three tanks north of Lëtzebuerg. Amidst this chaos, Brigadier Regnier was cut off and enveloped by the enemy, where he observed that none of their vehicles were destroyed.
Subsequently, the division was delayed for several hours at Mersch, where they engaged in a brisk struggle against antitank defenses. By midnight, they were engaged at Schrondweiler, where German defenses were tersely described as “adequate.” Facing such continually difficult opposition, nobody seriously believed that resistance would soon dissipate.⁶

September 8

On September 8, Bradley was concerned because German tanks had overrun a headquarters of Third Army, and he was therefore demanding that 5⁴th Corps accelerate the advance of 5⁴th Armored Division, in order to better protect Third Army’s flank. An examination of the situation map suggests that 90⁰th Division was thus attacked by 15⁰th Panzergrenadier Division, which was positioned along the northern flank of Third Army, near Longuyon. Of course, Hodges argued with some justification that First Army should not be held responsible for Patton’s chronic refusal to defend his own flank.⁷

It was at this time that Twelfth Army Group appears to have begun thinking quite seriously about the presence of extensive German fortifications, which were suddenly highlighted upon Twelfth Army Group’s situation map, with more detail added the following day. Meanwhile, no progress was made along First Army’s flanks, with Twenty-First Army Group engaged between Calais and Antwerp, whilst Third Army concentrated 20⁰th Corps at Metz, and 12⁰th Corps at Nancy.

During the day, journalists insisted that Third Army had occupied Metz, although this was not actually achieved until November 18⁰th. Nevertheless, by exaggerating Patton’s success, journalists could claim that Patton had achieved “the farthest American advance eastward in this war or the last.” Of course, after Aachen was occupied on October 21⁰th, no journalist used such
grandiose language to celebrate the fact that Hodges had achieved such a historic advance. Instead, newspapers would simply state, “Aachen is ours.”

30th Division

The advance continued along three routes, moving via Wavre toward Jodoigne. In order to conserve fuel, “all motors, not immediately essential to combat elements, moved in long bounds... separately.” Although it is unclear just what exactly this meant in practice, it seems that the basic premise was that fuel is wasted when idling vehicles are blocked by congestion, and this was therefore a means of ensuring that columns could move efficiently. Of course, one might wonder whether such a system could conceivably have been implemented sooner. If so, then the actual problem was not logistics, but traffic control.

Ultimately, no opposition was encountered, except for a brief engagement near Longueville. Subsequently, 120th Regiment occupied positions between Outgaarden and Noduwez. Meanwhile, 117th Regiment was positioned between Jauche and Marilles, with 119th Regiment between Jauche and Folx. Once again, 743rd Tank Battalion was concentrated in reserve, northwest of Pietremau, whilst 823rd TD Battalion was dispersed. As for 105th Engineer Battalion, they were dispatched forward, where they conducted a “continuous reconnaissance” in conjunction with “hasty repairs.” Finally, 30th Recon was concentrated southeast of Jodoigne.

1st Division

This formation continued following 3rd Armored Division toward Liege. During the early morning, 16th Regiment attempted to determine the best axis of advance. However, congestion was so severe that even relatively small recon elements were unable to proceed.

Nevertheless, by noon, 18th Regiment was moving through Bierwart toward St. Georges, whilst 26th Regiment was moving through St. Remy toward Waremme and Kemexhe. Once
again, this advance was made in the manner of leapfrogging, with 16th Regiment remaining at Huy, where contact was established with 39th Regiment. Meanwhile, clearing rough terrain directly along the Meuse, 30th Recon concentrated near Engis, whilst the division headquarters was at Noville.

Later that evening, elements of 18th Regiment were dispatched to support the tanks in Liege. Subsequently, operating with elements of 3rd Armored Division and 113th Cavalry Group, 26th Regiment’s 3rd Battalion cleared the northwestern suburbs, whilst 3rd Armored Division constructed a bridge across the Meuse, north of the modern Esplanade Albert-ler.12

9th Division

During the day, 9th Division cleared the area southeast of Huy. During the morning, 39th Regiment thus advanced northeast through Spontin, with 2nd Battalion engaging German troops within the forest south of Ramelot. Subsequently, the battalion dispatched a company (with tanks) which advanced southeast toward Terwagne, whilst the rest of the battalion continued toward Tinlot.13

Meanwhile, 60th Regiment advanced toward Verlee, where the leading 1st Battalion engaged small German detachments. Although this opposition was quickly reduced, a German battalion was encountered nearby, at Borsu. Subsequently, 1st Battalion shifted eastward and 2nd Battalion was brought forward, after which approximately two hundred German infantry were killed. The advance then continued against scattered opposition, and the regiment eventually occupied the triangle formed by Pair, Warzen, and Bende. Of course, this was the same regiment which established a similar position at Cerny on August 30. Undoubtedly, it was no coincidence that in both cases the apex was situated at a crossroads, with refused flanks anchored upon forested terrain.14
Finally, 47th Regiment was motorized through 39th Regiment, and they occupied the area south of Liege, where they were attached to 3rd Armored Division. Once again, the records indicate that fuel was not the only factor limiting this advance, as there were insufficient vehicles available to move the entire regiment simultaneously, even after attaching the vehicles of 39th and 60th Regiments (both of which advanced on foot). Consequently, it was necessary for 47th Regiment to employ the inefficient system of shuttling, which wasted both time and fuel.

Ultimately, upon arriving south of Liege, 47th Regiment was employed defensively to protect the bridges from a potential advance by 2nd and 12th SS.15

4th Division

During the morning, 8th Regiment’s 1st Battalion advanced from Poix and was soon engaged within the forest, southwest of Hatrival. It’s not clear how this advance was conducted, as there are three plausible avenues of approach from Poix toward Hatrival. Quite possibly, the battalion made use of all three routes, with one company moving east along the N808 and thence southward, whilst a second company moved southeast through the forest (along the railroad), and finally a third company apparently redeployed through Libin in order to approach Hatrival from the southwest. Certainly, some forces did approach Hatrival from the southwest, as resistance was encountered northeast of the railroad, along the Rue de Libin. Subsequently, the advance continued against stubborn resistance, and was ultimately halted west of Vesqueville.16

Concurrently, 8th Regiment’s 3rd Battalion advanced east from Paliseul. Subsequently, they encountered resistance west of Libramont, around the crossroads of Recogne, which forced the battalion to retreat a half kilometer. Ultimately, 8th Regiment thus concluded that a “decided increase” in German artillery was beginning to “seriously handicap” their advance. Whoever
wrote this report would surely have been annoyed to learn that newspapers were simultaneously claiming that the enemy was “without the artillery needed.”

As for 12th Regiment, they advanced against moderate resistance, with 2nd Battalion occupying St. Hubert. Presumably, 2nd Battalion then passed through Libin and Hatrival, following behind 8th Regiment’s 1st Battalion. Indeed, confirming the depiction given above, the records of 2nd Battalion observe that they took a convoluted path through the forest, as the roads were blocked by obstacles. Meanwhile, elements of 38th Cavalry Squadron advanced through Arville and approached St. Hubert from the north. Upon reaching St. Hubert, 2nd Battalion engaged a German artillery battery which successfully withdrew. Meanwhile, 1st and 3rd Battalions occupied road junctions along the northern edge of the Ardennes. Here, near Masbourg, A-Company rescued a reconnaissance force which had been surrounded. Concurrently, 22nd Regiment eliminated bypassed pockets of resistance, with 1st Battalion moving north from Menuchenet toward Paliseul.

Later that evening, Lieutenant Piper was ordered to patrol southeast, but lacking a map went too far and stumbled into a German column at Bras. Fleeing from this apparent debacle, Piper lost two jeeps along with two of his subordinates, whilst a third individual was wounded. Returning the next morning, Piper discovered his dead comrades had been covered with flowers, and were lying amidst the carnage of a destroyed tank, two abandoned halftracks, and the “parts” of at least five enemy soldiers. Naturally, Piper wondered about all of this, but was forced to conclude, “I’ll never know...”

On September 9, Hodges met with Montgomery, and they presumably discussed the plan to advance toward Arnhem. Specifically, they must have discussed 30th Corps, which was
concentrating three divisions northwest of Hasselt. As these divisions subsequently moved north, First Army was expected to defend their rear. Meanwhile, at Hasselt, 2nd Armored Division faced elements of five divisions, which firmly blocked the road toward Maastricht. It was apparently a surprise to encounter these divisions, as the Germans had previously been assumed east of the Meuse, but instead they were still occupying forward positions.\textsuperscript{20}

Further east, patrols by 113\textsuperscript{th} Cavalry Group confirmed that the bridges north of Liege were all destroyed, whilst the eastern bank was well defended by German reserves. Meanwhile, southwest of Aachen, 9\textsuperscript{th} Division was opposed by elements of an additional five divisions, as they waited for 3\textsuperscript{rd} Armored Division to cross the Meuse at Liege. Even further south, securing the flank of Third Army, 5\textsuperscript{th} Armored Division advanced toward Petange and crossed the border into Luxembourg, where they faced steadily increasing resistance (described previously).

As for Third Army, little progress was made against the eight divisions which defended Metz. Newspapers once again emphasized Patton’s situation, claiming that the German position had already “crumbled.” However, showing a lack of concern about this sector, the Germans actually detached Panzer Lehr, which moved north into the zone of 5\textsuperscript{th} Corps. Indeed, First Army would thus continue to face the bulk of German strength. Consequently, on September 13, the ratio of American to German divisions was 0.5 for First Army and 0.8 for Third Army, giving Third Army a substantial handicap when compared with First Army.\textsuperscript{21}

Regardless of which army faced the more difficult situation, the front was clearly becoming static, and Montgomery naturally hoped to advance northward, before the Germans were able to consolidate there. Unfortunately, although the Canadian Army continued to engage scattered German forces between Calais and Brugge, Second Army faced an increasingly strong defensive line of seven divisions, extending eastward from Gent toward Roermond.\textsuperscript{22}
During the morning, 30th Division once again advanced eastward, with vehicles conserving fuel via long bounds. Subsequently, facing no resistance, 120th Regiment was positioned between Bommershoven and Vechmaal. Meanwhile, 117th Regiment was located between Widooie and Lauw, with 119th Regiment between Lauw and Kemexhe. As for 30th Recon, after preceding the advance, they coalesced northeast of Gie.23

By the end of the day, some elements of the division had thus marched fifty-five kilometers. As Corlett wrote within his memoirs, “We were definitely bogged down for lack of gasoline, but we got around on foot…” Of course, no amount of fuel would have teleported 30th Division across the Meuse, nor would it have dispelled the German divisions which were already concentrated between Liege and Maastricht. Perhaps, with more fuel and more vehicles, 30th Division could have arrived along the Meuse a day or two earlier, but there is little reason to believe that this would have significantly altered the strategic course of events.24

After passing through Liege and crossing the Meuse, this formation planned to move northeast toward Aachen, whilst 3rd Armored Division advanced along their southeastern flank, moving toward Stolberg. Consequently, 26th Regiment was ordered to follow 3rd/CCA across the river, and occupy the eastern suburb of Bruyeres. However, it was estimated that it would take all day to complete crossing. One reason given for this delay was an order that the tanks were not to exceed fifteen miles-per-hour, in order to conserve gasoline. However, one need merely glance at a map in order to realize that a vehicle travelling at such speeds would still have been able to reach Aachen within two hours. Indeed, rather than focusing upon fuel, the division records instead emphasize severe congestion and insufficient bridging.25
Subsequently, increasing tension is indicated by an almost flippant response given when 7th Corps inquired as to the 16th Regiment’s intended route of advance from Huy. According to the division headquarters, “We have no plan... We cannot move... We don’t anticipate moving anything... Don’t see how we can move before tomorrow... We don’t want you to get the idea that we are motorized, as we aren’t.” At the end of the day, the division thus reported “no movement,” which apparently annoyed Collins, “I want you to get [movement] instructions out if you have not... I want reconnaissance the first thing in the morning... I want you to get to Aachen as soon as you can... Push to the objective... I want you in the area tomorrow.” Unfortunately, although Aachen was only forty kilometers away, it would not be occupied for more than a month.26

9th Division

During the morning, operating between 3rd Armored Division and 4th Cavalry Group, 39th and 60th Regiments continued advancing against 12th SS Division, which maintained numerous pockets of resistance. Meanwhile, 47th Regiment remained attached to 3rd Armored Division, occupying defensive positions south of Liege.27

With 47th Regiment halted, 39th Regiment was motorized, although the infantry were forced to dismount west of Forges, as Louveigne was defended by infantry and tanks. This stubborn position was not eliminated until assistance arrived from 3rd Armored Division. However, further movement was soon impracticable, as the roads were severely congested. Subsequently, in support of 60th Regiment, 3rd Battalion was diverted south toward the heights north of Sprimont, where slow progress was made under fire from German mortars and 20mm cannon. Likewise, 2nd Battalion also supported 60th Regiment, clearing the area east of Sprimont.
and continuing toward German positions at Aywaille. Finally, after 60th Regiment occupied Aywaille, 2nd Battalion pivoted and moved northeast toward Louveigne.28

Concurrently, 60th Regiment advanced northeast through Ouffet, toward Sprimont, clearing resistance along the Ourthe at Chanxhe. Subsequently, they continued against scattered resistance and occupied Sprimont, where they turned south and crossed the Ambleve at Aywaille, against sporadic resistance. Shortly thereafter, the advance was halted, with 1st Battalion occupying the area north of Aywaille, whilst 2nd and 3rd Battalions defended positions south of the river.

Ultimately, despite the increased availability of transportation, it should be noted that the advance on September 9 was only half that of September 8. Indeed, much of 9th Division was being diverted southward. Quite simply, before an advance toward Aachen could be sustained, it was first necessary to clear the forests, from which German forces would otherwise interdict the rear. Indeed, with 12th SS occupying Aywaille, and 2nd SS lurking nearby, would it have been rational for 9th Division to have blithely continued northeast, smashing into the layered defenses of 275th, 347th, and 348th Divisions?

4th Division

During the day, 4th Division cleared the area northwest of Bastogne. 8th Regiment thus advanced through Libramont, and 1st Battalion was engaged at Amberloup, after which they occupied a line extending southeast from Sprimont toward Renaumont. Of course, this was not the same Sprimont which was simultaneously cleared by 9th Division. Meanwhile, 2nd Battalion cleared the forest southwest of Vecmont. During this advance, they encountered “heavy enemy artillery, mortar, machine-gun, and small-arms fire” which forced the battalion to “fight its way
through.” Concurrently, 3rd Battalion moved southeast from Libramont, moving against no resistance until halted by machine-gun fire, northwest of Bercheux.29

As for 12th Regiment, 2nd Battalion advanced northeast through St. Hubert and Champlon, whilst 1st and 3rd Battalions moved northeast via Nassogne. 2nd Battalion thus shared the N89 with 8th Regiment’s 2nd Battalion, apparently following behind until they approached Vecmont. At this point, the battalion from 12th Regiment took the lead, advancing slowly through numerous roadblocks. Meanwhile, 1st Battalion advanced toward Halleux (northwest of Vecmont), whilst 2nd Battalion was engaged against German tanks northeast of Roche. Finally, 3rd Battalion occupied a centralized position along the Ourthe, at the crossroads south of Jupille.30

Details of the struggle for Roche appear within the commentary of Lieutenant Piper, who watched from the safety of an artillery observation post, located along the forested ridge west of town. Having occupied the ridge during the afternoon, 2nd Battalion emplaced 57mm cannon alongside machine-guns, which opened fire upon two companies of German infantry within the medieval ruins. Taking advantage of this suppressing fire, American troops soon entered the town, occupying various hotels and firing from the windows. From this vantage point, Piper felt the battle was “almost enjoyable,” emphasizing that the battalion suffered no casualties during an engagement in which “machine-guns sat on beds” and nearly “everybody had a hotel room that he could fight from.” After two platoons of American tanks arrived, G-Company led the final assault and overwhelmed the demoralized defenders. Although the Americans thus took no casualties, a French volunteer was either killed or wounded.31

Piper provided some explanation for why 2nd Battalion found it so easy to capture this town. As he noted, “I have never seen a town [surrounded by] so many observation posts...
Every time a German opened up, he got everything [we had] right back.” Indeed, being located within a narrow river valley, Roche is completely dominated by the surrounding terrain, with the heights along the eastern bank overshadowed by those along the western bank. Piper concluded by noting that of all the places he visited in Europe, this was the most scenic.32

As for 22nd Regiment, they once again remained in reserve, eliminating bypassed resistance alongside elements of 102nd Cavalry Group. However, that evening, 3rd Battalion was motorized and ordered to pass through 8th Regiment, occupying Salle amidst a bombardment.33

September 10

On September 10, Hodges ordered 19th Corps to protect the southern flank of 30th Corps, which would soon be advancing north toward Eindhoven. Consequently, we can see yet one more reason why fuel shortages were not that important. Quite simply, within the zone of First Army, such shortages principally affected 19th Corps, which was assigned a defensive role anyways. Subsequently, although 30th Division would cross the Meuse, 2nd Armored Division would thus remain west of Maastricht until September 18th, where they were positioned to intervene against a potential counterattack against 30th Corps. Indeed, the Germans had thus positioned 176th Division at Roermond, holding a bridgehead west of the Meuse.

During the day, Hodges attended a discussion of the logistical situation, during which Colonel Robert Wilson observed that a “slight” delay was inevitable. Of course, the implications of this wording are that no major delay had yet occurred, nor was one expected to occur. Meanwhile, the staff of First Army remained far more concerned about ammunition. Concurrently, 7th Corps engaged in a “final regrouping” preparatory to their advance toward Aachen. What this meant in practice, was that regardless of the fuel situation, the immediate problem was severe congestion which continued to block the bridges at Liege. Further south,
supplied with plenty of fuel, 5th Armored Division made “excellent” progress through Luxembourg, after which they were halted by a combination of heavy tanks and antitank defenses.\textsuperscript{34}

Ultimately, although logistical concerns certainly existed, far more problematic was an increase in the number of divisions facing First Army, from eleven to fourteen. Likewise, Third Army also faced an increase, from eight to ten divisions, where journalists insisted that the “heaviest” fighting since Normandy was taking place. In contrast, between Brugges and Roermond, Twenty-First Army Group reported a decrease, from eleven to nine divisions. This certainly helps explain why Eisenhower supported Montgomery’s decision to advance northward.\textsuperscript{35}

\textit{30th Division}

This formation resumed advancing toward the Meuse, preceded by 113th Cavalry Group, and once again conserving fuel via long bounds. However, whereas the previous advance was conducted over three routes, increased congestion now funneled the advance into two routes, with 117th Regiment following 119th Regiment along the southern axis.\textsuperscript{36} As one participated noted, “We were continually on the move… wet, cold, and hungry.”\textsuperscript{37}

Advancing along the northern route, 120th Regiment began to encounter sporadic bombardment. During the morning, they were halted by resistance at Eben-Emael, and therefore requested an air-strike upon the fortifications. Unfortunately, this assistance was inexplicably unavailable, and that afternoon the frustrated regiment cancelled their request. Subsequently, 3rd Battalion advanced from the north, moving through a bombardment which inflicted several casualties. Nevertheless, the attack proceeded, only to discover that the German defenders had suddenly withdrawn. Supporting this advance, 2nd Battalion also suffered casualties, including
the death of their outstanding commander, Major Leland Lambe. Ultimately, 3rd Battalion occupied the fortifications, 1st Battalion occupied Zussen, and 2nd Battalion occupied the forest southwest of the fortifications. Concurrently, 119th Regiment’s 1st Battalion occupied Broux, whilst 2nd and 3rd Battalions established a line extending northeast toward Haccourt. Meanwhile, 117th Regiment was concentrated around St. Simeon, alongside 743rd Tank Battalion.

1st Division

During the day, 16th Regiment bypassed the congestion at Liege, by moving instead to the southern bank of the Meuse at Huy, and then continuing east toward the Ourthe. At dawn, the regiment therefore asked 1st Division to confirm that a bridge was definitely available to facilitate their crossing of the canal. The headquarters responded that the original bridge at vK488262 was not actually in place, but that another bridge was available at vK490262. At this point, 16th Regiment responded with some obvious irritation, “You told us to use the bridge at 488262...” Of course, the original location was merely a quarter kilometer away from the new location, with each site being on either side of the N633 at Angleur, but this incident certainly indicates the frustrating problem of traffic control.

Concurrently, 18th Regiment finally began crossing the Meuse at Liege, where 3rd Battalion was attacked by German aircraft. Fortunately, no casualties were inflicted, due to effective defensive fire from 103rd AA Artillery. Meanwhile, 26th Regiment established a screen along the northern flank, with 3rd Battalion occupying Hovement (west of the Meuse), whilst the rest of the regiment extended across the river toward Beyne-Heusay. Subsequently, that afternoon, 3rd Battalion crossed the river and advanced northeast toward Blegny. Advancing further north, 1st Recon reported that the Germans were at Dalhem, entrenched within minefields.
By holding this position, the Germans were thus protecting the southern flank of their position at Maastricht, and were capable of maintaining an interdictory bombardment between Liege and Aachen.41

That evening, having passed through 26th Regiment, 18th Regiment reached Herve whilst 16th Regiment was further south, near Rechain. At this time, it was reported that the Germans were withdrawing northeast through Aubel toward Aachen, behind a defensive screen which extended south from Aubel toward Befve. Approaching these positions, 18th Regiment’s 1st Battalion was fired upon by German tanks, and they reported that the Germans appeared uncharacteristically determined to defend this objective. It is thus that the battle of Aachen had clearly begun. Meanwhile, a patrol from 3rd Battalion encountered a strong position southeast of Thimster, which was supported by German tanks along the heights northeast, around Clermont. Meanwhile, the rest of 3rd Battalion was concentrated at Battice, where they endured a bombardment which inflicted fourteen casualties.42

9th Division

Although the Germans continued to withdraw, they were nevertheless able to maintain resistance along the entire front, via roving combined-arms teams which were routinely encountered.43 Meanwhile, it was believed that a sizable German force was attempting to retreat through the area of 4th Cavalry Group. Consequently, in order to interdict this force, 60th Regiment’s 1st Battalion was dispatched south toward Manhay, with 3rd Battalion moving southwest toward Hotton, whilst 2nd Battalion defended the bridge at Aywaille. Initially, the plan was to dispatch these battalions with tank support. However, lacking sufficient gasoline, the infantry proceeded without the tanks. Subsequently, after overcoming a series of defended
roadblocks, there was no sign of the reported German force, and 1st Battalion therefore returned to Awan (southwest of Aywaille) whilst 3rd Battalion lingered near Werbomont.44

Unfortunately, the records do not clarify what happened to the aforementioned German force, and perhaps it never actually existed. Regardless, this incident draws attention back toward the question of logistics. Of course, one might use this example to try and prove that the gasoline shortage was critical, but it is clear that there was a deeper level of complexity involved. Indeed, one should note that the lack of gasoline primarily affected only tanks, which were apparently not required. Furthermore, even had the tanks moved, they would have been moving away from Aachen. This suggests that the real factor limiting the advance was not a fuel shortage, but rather it was the continual threat posed by the mere hint of German resistance. Ultimately, even if 60th Regiment had unlimited fuel, they would have made absolutely no progress toward Aachen, since they were advancing in the opposite direction!

Concurrently, 39th Regiment also made no progress, as 1st and 3rd Battalions were halted near Louveigne. This was not because there was no fuel, but because these battalions were also prepared to move south. As for 2nd Battalion, they advanced east toward the Hoegne at Theux, but were soon stuck behind a column of 3rd Armored Division, which was halted because there was no bridge. Eventually, 2nd Battalion’s infantry were able to cross over a footbridge, but they were only able to advance a mere kilometer past Oneux, because they were tied logistically to their vehicles. The infantry were thus halted east of Oneux, where they defended the crossroads northeast of town, at Boru. Here, mirroring positions seen elsewhere, their flanks were anchored within the woods on either side, with a company holding a half kilometer skirmish line extending further south, through the fields.45
Finally, 47th Regiment also made no progress. Instead, they were merely returned to 9th Division and concentrated near Beaufays, where they defended bridges at Esneux and Tilff, with various platoons detached to guard other bridges. Of course, this redeployment represented yet another movement away from Aachen. For example, 1st Battalion had previously been guarding bridges south of the isle of Monsin, northeast of Liege, and now they were south of Liege.46

4th Division

This formation advanced “preparatory to assembling before launching a coordinated attack on the West Wall.” During the morning, 8th Regiment’s 1st Battalion was thus shifted southeast to envelop Bastogne, advancing east through St. Etienne and encountering machine-gun and artillery fire near Hemroule, after which they occupied positions west of Bizory. Meanwhile, 2nd Battalion remained in reserve, whilst 3rd Battalion moved northeast from Bercheux.47

At this time, 8th Regiment reported that German resistance was becoming “increasingly fluid.” In particular, road centers were inevitably defended by strong delaying forces, which were supported by an increasing quantity of artillery, such that the defending infantry were able to withdraw with ease. In contrast, newspapers simply stated that German defenses were “thin.” Although this may have been true, it thus seems that a thin defense can actually be quite effective when deployed with considerable depth.48

Concurrently, 12th Regiment remained in reserve until noon, awaiting the advance of 22nd Regiment, after which they cleared roadblocks near Samree. Eventually, 1st Battalion approached Regne amidst a heavy bombardment.49 Further south, 2nd Battalion occupied the hamlet of Pisserotte.50 Finally, 22nd Regiment was inserted between 8th and 12th Regiments, at Salle. This redeployment employed trucks, despite the fuel shortage.51 Indeed, it is once again clear that the
actual limiting factor was not fuel, as there was still a lack of sufficient vehicles. Consequently, the battalions of 22nd Regiment had to be shuttled one at a time, with the trucks returning forty kilometers to pick up the next battalion. Mathematically, driving in this way, the trucks had to drive two hundred kilometers in order to move forty, and the advance thus took five times longer.

Eventually, 22nd Regiment’s 3rd Battalion advanced northeast from Salle, through light resistance at Bertogne, which steadily hardened into a “stubborn rear-guard action” at Houffalize. This resistance was finally eliminated after the intervention of 893rd TD Battalion’s C-Company. Apparently, the tanks fired indirectly at a range of nearly four kilometers, destroying a German tank and several additional vehicles. Afterwards, once the enemy withdrew, the citizens of Houffalize helped clear roadblocks and repaired a bridge. Ultimately, 3rd Battalion thus occupied Sommerain, 2nd Battalion was south of Houffalize, and 1st Battalion anchored the regiment at Bertogne.52

Summary

Between September 8 and 10th, 30th Division continued toward the Meuse, occupying the fortifications at Eben-Emael. Concurrently, pushing through considerable congestion at Liege, 1st Division was heavily engaged east of the Meuse. Meanwhile, also operating east of the Meuse, 9th Division was delayed by German forces along their southern flank. Finally, operating even further south, 4th Division faced considerable difficulty amidst rugged terrain.
CHAPTER 16

“THE STRONGEST DEFENSIVE BELT EVER”

On September 11 and 12th, First Army incurred 378 combat casualties during an initial advance against the German fortifications. According to Collins, Hodges wanted to temporarily halt the advance in order to ensure that there was sufficient ammunition, but subsequently agreed to allow a “reconnaissance in force.” Perhaps going too far, Collins thus ordered an all-out effort, which was supported by 19th Corps. Indeed, at this time, it seems that Corlett and Collins talked with one another far more regularly than with Hodges. Consequently, although historians have argued that Hodges had a tendency to micromanage his commanders, this certainly wasn’t the case in early September.1

Along the northern flank, 30th Division faced heavy resistance. Further south, 1st Division moved east toward Aachen and the Preuswald, facing equally difficult resistance. Meanwhile, 3rd Armored Division faltered before vicious, murderous, and withering defensive fire. In an understatement, Collins concluded in his memoirs, “Not much progress was made…” More pointedly, Corlett observed that 7th Corps had been “definitely stopped” and “did not have an ounce of offensive strength left.”2

One might inquire as to whether German resistance was exaggerated. Murderous? After all, less than four hundred casualties were actually incurred. However, one must remember that these were mostly concentrated within just three divisions. Indeed, 2nd Armored Division was still halted west of the Meuse. Further south, the Germans had suddenly withdrawn, and 4th and 9th Division thus remained mired within the forest, whilst 5th Corps reported almost “no response” from the withdrawn enemy. Once again comparing the casualties of 7th Corps with those of 1st Marine Division at Fallujah, in November of 2004, each of the advancing divisions
faced resistance which was significantly more intense. Had First Army been advancing against such resistance along a frontage of ten divisions, as was the case in early August, the combined casualties would have exceeded one thousand.³

September 11

On September 11, Hodges met with Collins and Gerow, finalizing plans for their advance. Meanwhile, leading elements of 5th Armored Division crossed the German border near Bitburg. Further north, 30th Division crossed the Meuse, with 113th Cavalry Group clearing the eastern bank between Liege and Maastricht.

At this time, there was an intelligence report which suggested that the Westwall was only occupied by reserve troops. This was undoubtedly true, but it does not mean that the fortifications were weakly held, and Hodges warned his subordinates to expect solid resistance. Indeed, the eight divisions of First Army were facing fourteen divisions, which still occupied defensive positions in front of the fortifications. Subsequently, as they withdrew, the German plan was to shelter their inexperienced reserves within the fortifications, whilst more experienced troops remained outside where they could maneuver and counterattack. As one intelligence summary concluded, “It soon became apparent that Allied intelligence had underestimated enemy capabilities of defending… with miscellaneous units such as fortress, replacement, sicherung, and landschuetzen battalions.”⁴

Along the northern flank, Second Army continued to orient northward between Antwerp and Neerpelt, whilst 2nd Armored Division remained in reserve at Hasselt. As for Third Army, 12th and 20th Corps were halted along the Moselle, although 15th Corps was brought forward, south of Nancy. With Twenty-First Army Group reorganizing, and Third Army blocked at Metz, First Army finally enjoyed some publicity for essentially the first time since July. As the artillery
of 7th Corps bombarded German soil, journalists thus celebrated the “powerful offensive” which Hodges now “unmasked.” Unfortunately, once again misinterpreting events, such accounts reported that there was no indication of serious resistance.5

30th Division

Beginning at midnight, patrols were dispatched eastward by 120th Regiment’s 2nd and 3rd Battalions, in order to determine whether German forces occupied the isle of Lanaye, between the Albert canal and the Meuse. Subsequently, those from 2nd Battalion encountered no resistance, whilst those from 3rd Battalion were halted by violent resistance. It thus appears that the Germans were concentrated around the town of Lanaye. Meanwhile, additional German forces were firing from the heights east of the Meuse.6

At dawn, 3rd Battalion began exploring the extensive subterranean area under Eben-Emael, after locating a civilian engineer who told them how to turn on the lights. It is thus fortunate that the Germans had not left troops within the fortifications, where they might have unexpectedly emerged during the night. Meanwhile, 1st Battalion’s A-Company crossed the canal near Vroenhoven, patrolling northwest toward Kanne. This company was then assigned to 2nd Battalion, in exchange for F-Company. Similarly, as discussed below, 3rd Battalion’s K-Company would also cross the river and be attached to 2nd Battalion, being swapped for G-Company. The operations of companies from two different battalions were thus coordinated by the headquarters of a third battalion.7

Meanwhile, American observers were able to observe distant German crews loading and firing 88mm artillery, which maintained a constant bombardment of the fortifications, resulting in several casualties including the death of Captain James Lott (M-Company). The records dedicate several paragraphs discussing this exceptional officer. Indeed, the commander of B-
Company wrote in his memoir that this was a particularly sad event, coming so soon after the death of 2nd Battalion’s commander. Ultimately, what Lott’s death symbolizes is the extent of attrition, during which experienced personnel were steadily being lost through a series of relatively minor engagements.\(^8\)

Having served previously in Normandy, Lott was credited with the development of a new doctrine for directing mortar fire. In essence, what he realized was that the official method of coordinating mortar fire was ineffective, because it was based upon the telephone and the SCR-536 handie-talkie radio. Unfortunately, telephone lines were frequently knocked out by enemy artillery, and excessive casualties were suffered during attempts to repair the wiring. Meanwhile, the SCR-536 had abysmal reception, frequently failing at ranges of less than a single kilometer. What Lott did was to improvise a new system, in which observers directed fire via the company commander’s more powerful SCR-300 walkie-talkie, which could transmit at ranges approaching five kilometers. Consequently, this increased range meant that mortar teams could fire from further away, and therefore they did not have to redeploy as often.\(^9\)

That evening, a patrol from K-Company was ordered to occupy the Meuse locks, located north of Lanaye. This operation took three hours, since the area was surrounded by extensive minefields. In order to avoid these, it was first necessary for a platoon from 105th Engineer Battalion’s A-Company (Lieutenant Grow) to lower boats from a tunnel within the Eben-Emael complex, which emerged halfway down an almost perpendicular cliff. Dangling in midair, these boats were then boarded by a squad of infantry who emerged from a nearby drainage tunnel, after which the loaded boats were lowered to the canal. Subsequently, this force bypassed the minefields and surprised the German garrison, which was preparing to destroy the locks and thereby flood terrain further north.\(^10\)
Afterwards, a platoon from K-Company was dispatched to defend the locks. Shortly after midnight, this platoon ambushed a company of German infantry, inflicting ninety-six casualties. During the subsequent day, the defending platoon was thus surrounded by the pitiful moans of German wounded. Although medics attempted to provide assistance, the platoon was completely enveloped by German infantry, and very little could be done amidst intense suppressing fire.11

During the evening of September 11, 120th Regiment’s E-Company dispatched a platoon which crossed the canal and attempted to occupy Lanaye, where they were halted by defensive fire. Subsequently, a second platoon was dispatched as reinforcement, and the town was eventually occupied. Afterwards, elements of E-Company were able to cross the Meuse, establishing positions north of Eijsden. Meanwhile, three companies (L, K, and G) also crossed the canal, and occupied positions along the island, between the locks and Lanaye. Shortly thereafter, K-Company dispatched elements across the Meuse, establishing additional positions northwest of Moorland.12

As for 119th Regiment, during the afternoon, L-Company crossed the Meuse near Vise, followed by the rest of 3rd Battalion, and then 1st and 2nd Battalions. This was conducted with the assistance of 105th Engineer Battalion’s A&C-Companies, northeast of Oupeye, which operated a system of “assault boat ferries.” Although the advance proceeded against negligible resistance from machine-guns and artillery, casualties were nevertheless incurred. Meanwhile, supporting artillery bombarded Vise, which the Germans had abandoned.13 Unfortunately, a number of rounds fell short, resulting in additional casualties. Of course, utilizing small boats, it was not possible for the battalion’s vehicles to cross. Consequently, these were directed southward, where they passed through the congestion at Liege and returned north along the eastern bank.14
By evening, 3rd Battalion was occupying the forest east of St. Andre. Meanwhile 1st Battalion was occupying positions northeast of Dalhem, within a triangle formed by Mortroux, Neufchâteau, and Bombaye. Finally, advancing along the southern flank, 2nd Battalion concentrated southwest of St. Andre, along the banks of the Asse. Concurrently, operating along the northern flank of 120th Regiment, 117th Regiment remained in reserve at St. Simeon, although patrols were dispatched northward, between Tongeren and Maastricht. Likewise, this same area was patrolled by 30th Recon.

Throughout the day, observers spotted German infantry moving south toward 119th Regiment. Subsequently, this movement was interdicted by artillery fire, and whole groups were “blown into the air.” Nevertheless, a significant number of enemy troops managed to proceed, and 119th Regiment’s 1st Battalion was thus engaged throughout the night, whilst K-Company ambushed a column which had apparently bypassed the western flank of 1st Battalion.

1st Division

At 08:30, 980th Artillery’s A-Battery fired what appears to have been the first Allied bombardment across the German border, directed at the railroad near Preuswald. This 155mm mission was fired at a range of twenty-two kilometers, from positions south of Noblehaye. Meanwhile, the division objective advanced along the northern flank of 3rd Armored Division, which was moving from Vervins toward Eupen.

The immediate objective for 18th Regiment was to clear Aubel. Consequently, 2nd Battalion’s scout platoon was soon engaged north of Charneux, just west of the N642/650 junction. According to the records, one member of this platoon was thus credited with killing ten Germans. By noon, the regiment was advancing toward Aubel, with 3rd Battalion moving north along the N648, whilst 2nd Battalion moved northeast along the N642. Meanwhile, 16th Regiment
advanced northeast along the N3, via Thimster and Clermont, encountering minefields, roadblocks, and machine-guns. Subsequently, within positions west of Henri, 1st Battalion was halted amidst a German bombardment. As for 26th Regiment, they remained near Blegny, protecting the northwestern flank of 18th Regiment. Finally, 1st Recon bypassed the Germans at Dalhem and advanced toward Berneau. Eventually, Dalhem would be cleared by 113th Cavalry Group, whilst 119th Regiment established positions east of Dalhem.19

During the afternoon, 18th Regiment’s 3rd Battalion occupied positions southwest of Froidthier, where they were halted by German resistance. That evening, they continued a slow advance against continued resistance, whilst contact with 2nd Battalion was lost. Eventually, 3rd Battalion reached the river northwest of Froidthier, where there were no bridges, although the infantry “manhandled” jeeps across. Finally, at dusk, 3rd Battalion occupied positions southeast of Aubel, whilst 2nd Battalion was located southwest of town. Subsequently, aerial and artillery support were employed against a German convoy which was withdrawing eastward, along the ridge north of Aubel. Ultimately, 3rd Battalion incurred thirty-four casualties during this effort.20

During the day, a report from 18th Regiment once again revealed considerable tension between the various headquarters. Apparently, 1st Division had not allowed 18th Regiment to employ 1st Battalion, and the regimental commander demanded an explanation for this. No such explanation appears to have been given, although the battalion was eventually allowed to rejoin its regiment. However, considering the ten kilometer gap between 18th and 26th Regiments, which were respectively at Blegny and Aubel, it seems likely that this battalion was deployed between Julemont and Charneux. Presumably, they were released once 119th Regiment was positioned north of Julemont.21
9th Division

During the day, this formation lost contact with the withdrawing enemy, aside from scattered resistance. However, the advance remained halted, with 39th Regiment still waiting for their vehicles to cross the Hoegne. Subsequently, that afternoon, 2nd and 3rd Battalions were diverted southeast, where 4th Cavalry once again requested assistance, this time against German troops at Malmedy. However, with darkness falling, even this was not carried out, and the regiment remained near Theux, although 2nd Battalion made a meager advance toward Polleur (well short of their intended destination at Spa).22

Somewhat more progress was made by 47th Regiment, which occupied positions northeast of Verviers, where they were bombarded. Meanwhile, 60th Regiment began returning northward, crossing the Ambleve at Aywaille, but they were unable to proceed further than Sprimont. Ultimately, although one might reasonably conclude that the advance was insufficient, there is simply no reason to attribute this to a fuel shortage. Instead, as the records emphasize, the primary problems were “roadblocks... weapons... mines... [and] the demolition of bridges.”23

4th Division

During the morning, 8th Regiment moved northeast from Bastogne, clearing Houffalize by noon. Subsequently, they advanced toward Bovigny, which was occupied that evening, whilst a single company continued toward Rogery.24

Concurrently, 12th Regiment continued east from Regny toward Vielsalm. Leading this advance, A&C-Companies cleared the ridges on either side of the N89. Immediately west of Salm, C-Company received heavy mortar fire which inflicted several casualties. Subsequently, tanks and infantry were engaged along the eastern bank of the Salm river. During this heavy fighting, an American tank-destroyer was credited with destroying a German tank at a range
exceeding three kilometers. Afterwards, C-Company attacked the town of Salm, which was occupied two hours later, with support from A-Company along the northern flank. Meanwhile, 2\textsuperscript{nd} Battalion advanced toward Bihain, advancing through the forest, after which they continued east toward Cirreux and Rogery. From this position, patrols were extended further east toward Commanster, in order to cut the N823 southeast of Vielsalm. Finally, although no specific details are available regarding 3\textsuperscript{rd} Battalion, an examination of the map suggests that they moved northeast from Sart toward Goronne, and then east toward Vielsalm.\textsuperscript{25}

As for 22\textsuperscript{nd} Regiment, they initially advanced in the center of 4\textsuperscript{th} Division, encountering bicycle troops armed with machine-guns, northwest of Bovigny. Subsequently, the regiment continued southeast and established a line along the southern flank, extending from Bovigny toward the forest west of Gouvy. Afterwards, elements continued advancing as far east as Grufflingen. From here, patrols were dispatched toward the German border. Shortly before midnight, Lieutenant C.M. Shugart thus led one of these patrols across the border, northwest of Winterspelt.\textsuperscript{26}

September 12

On September 12, Hodges attended a conference with Bradley and Patton, during which it was acknowledged that it would be necessary to halt for a “short period,” although the records do not indicate that fuel shortages were being blamed for the immediate situation. Instead, according to Corlett, his primary concern was the five divisions opposing 19\textsuperscript{th} Corps. Although such divisions were certainly understrength, amounting to perhaps five regiments, this was little consolation considering that Corlett possessed only five regiments.

Meanwhile, 3\textsuperscript{rd} Armored Division advanced northeast of Eupen, moved south of the Preuswald. Although the records do not state that fuel shortages delayed this effort, they do state
that they faced considerable resistance and numerous obstacles, and that the division was thus halted south of Oberforstbach, “Casualties mounted alarmingly... One by one, the American Shermans were hit and set ablaze. At dusk on that bitter day... there was a steady flickering of guns along the skyline, and a meshing crackle of small arms to accentuate the curving whistle and crash of shells.” In particular, 32nd Armored Regiment’s 2nd Battalion lost twenty tanks, and the battalion commander (Captain Louis Plummer) was seriously injured.27

Concurrently, the Canadian Army finally cleared Havre, whilst 30th Corps continued their preparations, concentrating two armoured divisions at Neerpelt. Further south, Third Army’s 5th Division began crossing the Moselle south of Metz, after which 80th Division was scheduled to follow. Meanwhile, even further south, the formal link between Third and Seventh Armies was established at Sombernon, west of Dijon, with the latter army thus completing its advance from Marseilles.

Ultimately, momentarily eclipsing Patton, it was now Hodges whom journalists described as “rampaging” forward in a “blow for which the United Nations had long waited.” Nevertheless, Patton also waged a “blazing battle” which was “shortly” expected to achieve victory. Only a few phrases of this celebratory narrative foreshadowed coming difficulties, noting that First Army was encountering “the densest minefields seen since [June],” amidst “terrain better adapted for defense.”28

30th Division

30th Division was tasked with defending the northern flank of 7th Corps, with 120th Regiment occupying defensive positions south of Maastricht, between Kanne and Lanaye. Meanwhile, 119th Regiment moved north into Holland, with 1st and 3rd Battalions leading. By noon, this regiment was halted by resistance which extended southeast from Eijsden through
Gravenvoeren, encompassing the ridge northeast of Warsage. Here, entrenched German infantry were supported by 20mm cannon, and the advance was thus halted for two hours, until the Germans were finally forced to withdraw by an extensive bombardment.²⁹

Eventually, 119th Regiment’s 1st Battalion occupied Gravenvoeren with a single company, whilst the rest of the battalion was directed to support 3rd Battalion, northeast of Warsage. Meanwhile, the advance was once again halted, this time for three hours. After a renewed bombardment, the advance briefly resumed, although 1st Battalion was promptly halted by heavy opposition. Along the eastern flank, K-Company was heavily engaged south of Terlinden, with L-Company operating along their western flank. Under Lieutenant Leslie Stanford, L-Company was delayed by counterattacks, during which Sergeant Daniel Petersen was credited with sniping the driver of a halftrack. Subsequently, although L-Company entered Terlinden from the west, K-Company was still pinned down south of town, and both companies were thus enveloped by “numerous” German infantry. Such difficult engagements are completely obscured within the division history, which merely notes that German resistance was gradually “broken down.”³⁰

Concurrently, 119th Regiment’s 1st Battalion was halted at Mheer, southwest of Banholt, where the Germans were “laying in” a heavy defensive bombardment. During the subsequent struggle for Banholt, a Sergeant Burroughs reportedly killed seventeen Germans with a machine-gun. Afterwards, the advance was led by C-Company’s 2nd Platoon under Lieutenant Shetter. As night fell, this force was ambushed by three 20mm cannon, one of which was firing from a range of just fifty meters. Reacting quickly, Shetter ordered suppressing fire, and dispatched a squad through a graveyard along his flank. Once the flanking squad distracted the Germans, Shetter
ordered a frontal assault and cleared the position. Meanwhile, in reserve, 2nd Battalion occupied the forest west of Noorbeek.31

As for 117th Regiment, 1st and 2nd Battalion began crossing the Meuse at Vise, although it took the entire day to cross. Subsequently, both battalions encountered moderate resistance along the Dutch border, where they were presumably deployed along the southwestern flank of 119th Regiment. Afterwards, they established a reserve position, occupying the triangle of Eijsden, Gravenvoeren, and St. Geertruid.32

During the day, 743rd Tank Battalion also crossed the river and concentrated south of Vise, whilst 823rd TD Battalion established antitank positions alongside the infantry. As for 30th Recon, they continued to operate along the western bank, where they moved north and maintained contact with 30th Corps. Likewise, along the eastern bank, 113th Cavalry Group maintained contact between 1st and 30th Divisions. Finally, 105th Engineer Battalion had another busy day, with A-Company clearing minefields near Warsage, whilst B&C-Companies constructed four additional bridges, between Eijsden and Oupeye.33

1st Division

Shortly after midnight, four battalions of artillery were directed to bombard fortified positions east of Neufchateau, from which German artillery were firing upon 30th Division. Meanwhile, presumably in response to the previous bombardment of 16th Regiment’s 1st Battalion, 2nd Battalion relieved that formation west of Henri. Concurrently, 3rd Battalion cleared the forest of Grunhaut, southwest of Welkenraedt.34

Anticipating extensive fortifications, the division was provided with eight “planes... with flame-throwers,” which would be orbiting overhead during the day. It is not clear what kind of ordnance this refers to, and the headquarters thus sought clarification from 7th Corps, which
vaguely explained that the planes were carrying experimental “bombs with liquid flamethrowers.” Subsequently, the division advised its regiments to mark appropriate targets with red smoke. However, 18th Regiment noted that the Germans were using red smoke to mark American positions, suggesting violet smoke instead. Meanwhile, 16th Regiment claimed that their positions near Hirtz were being bombarded by artillery attached to 18th Regiment.35

By noon, 18th Regiment’s 3rd Battalion was halted by “quite a force” at Plombieres, where “the most stubborn” German infantry were supported by a company of tanks. Further south, 16th Regiment engaged German infantry near Kelmis, who gradually withdrew into the Preuswald. Further north, 1st Recon moved toward Holland, until halted by a German battalion which defended the forest south of Planck.

During the afternoon, following a bombardment of Plombieres, 18th Regiment’s 3rd Battalion resumed advancing amidst a reciprocal German bombardment. Meanwhile, 26th Regiment continued to screen the northern flank, with support from 18th Regiment’s 1st and 2nd Battalions. Later that evening, 18th Regiment’s E-Company thus crossed the Dutch border east of Teuven, facing scattered resistance within the forest.

Concurrently, along the southern flank, 16th Regiment’s 1st Battalion crossed the German border, occupying the heights southeast of Preuswald, whilst 3rd Battalion moved east from Kelmis toward Hauset. Meanwhile, friendly fire was once again an issue, as 3rd Armored Division was attempting to clear Eynatten, after advancing northeast from Eupen. Unfortunately, this division’s artillery thus “plastered” I-Company, north of Eynatten.36

Finally, 26th Regiment concentrated north of Aubel (although 1st Battalion was at Eupen with 3rd Armored Division), whilst 18th Regiment’s 1st Battalion was redeployed through
Hombourg toward Kelmis. Meanwhile, continuing to advance northeast, 18\textsuperscript{th} Regiment’s 3\textsuperscript{rd} Battalion occupied Gemmenich by midnight, just seven kilometers from the center of Aachen.\textsuperscript{37}

\textit{9\textsuperscript{th} Division}

At dawn, 39\textsuperscript{th} Regiment’s 2\textsuperscript{nd} and 3\textsuperscript{rd} Battalions continued advancing south toward Malmedy, during which no contact was made, as the enemy had withdrawn. Consequently, after establishing contact with 4\textsuperscript{th} Cavalry Group, the infantry returned to Theux. Considering that 60\textsuperscript{th} Regiment had previously conducted a similar detour, the cumulative mileage involved in these diversions was considerable. For example, it is approximately forty kilometers from Theux to Malmedy and back again, and yet it is only thirty kilometers from Theux to Aachen. Of course, it would not have been possible to advance directly toward Aachen, due to severe congestion.\textsuperscript{38}

As for 47\textsuperscript{th} and 60\textsuperscript{th} Regiments, these formations also made no progress, aside from patrolling Verviers. Once again, it was not possible to move northeast, as 3\textsuperscript{rd} Armored Division was completely blocking the area of Eupen. Instead, moving southeast from Verviers, Brigadier Kenneth Buchanan commanded a “reconnaissance in force,” composed of 9\textsuperscript{th} Recon, a company from 60\textsuperscript{th} Regiment, and a platoon of tanks. Advancing “to determine the enemy’s presence and strength,” this taskforce was ambushed and lost four armored cars. Clearly, the Germans continued to occupy the forest east of Spa.\textsuperscript{39}

\textit{4\textsuperscript{th} Division}

Facing little opposition, 8\textsuperscript{th} Regiment’s 1\textsuperscript{st} and 3\textsuperscript{rd} Battalions advanced toward Galhausen, southwest of St. Vith, with 2\textsuperscript{nd} Battalion in reserve. Meanwhile, 4\textsuperscript{th} Cavalry Group cleared St. Vith, establishing a line extending north toward Malmedy and Bütgenbach. Likewise, 12\textsuperscript{th} Regiment also advanced toward St. Vith, where it was 3\textsuperscript{rd} Battalion’s turn to enjoy the “fun” of combat. Subsequently, 1\textsuperscript{st} Battalion continued further east toward Schlierbach, where Private
Maurice Wilson (B-Company) became the first member of the regiment to cross the border. According to Lieutenant Piper, this portion of Belgium was “definitely pro-German” and the troops felt more like conquerors than liberators. Likewise, other records emphasized that the populace was becoming “coldly indifferent.”

During the early morning, 22nd Regiment ordered a pair of patrols across the border. One of these, under Lieutenant E.C. Martin, engaged in numerous skirmishes, capturing three prisoners and destroying a tank. Subsequently, 3rd Battalion crossed the border and occupied Winterspelt, with 2nd Battalion further west at Reuland. Afterwards, Barton visited 3rd Battalion and thus became the first division commander to enter Germany.

Although this occupation of German soil certainly suggested an impending end to the war, the troops of 12th Regiment recognized that they now faced the “strongest defensive belt ever,” which was made even more formidable by the “extremely difficult terrain.” Although the records also acknowledge a “desperate” logistical situation, it thus becomes clear that this problem was more of an afterthought rather than the primary issue. Indeed, after three weeks of continuous movement, the troops were exhausted and the enemy was not defeated. Consequently, there was absolutely no reason to expect a rapid advance.

Summary

During September 11 and 12th, 30th Division was heavily engaged southeast of Maastricht. Concurrently, 1st Division was likewise engaged southwest of Aachen. Meanwhile, 9th Division continued to operate toward the south, whilst the terrain further east was increasingly rugged. Finally, 4th Division cleared the area northeast of Bastogne, facing similar difficulties.
CHAPTER 17

CONCLUSION

During August of 1944, journalists were eager to prove that Americans had mastered mechanized warfare. Fetishizing the German offensives of 1939 and 1940, they thus sought to portray the advance of Third Army as an American Blitzkrieg. Indeed, Patton deserves credit for liberating eighty thousand square-kilometers of French territory. However, considering that he faced comparatively little resistance, it seems clear that the operations of First Army were far more indicative of American doctrine.¹

An American Way of War

First Army conducted a series of mobile operations against heavy resistance: from St. Lo toward Villedieu and Tessy, from Percy toward St. Sever and Vire, from Villedieu toward St. Pois and Mortain, from Barenton toward Ger and Domfront, from Carrouges toward Putanges, from Mayenne toward Mace, from Verneuil and Nonancourt toward Evreux and Elbeuf, from Mantes toward Tournai, from Melun toward Mons, from Hirson toward Dinant, and ultimately from Liege toward Aachen. Having previously conducted research on the operations of the 101st Airborne Division in Vietnam, I found more than a passing similarity to these wide-ranging maneuvers which resembled the churning waters of a stormy ocean. Indeed, that division was commanded by Olinto Barsanti, who had served in First Army’s 38th Regiment.

More than merely employing force projection, such operations are remarkable for the way that they simultaneously engage disparate objectives through what can be considered a widespread campaign of Shock and Awe. Although that particular phrase has been widely mocked, it seems clear that if the United States does fight another major war, the enemy can
expect multiple simultaneous attacks, proceeding consistently regardless of opposition or consequences, in the brutal manner of the Ardennes, the Wilderness, or the Hürtgenwald.

Although aggressive junior officers are naturally encouraged to maneuver and encircle the enemy in a classic battle of annihilation, American strategists are consistently willing to engage in prolonged attrition, and they will do so despite public protests and with an almost irrational disregard for economic costs. One can gain an idea of what such warfare resembles by considering the experiences of 8th Regiment at St. Pois, 12th Regiment at Tete, 16th Regiment at Bettignies, 18th Regiment at Plombieres, 22nd Regiment at St. Quentin, 26th Regiment at Sars, 47th Regiment at Perriers, 60th Regiment at Heer, 117th Regiment at St. Barthelemy, 119th Regiment at Tournai, and 120th Regiment at Tessy. In every case, mobile operations concluded with extremely heavy fighting.

Despite this string of victories, the enemy somehow managed to maintain a determined defensive effort. Meanwhile, First Army endured a cumulative attrition of nearly 20 percent between August 1 and September 12, which ominously reached 50 percent on December 16. Was this because American operations were fundamentally flawed when compared to the brilliant maneuvers of Rommel, Manstein, Mellenthin, and Guderian? Indeed, Collins compared himself to the often criticized Alexander von Kluck, who commanded First Armee during the German offensive of 1914. After an arguably brilliant and impressive advance, Kluck was nevertheless halted just short of his objective, and the mobile bewegungskrieg thus turned into a static stellungskrieg. Likewise, after being halted at Aachen, First Army was reduced to what Benjamin Rush has correctly described as “prolonged and bitter attrition.”

2
Logistics

By emphasizing the successful advance in July, historians are confronted with a paradox. After a seemingly overwhelming offensive, did fuel shortages really force a halt? Aachen for a gallon? Not only does this simplistic presentation ignore consistent resistance, but it also ignores deteriorating weather, rugged terrain, insufficient bridging, and incessant congestion. Although the Allied plan was simple enough, to merely pursue a retreating enemy, the reality was far more complex than historians have appreciated.

However, surely, logistical difficulties were truly a critical problem… right? No, definitely not. The United States was and is one of the best maintained forces in the world. Although there were certainly problematic shortages of fuel, food, ammunition, and spare-parts, these were soon resolved. Any notion of a fuel shortage was relative, considering that a single armored division contained more than four thousand vehicles, many of which were carrying three times more cargo than they were officially capable of transporting. On September 1, First Army was thus advancing with nearly fifty thousand vehicles.³

During the worse phase of the crisis, tanks ran out of gas in the morning, and yet they were frequently refueled by noon. On September 7, 30th Division complained that their advance from Tournai had been halted by fuel shortages, although they still managed eighty kilometers. Surprisingly, between September 1 and September 13, First Army actually consumed an average of fifty thousand more gallons per day, than they had consumed between August 19 and August 31. Meanwhile, at the peak of the crisis, on September 2, First Army maintained a quarter million gallon reserve. This was enough to completely refuel five hundred M4 tanks and more than two thousand M35 trucks. However, this reserve was never depleted, and the army thus consumed nearly a million additional gallons within forty-eight hours.⁴
Regardless, fuel was never the primary logistical issue. Both records and memoirs confirm that maintenance was a more critical factor, alongside ammunition. Belton Cooper thus emphasized that this issue has not been properly appreciated by historians, and he also noted that the enemy was continuously operating with an inferior logistical situation. Meanwhile, although the American troops were not always fed, they certainly did not starve, and they were frequently provided with captured rations. Likewise, they began using German vehicles, German fuel, German weapons, and they undoubtedly wore German boots. Some of the American reports were actually being typed on German paper and filed within German folders. In other words, the supply crisis was more of an inconvenience, rather than a debilitating disaster.5

As Eisenhower noted within his memoirs, many of his subordinates became unduly "obsessed" with the issue of logistics. Unfortunately, the Germans still had significant combat reserves and it was thus "completely fantastic" to believe that a dramatic advance was possible, regardless of the logistical situation. Therefore, Eisenhower stated that even if a force of ten divisions had been given unlimited support, they would have met "inescapable defeat."

Specifically, Eisenhower cited the failure of Second Army’s subsequent advance toward Arnhem as proof that there was never any realistic chance of a breakthrough. Therefore, refuting the traditional notion that supply shortages halted the Allied advance, Eisenhower instead praised the "spectacular" organizational success which was achieved by "astonishing" and "extraordinary" efforts. Although he acknowledged that additional supplies would certainly have expedited the advance, his point was that it is wholly unreasonable to have expected even more success.6

Why, then, have historians persisted in perpetuating the myth that logistics halted this advance, rather than acknowledging that logistics explains why the advance was not halted even sooner? Ronald Andidora has written an excellent overview of this "uneven story," within his
appropriately titled *Home by Christmas*. As Andidora explained, journalists cultivated an “illusory expectation of imminent victory,” which fostered a “gross misreading of Germany’s residual capacity for resistance.” He continued, “The failure of postwar retrospectives to dispel the illusion of victory in 1944 has often allowed this unreasonable expectation to become the standard against which the campaign is measured. Unfortunately, this view sometimes obscures the magnitude of the Allied accomplishments by focusing on an improbable scenario and then casting blame for its failure to reach fruition.” Fuel shortages and strategic incompetence have thus become scapegoats to hide the fact that the enemy remained undefeated.7

In particular, fuel shortages are used to explain Patton’s failure at Metz. Unfortunately, American popular culture has taken this complex issue and reduced it to an arbitrary cliché, devoid of factual content: “Patton could have finished off the Germans in 1944 if only Ike hadn’t given all of his gas to Monty.” However, Patton’s lack of genuine achievement raises considerable doubts about his actual abilities. Consequently, we don’t know what Patton would have done with more fuel, but we can assume that the Germans would have invariably managed strong resistance. Indeed, asked to evaluate this issue in 1945, Colonel Herbert Ehrgott concluded that the geographic difficulties were so severe, such that Third Army would have been halted by “a good task force of… Hitler Youth.”8

The traditional depiction of an inevitable and easy victory, marred by logistics, fails to acknowledge the critical role played by German infantry, armed with *maschinengewehre*, *granatwerfer*, and *flammenwerfer*. Entrenched along forested ridges and hidden within stone buildings, these troops were protected by extensive *minenfelder* and incessant *trommelfeuer*, and they were supported by roving *schützenpanzerwagen* and *sturmgeschütze*. When attacked by American tanks, the Germans routinely employed *panzerfausts*, *panzerschrecks*, and
panzerabwehrkanone. Afterwards, they would counterattack with schwere panzerabteilungen. Finally, the Luftwaffe remained surprisingly effective during the initial weeks of August.

Quite simply, the Germans did not simply roll over when attacked, and they were never on the verge of operational disaster. As stated by Martin van Creveld “The Wehrmacht fought equally well in victory and defeat.” Even in March of 1945, the enemy continued to operate successfully, and Cooper’s memoir thus emphasizes that they remained capable of ambushing columns within "excellent" defensive terrain. Therefore, until American historians thus acknowledge the grim reality of a "hartnäckiger Widerstand," they will fail to truly understand the severe difficulties which were consistently faced by the Allied armies.9

Unfortunately, by denigrating German capabilities and exaggerating the importance of George Patton, many historians have thus created a false narrative which minimizes the tremendous efforts of those who fought against the Germans. Meanwhile, by refusing to demand that historians explain this subject more carefully, and by failing to demand that the government allocate more funds for the preservation and study of historical data, Americans have inadvertently disgraced the memory of their own veterans. Quite simply, funding should be immediately allocated to preserve and analyze the vast records which remain buried within the National Archives.

Heavy Resistance

Within his famous philosophy of martial strategy, Carl von Clausewitz emphasized that historical examples should be used to elucidate theoretical principles. Indeed, the operations of First Army clearly demonstrate “the greater strength of the defensive form.” Unfortunately, ignoring such statements, Americans have become far too enamored with trite clichés, such as “the best defense is a good offense," and political leaders fail to understand the potential for a
tenacious defense (which certainly helps explain the failures in Korea, Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan). As Clausewitz noted, “It is the defensive itself which contributes to the weakening of the offensive. This is so far from an idle subtlety, that we consider it to be a chief disadvantage of the attack...”

Although journalists and historians have emphasized a seemingly swift and relentless advance from Normandy toward the German border, Clausewitz correctly noted that “the hostile action of a campaign does not progress by a continuous, but by an intermittent movement.” Indeed, as the records state, “The enemy continued to fight a delaying action [and] withdrew slowly.” First Army thus faced continual resistance which frustrated, disrupted, and delayed the advance. Furthermore, Clausewitz noted that even when an enemy army has been defeated, the victor is likely to be exhausted and disorganized, such that they will inevitably experience a “state of crisis.” Such a crisis is no mere incidental event, but is the very objective of a defense.

Furthermore, although Martin Blumenson described the entire advance as a pursuit, Clausewitz stated that it would be exceptional for a true pursuit to continue for more than a few kilometers, as “marches tell upon the pursuer as well as the pursued.” For Clausewitz, this notion of a pursuit is instead a temporary chase after disorganized troops who are fleeing without coherent tactical leadership. However, within a matter of hours “the conquered is decidedly in a better condition” and is thus capable of renewed battle. Consequently, the advancing army will find “a powerful check to the vivacity of his pursuit” as “adverse combats are still possible and may diminish the advantages which up to the present have been gained.”

What contemporaries hoped for was a breakout, followed by a pursuit, but instead they experienced neither. Therefore, the narrative must go beyond merely describing the Allied advance as a surging tidal wave. Indeed, First Army was not chasing a routed enemy, and
American tank columns were not slashing forward like romantic cavalry. Instead, the troops were advancing carefully, cautiously, and with trepidation. At any moment, they might suddenly find themselves facing scattered shots, or they might be pinned down by withering defensive fire. Meanwhile, American tanks were consistently ambushed by antitank troops. Indeed, after four years of war, both sides had thus learned to deploy their defenses in depth, with dispersed mobile reserves, such that the dramatic breakthrough of 1940 could not be repeated.

Clausewitz thus urged the study of military-history, because it is necessary to consider ideas which might otherwise cause "astonishment and perplexity." Unless the soldier is well versed in factual details, he is likely to view unexpected outcomes with an immature mentality, wrongly believing that shortcomings are the result of faults and mistakes. As General George Marshall once noted, “There is much evidence to show that officers who have received the best peacetime training available find themselves surprised and confused by the difference between conditions as pictured in map problems and those they encounter in campaign.”

Quite simply, traditional training teaches individuals to follow orders, and to give orders, but without history one gains little insight into what orders should actually be given, or what problems may be encountered. Nor does one gain experience in the organization of voluminous data. Consequently, as Michael Doubler has noted, “In lieu of actual combat experience, the armed forces must turn to military history...” Meanwhile, if politicians, soldiers, and citizens do not anticipate the strength of a determined defense, and if they do not prepare for the complexity of operations, then they will inevitably suffer from bitter recriminations, squabbling over the blame for disappointing outcomes.

However, the study of military-history goes beyond purely martial applications. From a social perspective, a proper understanding of combat operations will provide insight into the
psychology of individuals who have been exhausted by a prolonged series of traumatic events. From a political perspective, such analysis may provide one with an awareness of the tremendous economic and human costs of waging war. Finally, by studying such events, the average citizen can gain an understanding of what war actually entails, and they might thus come to view Veterans Day with a more profound sentiment.

Overall, by studying the campaigns of this great war, one learns that even an inevitable victory isn’t likely to be easy. Indeed, contemporaries were sorely frustrated by their failure to win in August. Blumenson thus concluded that what happened was an outright "miracle" for the Germans, as if the course of events defied any rational explanation. However, as Clausewitz pointedly observed, “The conqueror in a war is not always in a condition to subdue his adversary completely. Often, in fact, almost universally, there is a culminating point of victory.” Fortunately, this was expected by Eisenhower, Bradley, and Hodges, even if it came as a surprise to Patton and the press pool. As for Montgomery, he also expected heavy resistance, and his advance toward Arnhem should therefore be seen as a desperate attempt to avoid the defenses at Aachen, rather than as a foolish bid for personal prestige.16

Indeed, as the Allies advanced, they inevitably grew weaker in every way. Not only were their logistics complicated, but they also suffered from attrition and physical exhaustion. Those who had survived the first week of August, soon looked with foreboding upon the second week of September. Meanwhile, the rugged terrain increasingly favored the enemy, who were falling back toward supplies, reinforcements, and fortifications. As if that were not enough, the weather was growing steadily worse, turning roads to mud and amplifying rivers and streams.

Furthermore, one should note that the Allied advance suffered from the same difficulty which hindered the German advance in Russia. On August 1, the Allies had concentrated thirty
divisions along a hundred kilometers of frontage. By September 12, they were dissipated across five hundred kilometers of frontage, although the number of Allied divisions had not increased five-fold. Instead, the number of Allied divisions had actually decreased, since the Canadian Army had been diverted against German positions between Havre and Calais, whilst much of Third Army remained in Brittany. Indeed, whereas First Army had eleven divisions on August 1, they had only eight on September 12.

The truth of the matter is that the Allied advance wasn’t overwhelming, and it stopped when and where the Germans wanted it to stop. We should thus remember that the Germans had previously withdrawn in 1917, because they wanted to occupy defensive terrain to the northeast. Discussing that earlier conflict, Basil Liddell-Hart might as well have been discussing the Allied advance in 1944, “A direct approach… given overwhelming fire superiority and a morally decaying opponent, can break into the enemy’s position – but cannot break him up.”

Although the Germans have a history of aggressive advances, they also have a history of deliberately withdrawing and then counterattacking. In 1757, at Leuthen, the Prussian army thus did a "vanishing act," and the opposing commander supposedly remarked, “The good fellows are leaving… let them go.” Of course, the Prussians attacked shortly thereafter. Subsequently, in 1813, the Germans retreated from Russia, and then they invaded France. In 1942, they withdrew from Egypt, through Libya, and then advanced into Tunisia. Clearly, retreat does not necessarily equal defeat, and it certainly does not mean that an army is incapable of resistance.

Indeed, the War Department’s Handbook on German Military Forces (1945) noted that if the Germans were faced with overwhelming strength, they would withdraw toward a reserve position. During such a ruckzugs, a single German infantry company would be reinforced by mortars, machine-guns, and antitank artillery, with small groups dispersed across a broad
frontage. Such detachments would ambush advancing patrols, and would be sufficient to halt "very superior" forces along a frontage of five kilometers. Nearby, the Germans would typically position camouflaged tanks, as a mobile reserve. The advancing force would thus be delayed, whilst the Germans would conduct a timely withdrawal and occupy new positions nearby.\footnote{19}

Subsequently, this handbook describes the German fortifications near Aachen as ideal for defensive purposes, emphasizing that this was not a static position like the Maginot Line, but instead it was a staging area for offensive operations. Consequently, attacking forces could expect counterattacks in increasing strength as they attempted to advance through the German positions. Although historians have described the fortifications as outmoded and unimpressive, one has to remember that there were eighteen thousand positions within the Westwall, not including entrenchments. It was to this excellent location that the Germans had been wisely withdrawing.\footnote{20}

Consequently, advancing on September 13, 1st Division encountered "phenomenal" resistance within the Preuswald. 16th Regiment’s B-Company soon made a frontal assault, seizing two antitank positions and a bunker, after which they were halted by machine-gun fire amidst a heavy bombardment. 1st Battalion thus incurred ninety casualties. Meanwhile, 3rd Battalion was halted by an intense barrage which prevented them from clearing an extensive minefield. Eventually, 16th Regiment reported, “Having some trouble; enemy is dug in… Thing is not clearing up… pillboxes, mortars, artillery, and small-arms… We can’t make it…” That evening, the Germans counterattacked, throwing grenades into the American positions. 18th Regiment soon reported, “…being heavily attacked… could use… help.”\footnote{21}

Simultaneously, 3rd Armored Division attempted to advance toward Schmidthof, where German defenses were still "too much." Cooper’s memoir thus describes this resistance as
"awesome." Likewise, 30th Division encountered heavy resistance near Vosboch, where the Germans counterattacked in battalion strength. Meanwhile, although 4th Division temporarily enjoyed relatively light resistance, by September 14 they were also heavily engaged against continuous defensive fire, amidst forested terrain which was marked by “a virtually impassable and meager network of muddy roads.” The records note that many more fortifications were encountered than had been expected, whilst the enemy refused to surrender.22

Concurrently, delayed by minefields, roadblocks, and harassing fire, 9th Division was unable to reach the fortifications until September 16. Here, they were at once brought under a heavy bombardment, although they initially congratulated themselves for "slow and steady" progress which was achieved via "considerable" maneuver. This seeming success evaporated on September 17, when the situation became critical, and there were subsequent withdrawals. By September 20, 9th Division reported, “The enemy maintained his stubborn defense… bringing up reinforcements from all available sources and attempting at every opportunity to retake lost positions.” Within two weeks, First Army would incur more than nine thousand casualties. Subsequently, this rate would be sustained, with 18,526 casualties during November.23

Stellungskrieg

The notion of blitzkrieg stalled upon the fact that mechanization had not revolutionized operations. This same argument has been made by John Mosier, within The Blitzkrieg Myth. As Mosier noted, the German victories earlier in the war have wrongly been attributed to the advance of tanks, whilst the role of infantry has been largely ignored. Indeed, it was only a matter of time before defending infantry were equipped with better artillery and portable rocket-launchers. Meanwhile, the Germans had learned from the Russians that an armored advance could be halted by withdrawing and steadily ambushing advancing columns. Although
journalists appear to have been unaware of this, American troops had already discovered such truths for themselves, when they successfully halted the Germans at Kasserine in 1943. Surely, Patton should have learned this at Maknassy, two months later. Modern theorists, taking into account the 1973 Yom Kippur War, should thus conclude that antitank troops are quite effective.

Unfortunately, according to Cooper, Patton seemed to be completely oblivious to operational realities, and his approach was the disastrous product of "inflexible" thinking, which German theorists would describe as *einseitigkeit*. Although Patton’s notion of armored warfare had been adopted by the army, Cooper stated emphatically that Patton was resented by his own subordinates, and it was "obvious" to everyone that something was fundamentally wrong with American doctrine. In particular, emphasizing a macho mixture of mass, dash, and bravado, Patton had forced the army to rely upon the poorly designed and under-armored M4, whilst the divisional structure contained far too many tanks and not enough infantry.  

Consequently, between July 25 and September 12, there had been no breakthrough. Although Patton’s tanks rampaged across undefended France, and First Army advanced hundreds of kilometers against heavy resistance, it was completely nonsensical to believe that these advances were inherently indicative of impending victory. This was a war of movement, but it was not a rapid lightning thrust. Between August 1 and September 12, First Army advanced at an average of more than ten kilometers per day. Consequently, by September 12, they were within seven kilometers of the center of Aachen. However, by October 21, their average rate of advance had decreased to less than two hundred meters per day. In comparison, between June 6 and July 25, the advance had proceeded at a relatively rapid six hundred meters per day.
Most historians have concluded from these events, that the Allies simply needed more vehicles, and more fuel. However, as Mosier has pointedly noted, the Germans never had the mechanization of the Americans. The strength of the German army was not in its vehicles, but in its decentralized and fluid command structure, which made it possible to consistently delay an advancing army with a seemingly endless series of ad hoc taskforces. In fact, as Hodges stated, mechanization was a ridiculous liability, as the roads were severely congested, with a single armored division blocking a hundred miles of road. Meanwhile, although traditional notions of blitzkrieg argue that tanks should be concentrated and thrust through the defensive lines, veterans realized the marked advantage of antitank forces, and they were forced to disperse their vulnerable tanks (which nevertheless took "horrendous" casualties). Once again employing a chess analogy, one might think of a powerful piece being forced to retreat by the advance of a single pawn.25

Instead, what the Allies truly needed was more "rocket" infantry, operating alongside more light tanks, more heavy tanks, and less medium tanks. William Nance is thus absolutely correct that the "perfect solution" was more cavalry, which could blend mechanized infantry and tanks together in order to achieve coordinated tactical thrusts, in a manner reminiscent of the Napoleonic dragoon. Within his master’s thesis, Major Nance correctly identified armored reconnaissance groups as “the most efficient regimental sized formation.” Such a formation would have been properly deployed, for example, at Belleville on August 29.26

With this in mind, one should consider how 1st Division desperately requested the assistance of cavalry at Mayenne, how 4th Division was unable to effectively pursue from Teilleul, how 120th Regiment’s 3rd Battalion was awkwardly dispatched toward Barenton, and how 2nd, 3rd, and 5th Armored Divisions repeatedly bashed themselves against dense minefields
and murderous artillery. With these operations in mind, the US military should develop numerous independent combined-arms battalion-sized strike-forces, capable of fluid operations, rather than maintaining large congested formations which emphasize efficient administrative rather than operational functions. Indeed, this has been the very intent of the modern modular system, exemplified by the divergent efforts of the 101st Airborne Division in Vietnam.

Meanwhile, although strategic operations should naturally be directed at distant idealized objectives, tactical commanders should emphasize localized efforts with a realistic awareness of inevitable friction.

Unfortunately, by simplifying the narrative of WWII into a tale of inevitable victory, historians have neglected to appreciate just how complex and difficult these events were, and they have thus failed to learn much from the experience. As Colonel Elbridge Colby noted, “We had broken well out of our Normandy beachhead… Campaigns are not won, however, by a single battlefield success.” Subsequently, as Captain George Knapp stated, “We were always in combat… we fought from daybreak to dusk.” As Captain Murray Pulver remembered, “We were continually on the move, wet, cold, and hungry… the price was steep.” As Sergeant Arnold Erbstoesser recalled, “Attack, early in AM, and no one knew how far we would go, 100 yards or 2 miles… It wasn’t going to be quick [or] easy.” Finally, as Captain Francis Ware observed, “Those that fell… were not statistics… Believe it or not, there were still Germans…”

Indeed, the enemy was not bluffing, when their aircraft dropped the following propaganda pamphlet upon American positions, “Say your prayers… because you’re headed for Aachen… One thing is certain: This will be the hottest party the world has ever seen.” Although Blumenson wrongly claimed that American officers believed that the enemy was incapable of reestablishing a defensive line, Lt.Colonel Donald Clayman instead warned his troops, “Just
remember, there are beaucoup Germans left, and somewhere along the line, they’re going to stop running. Then, when they’re closer to home, it’s going to be a different ballgame.”

Perhaps the ultimate anecdote comes from Belton Cooper, describing the advance on November 16. Having occupied Aachen nearly a month previously, First Army was now advancing toward Köln, although they remained just fifteen kilometers east of Aachen, having maintained a rate of advance which was no better than that of June. Attempting to subdue stubborn resistance, ninety artillery battalions had been concentrated, supported by more than three thousand aircraft, representing the profound might of American industry. Would this be the final breakthrough? A second Operation Cobra?

Advancing shortly after dawn, 3\textsuperscript{rd}/CCB struggled forward, losing nearly fifty tanks in less than half an hour. Meanwhile, the bulk of 104\textsuperscript{th} Division was pinned down amidst a "murderous" barrage, whilst those who managed to continue advancing faced "bitter" hand-to-hand combat which lasted for several days. Clearly, the war would not be over any time soon. Therefore, when we judge the competence of General Hodges, who ordered such patently suicidal frontal assaults, we must remember that he had previously served in the Ardennes, and he knew how dangerous the enemy was. Nevertheless, sometimes there is no indirect approach, and it’s not always possible to avoid an attritional struggle.

As Al Gore might remark, this is the "inconvenient truth" about warfare. Such notions are reflected within the Byzantine Strategikon, which observes that “constant attacks” must be made and “losses will occur.” Therefore, “great caution must be observed” and “the wise general, even the most courageous, will keep in mind the possibility of failure and defeat and will plan for them as actually occurring.” Or, as Sun-tzu observed, “One who excels in warfare is able to make
himself unconquerable, but cannot necessarily cause the enemy to be conquerable… There is nothing more difficult than military combat…”\textsuperscript{30}

Indeed, military strategists must remember that war is like chess. When two grandmasters confront one another, there is almost never a quick and easy checkmate, but instead the game typically ends after a grueling campaign, with few pieces remaining. Throughout history, wars of decisive maneuver have been the exception, as positional siege warfare is extremely common. \textit{Bewegungskrieg} is merely an ideal, whilst \textit{rattenkrieg} is the grim reality. We thus celebrate breakthroughs because they are both uncommon and unexpected. Meanwhile, as Geoffrey Wawro observed within his histories of the Austro-Prussian and Franco-Prussian conflicts, seemingly brilliant generals are frequently just lucky. Unfortunately, such gambler's luck always runs out, as both Napoleon and Hitler would eventually discover.\textsuperscript{31}

Attritional warfare is often inevitable, regardless of seemingly decisive advantages. Consequently, the most disastrous strategic error is not the failure to aggressively pursue with an almost reckless disdain for caution, but rather the critical mistake is the macho and foolishly optimistic tendency to underestimate the capabilities of an enemy army. One must remember that indirect maneuvers are merely an idealistic means, illustrating elementary tactical concepts, but victory is rarely achieved without directly engaging a series of fortified positions. In such cases, strong resistance should always be expected, and heavy casualties will inevitably be incurred.

Ultimately, thanks to the excellent records of First Army, we can gain an understanding of what modern warfare is like. These records are a model which should be emulated by modern institutions, both military and corporate, as they provide a detailed explanation of events from the perspectives of multiple headquarters. Following operations, historians should be given access to such records, and allowed to interview participants, in order to facilitate detailed
analysis. With regard to First Army, the lessons thus learned are that advancing does not necessarily indicate victory, whilst mechanization does not avoid the difficulties of combat.
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