

Infantry broke through the German line around Pleurtuit. After destroying five bunkers by demolition and assault, knocking out an 88-mm. gun and several vehicles, and taking more than a hundred prisoners, the regiment at last made contact with the isolated battalion of the 121st.<sup>42</sup>

Through three days of isolation, the battalion had retained its integrity in the face of several counterattacks launched with artillery support. Surprisingly, losses were not so high as had been feared—31 killed, 106 wounded, and 16 missing. The kind of courage that had sustained the battalion was exemplified by a heroic act on 9 August, not long after the force was isolated. No sooner had an artillery shell struck the battalion command post, killing the operations and motor officers and seriously wounding the operations sergeant and a radio operator, than a German tank appeared five hundred yards away. Opening fire, the tankers killed several men. For a moment it appeared that the battalion headquarters might be annihilated. Taking matters into his own hands, Pvt. Francis A. Gardner of the Headquarters Company ran toward the tank with a bazooka. Though his first rocket missed, a 57-mm. antitank gun firing at the same time immobilized the tank by a hit on the treads. As the German crew started to abandon the disabled tank, Gardner fired a second time,

striking the turret and killing the crew.<sup>43</sup>

With Pleurtuit in hand, the two regiments continued their attack on 13 August, slowly and systematically reducing individual pillboxes. By the afternoon of 14 August both regiments had entered Dinard and its suburbs. The operation was completed on the following day with the clearing of Dinard and the nearby villages of St. Lunaire and St. Briac-sur-Mer. Bacherer's headquarters, located in a small fort equipped with running water, air conditioning, food, and facilities to withstand siege, was captured. Surrender of the Dinard garrison added almost four thousand prisoners, including Bacherer, to the Allied bag.

When General Middleton remarked that the 121st Infantry didn't appear to have done much, the 83d Division chief of staff explained, "It is hard to tell what they have been up against. Sometimes those things go very slow for a while then all of a sudden they break. . . ." <sup>44</sup> The fact was that one regiment had not been enough west of the Rance but two had been able to do the job.

### *Siege Operations*

While General Macon had personally directed the attack on Dinard, the assistant division commander, General Ferenbaugh, had taken control of the two remaining regiments of the 83d Division. The objectives still to be reduced were the walled city of St. Malo, the Citadel, and the strongpoints of St. Ideuc and la Varde. Ferenbaugh con-

<sup>42</sup> Two members of the 121st Infantry, T. Sgt. Milford W. Wilson, who boldly diverted enemy fire to himself to cover his squad's withdrawal, and Capt. Arthur W. Kaiser, who led his company through mine fields, barbed wire, tank barriers, and artillery and machine gun fire to assault enemy positions with bayonet and grenade, were posthumously awarded the DSC.

<sup>43</sup> Annex 1 to 121st Inf AAR, Aug. Summary of Action of 3d Bn 121st Inf from 7 Aug to 12 Aug 44, 4 Sep.

<sup>44</sup> Telecon, Gen Middleton and Col Samuel V. Krauthoff, 1440, 13 Aug.

centrated first on the lesser strongholds, St. Ideuc and la Varde, which were small, mutually supporting forts. St. Ideuc in actuality was an outer defense position for la Varde, which was on the coast. German artillery at Dinard and Cézembre could fire in support.

On 9 August, while the 329th Infantry patrolled and policed the towns of St. Servan and Paramé and prepared to attack the Citadel, the two battalions under the 330th Infantry headquarters attacked toward St. Malo and St. Ideuc. For three days artillery pounded St. Ideuc and infantry and engineers operated against individual pillboxes and bunkers. In the late afternoon of 12 August, after a final burst of concentrated artillery fire and an infantry assault, the 160 surviving defenders capitulated. Without pause the assault battalion moved toward la Varde, and on the following evening, 13 August, captured the fort. Little more than a hundred Germans filed out in surrender.

Meanwhile, the other battalion under the 330th Infantry, with an additional rifle company, had been attacking toward the town of St. Malo. To gain entrance into the walled town, the troops had to secure the Paramé-St. Malo causeway. The attack thus took place across an area that funneled the troops toward the narrow causeway strip. Supported by tanks and tank destroyers, the infantrymen systematically reduced pillboxes and bunkers, measuring their progress by streets. The avenues of Paramé became thoroughfares for bullets and shells, and engineers dynamited passageways from house to house to enable the infantrymen to fight forward from one building to another.

Manned by a small garrison employing

machine guns and 20-mm. pieces and overlooking the battle area was the château of St. Malo at the far end of the causeway. The thick walls of the château, designed to withstand medieval siege, proved effective against the engines of modern war.

The immediate objective of the battalion attack was the Casino at the near end of the causeway. After two days of small unit action, the battalion in the late afternoon of 11 August took the blasted and tattered Casino. The château was less than a thousand yards away, but the intervening space was as exposed as a table top.

Although guns then pummeled the château for two days, even high velocity shells from 3-inch tank destroyer guns and 8-inch shells from artillery guns and howitzers seemed to have little effect. Neither did air attack by heavy and medium bombers produce any apparent result. German machine gun fire from the château walls remained too devastating for infantry alone to cross the causeway, and mine fields prevented tanks from approaching.<sup>45</sup>

As the fighting had progressed, the fires within the St. Malo ramparts had become a raging inferno. Flame and smoke obscured many of the defensive positions. To allow about a thousand French civilians still inside the walls to escape the conflagration, a truce was concluded for several hours during the afternoon of 13 August. These and about five hundred hostages and internees, who had been held at a tiny French-built fort offshore, entered American lines. The blaze had no effect on the German garrison in the château, for

<sup>45</sup> 330th Inf Rpt, 1220, 12 Aug.



ARTILLERYMEN FIRING 3-INCH GUN ON GERMAN DEFENSES IN ST. MALO

the château had its own fireproof walls separating it from the burning town.

With St. Ideuc and la Varde reduced by 13 August, the entire 330th Infantry gathered to assault St. Malo on the morning of 14 August. As artillery intensified its shelling and fired smoke and high explosive against the château walls, an infantry battalion surged across the causeway, past the château and into the walled town. There were few enemy troops in the charred and still burning buildings, and these were quickly rounded up. The defenders in the château, however, still held out, and their machine guns continued to chat-

ter, discouraging engineers from placing demolition charges against the walls. Despite their virtually impregnable position, the prodding of American artillery fire and the obvious hopelessness of continued resistance finally prompted surrender that afternoon. Prisoners totaled 150.<sup>46</sup>

With this surrender, all organized resistance on the north shore of the St. Malo peninsula came to an end. On two small islands several hundred yards offshore, tiny forts, Fort National and

<sup>46</sup> 330th Inf S-3 Rpt, 1800, 14 Aug; 83d Div G-2, G-3 Jnl, entry 1815, 14 Aug.



STREET FIGHTING IN ST. MALO

Grand Bey, each comprising several blockhouses, had to be investigated. At low tide on 16 August a rifle company of the 329th Infantry marched across the sand to Fort National and found it unoccupied. The same company then assaulted Grand Bey. "Went in under a smoke screen, took them by surprise, tossed a few hand grenades, and they gave up." About 150 Germans surrendered.<sup>47</sup>

All this activity was either preliminary or tangential to the main task, reduc-

tion of the Citadel, which was supported by fire from the island of Cézembre. Although there was no longer any possibility of using the destroyed port of St. Malo, the resistance had to be eliminated to keep the Citadel and Cézembre garrisons from interfering by fire with Allied shipping to Granville and Cancale. Continued opposition from them would give courage to the small isolated German groups in Brittany that still refused to surrender, while capitulation might have the effect of softening the will to resist at Lorient and Brest. Also, complete reduction of the St. Malo com-

<sup>47</sup> 83d Div G-2, G-3 Jnl, entry 1555, 16 Aug; 329th Inf Msg and Sitrep, 16 Aug.

plex would free the 83d Division for employment elsewhere.<sup>48</sup>

### *The Citadel*

Since reduction of Cézembre required an amphibious landing and naval support, the immediate problem facing General Macon was how to take the Citadel. Dug deeply into the ground, the Citadel was the heart of the fortress complex.<sup>49</sup> The rocky promontory where it was located was a natural defensive position, as indicated by remaining vestiges of fortifications built by the Gauls to protect the long since vanished village of Aleth. A French fort erected there in the mid-eighteenth century provided the foundation for extensive construction undertaken by the Germans in 1942 with Polish, Belgian, Czech, French, Dutch, Algerian, and Spanish workers laboring voluntarily or otherwise for Todt.

A casemated strongpoint of connected blockhouses, the Citadel was effective against an approach from almost any direction. Where the guns of the Citadel could not fire, pieces at Dinard and Cézembre could. Although the fire power that the fort could deliver was not overwhelmingly impressive—half a dozen field pieces (the largest of 105-mm. caliber), several mortars, and perhaps eighteen or twenty machine guns com-

prised the armament—the weapons were mutually supporting. In the event that invaders would manage somehow to scale the walls, weapons were fixed to cover the interior court. The walls shielding the defenders were of concrete, stone, and steel, so thick that they were virtually impervious to artillery and air bombardment. Inside the fort, aeration and heat ducts, a vast reservoir of water, a large amount of food and supplies, and a subterranean railroad to transport ammunition and heavy equipment facilitated the ability to withstand siege. Blocking the landward approaches were barbed wire, four lines of steel rails placed vertically in cement, and an anti-tank ditch. Periscopes emerging from the ground level roof of the interior fort provided observation. To improve visibility and fields of fire, the Germans had knocked down several houses in St. Servan, and only the pleading of the mayor had saved a twelfth century church from a similar fate. Personifying the strength of the Citadel was the commander, Aulock, who was determined to bring credit to himself and his forces. According to prisoners, resistance continued “only because of Colonel von Aulock.”<sup>50</sup>

As early as 5 August, General Macon was aware that it would be difficult to take the Citadel. When the corps G-3 suggested “Why don’t you take 155’s and blow it off the map?” the division G-3 answered, “I don’t believe we can.”<sup>51</sup> He was speaking with more truth than he perhaps realized.

The obvious strength of the St. Malo

<sup>48</sup> Telecon, Middleton to Krauthoff, 1440, 13 Aug, 83d Div G-2, G-3 Jnl and File; VIII Corps G-2 Per Rpt 60, 2400, 13 Aug, and G-3 Per Rpt 61, 14 Aug.

<sup>49</sup> The best description of the Citadel is found in Fouque, *La Cité*, pp. 7-25. See also VIII Corps G-2 Per Rpt 56, 2400, 10 Aug, and G-2 Weekly Per Rpt 8, 12 Aug; ETOUSA Engr Hist Rpt 10, Combat Engineering (Aug, 45); [George], Ninth Air Force, pp. 203, 219.

<sup>50</sup> 83d Div G-2 Per Rpt 35, 1600, 7 Aug.

<sup>51</sup> 83d Div G-2 Per Rpt 33, 1600, 5 Aug; Telecon, Evans and Boyle, 2318, 6 Aug, 83d Div G-2, G-3 Jnl and File.

fortress, and particularly of the Citadel, prompted General Middleton to move heavy artillery of the corps into position to support the 83d Division attack. Before the battle ended, ten artillery battalions, including 8-inch guns, 8-inch howitzers, and 240-mm. howitzers, were pounding the St. Malo defenses.<sup>52</sup> Yet the uncertainty of ammunition hampered operations. Fire plans were often curtailed. No artillery preceded an infantry attack launched on 9 August, for example, and on the following day the stockpiles of shells were so low that only five rounds per piece were available. For several days, some of the battalions fired four rounds per gun per day. Though ammunition shortages were troublesome, the lack of apparent effect against the enemy position was depressing. The walls of the Citadel were too thick to be breached by fire, the enemy pieces too well protected by casemates to be knocked out.<sup>53</sup>

Air attack was similarly ineffective. Fighter-bombers gave excellent assistance when the infantry attacked smaller strongpoints, but they were unable to make an impression on the Citadel. Though two groups of medium bombers attacked the Citadel with 1,000-pound general purpose bombs, these, too, seemed to have no effect.<sup>54</sup> Assured by personal inspection that drastic measures were necessary to reduce the Citadel, General Middleton requested a high-level bombardment by heavy bombers in a mass attack. Unfortu-

nately for Middleton, higher headquarters deemed objectives elsewhere of more importance.<sup>55</sup>

Since direct measures to reduce the Citadel seemed to have failed and since an all-out infantry attack would be costly, the 83d Division turned to subterfuge. A loudspeaker manned by the corps Psychological Warfare Service unit attempted without success to persuade the Germans to lay down their arms. Engineers explored the sewage system of St. Malo in the vain hope of discovering at least one conduit close enough to the Citadel to place a decisive demolition charge. A captured German chaplain was permitted to visit the Citadel to ask Aulock to give up. The chaplain returned with the report that Aulock refused to surrender because he was "a German soldier, and a German soldier does not surrender."

The mayor of St. Servan-sur-Mer suggested confidentially that a French lady who knew Aulock rather well might persuade him to lay down his arms and come out. Contact would not be difficult, he revealed, because a line still connected the Citadel and the St. Servan telephone office. Although the unorthodox nature of this suggestion at first prompted hesitation on the part of U.S. commanders, the lady rang up the Citadel anyway. Though Aulock would not come to the phone in person, he informed the lady through a subordinate that he had other things on his mind.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>52</sup> Memo, Evans for Maddox, 7 Aug.

<sup>53</sup> 83d Div G-2, G-3 Jnl, entries 0015, 9 Aug, 0935 and 1510, 10 Aug; Msg, Macon to Evans, 1400, 11 Aug.

<sup>54</sup> 83d Div AAR, Aug, and Msg, 1100, 6 Aug; TUSA Info Memos, 5 and 7 Aug; VIII Corps Arty (Air OP) Msg, 1350, 5 Aug.

<sup>55</sup> VIII Corps G-3 Jnl, entries 1030 and 1500, 10 Aug.

<sup>56</sup> Rpt of Maj Marcus, MC, on Mission Behind German Lines, St. Malo, n.d., 83d Div G-2, G-3 Jnl File, Aug; 83d Div AAR (7 Aug); 329th Inf AAR (10 Aug); ETOUSA Engr Hist Rpt 10; Fouque, *La Cité*, p. 58.

Reinforcing Aulock's indomitable will was information he had received of a major German counterattack directed through Mortain toward Avranches. If this effort succeeded, it would isolate the Americans besieging St. Malo and eventually make them loosen their grip on the city. He announced the news of the counterattack to his troops with enthusiasm and promised that the garrison would be rescued—"if everyone discharges his duty and we hold out just a little longer. . . . Anyone deserting or surrendering," he warned, "is a common dog!" When he learned that the German counterattack had stalled, he still clung to his hope of eventual relief, but his declaration to his soldiers then appeared empty. The 83d Division had by then begun to assault the Citadel.<sup>57</sup>

Having cleared St. Servan and reached the immediate approaches to the Citadel by 9 August, the 329th Infantry prepared an attack as follow-up to an air strike on 11 August that was "going to bomb hell out of the place." Medium bombers appeared over the Citadel on the evening of 11 August and dropped 500-pound general purpose bombs, 100-pound incendiaries, and 1,000-pound semi-armor-piercing bombs. Immediately after the air attack, a rifle company of the 329th Infantry, reinforced by several engineers and three men of the FFI, moved toward the fort to exploit breaches in the defensive works caused by the bombardment. Using Bangalore torpedoes to open passageways through the barbed wire entanglements and the antitank obstacles, the men approached the fort. While a

flame-thrower team sprayed a nearby bunker and the company established security positions, about thirty men, including the three Frenchmen, scaled the wall and reached the interior court. They saw no damage that could have been caused by the air attack, no broken concrete, no flames. Engineers dropped several pole charges through air vents and portholes without apparent effect and set off a few demolition charges without evident result. Suddenly the Germans opened a deadly cross fire with machine guns. Mortar shells began to drop around the walls and artillery shells from Cézembre fell near the fort. Having seen no real breach in the defenses, the assault group departed the fort and the rifle company withdrew.<sup>58</sup>

Colonel Crabill, the regimental commander who had the immediate responsibility for capture of the Citadel, next decided to form two special assault teams for close-in action against the fort. Each team was to have ninety-six infantrymen augmented by demolition groups, security groups, and a special heavy demolition group. While the teams were formed and rehearsed for action, tank destroyers assumed positions from which to deliver direct fire against the fort in the hope of demolishing enemy gun emplacements.<sup>59</sup>

The tank destroyers, assisted by artillery, pounded the Citadel for two days, and on 13 August medium bombers again struck the fort. Soon after the air bombardment a white flag appeared,

<sup>57</sup> 83d Div G-2, G-3 Jnl, entry 1415, 11 Aug, Annex 1 to G-2 Per Rpt 41, 13 Aug, and G-2 Per Rpt 38, 1600, 10 Aug; Fouque, *La Cité*, p. 50.

<sup>58</sup> Telecon, Lt Col Jules Deshotels and Lt Col Herbert H. Hauge, 1018, 11 Aug, 83d Div G-2, G-3 Jnl and File; 329th Inf and VIII Corps G-2 Per Rpt 58, 2400, 12 Aug; Fouque, *La Cité*, pp. 58-62.

<sup>59</sup> 329th Inf AAR (12 Aug)

producing a short-lived jubilation. Aulock wanted only to conclude the truce that had permitted the French civilians to depart the burning town of St. Malo.<sup>60</sup>

After the armistice, the artillery and tank destroyer shelling continued. Rounds expended during one 24-hour period totaled 4,103, despite threatened shortages of ammunition.<sup>61</sup> Again on 15 August medium bombers plastered the Citadel for thirty minutes. At the conclusion of the bomb strike, Colonel Crabill's special assault teams launched an attack, but intense machine gun fire soon drove them back.

Given no apparent alternative but to intensify the siege tactics, General Macon directed that the shelling of the Citadel continue. Two 8-inch guns of the corps artillery came to within 1,500 yards of the fort to deliver direct fire on port-holes and vents. Two companies of 4.2-inch mortars that had been firing on the fort intermittently increased the proportion of white phosphorus to high explosive. Air liaison personnel at the 12th Army Group planned a bombing mission employing "gasoline jell" bombs, not only to eliminate resistance but also to experiment on the effectiveness of what later came to be known as napalm.<sup>62</sup> The climax of these efforts was to be an air attack projected for the afternoon of 17 August.

Forty minutes before the scheduled arrival of the planes, a white flag appeared over the Citadel. When several German soldiers emerged from the fort, an

American officer went to meet them, though wary that this might be another false alarm. It was not. Aulock was indeed ready to surrender. Diverting the bombers to Cézembre, which manifested no sign of imminent capitulation, the 83d Division began to accept the surrender of four hundred Citadel defenders who emerged. Among them was Aulock, freshly-shaved, dress-uniformed, and insolent.<sup>63</sup>

Why had he surrendered—this commander who had sworn to defend to the last man, the last cartridge, the last stone? Still with men and cartridges, Aulock was far from having to resort to stones. His supply of food, water, and air was abundant. Allied plane attacks had hardly been felt inside the fort. The shock of impact from artillery shells had been slight. The Americans were no closer to the Citadel than they had been eight days before.

As the story emerged, it became clear that two factors had caused Aulock to renounce his vows. First, direct hits by 8-inch guns aimed singly and at specific targets at virtual point blank range had penetrated several firing apertures in the fort and had destroyed a few of the larger artillery pieces and machine gun emplacements. Second, Aulock's determination notwithstanding, American capture of the individual strongpoints of the St. Malo fortress had intensified a psychological malaise deriving from the sensation of being surrounded and trapped. Morale of the troops had deteriorated to the point where further resistance seemed senseless.

Despite his capitulation, Aulock had done his duty well. He had rendered

<sup>60</sup> 83d Div G-2, G-3 Jnl, entry 1413, 13 Aug; 329th Inf AAR, Aug.

<sup>61</sup> 83d Div G-2, G-3 Jnl, entry 1203, 14 Aug.

<sup>62</sup> Telecon, Evans and Krauthoff, 1945, 16 Aug, 83d Div G-2, G-3 Jnl and File; 329th Inf AAR (17 Aug).

<sup>63</sup> 329th Inf AAR (17 Aug) Fouque, *La Cité*, plate 24.





THE CITADEL AFTER IT WAS TAKEN BY U.S. TROOPS

the port of St. Malo useless to the Americans. He had held up an entire division and substantial supporting forces for almost two weeks and thus had prevented the VIII Corps from taking decisive action against the fortress ports of Lorient and Brest.

The surrender of the Citadel cleared the St. Malo-Dinard sector with the exception of the garrison on the island of Cézembre. The 83d Division had completed an impressive action. As against comparatively light losses, the division had taken more than ten thousand prisoners.<sup>64</sup>

<sup>64</sup> 83d Div Annexes 1 and 2 to G-2 Per Rpt 44, 16 Aug.

The efforts of the division during this period had nevertheless been strenuous and, as a measure of rest and rehabilitation, the troops received a different type of mission. Originally scheduled to help in the reduction of Brest as soon as St. Malo was captured, the 83d Division instead took responsibility for the "back area" of the Rennes-Brest supply line and eventually patrolled Brittany as far south as the Loire River. As the division dispersed throughout the area south of Rennes in a welcome respite after the close-in siege action, two infantry battalions of the 330th—one at Dinard and the other at St. Malo, both aided by the FFI—policed the coastline and guarded



INTERIOR OF THE CITADEL AFTER THE SURRENDER

against German infiltration from Cézembre.<sup>65</sup>

### *Cézembre*

Four thousand yards offshore, the tiny island of Cézembre, half a mile long and a quarter of a mile wide, by its position opposite the mouth of the Rance River controlled the deep water channel to St. Malo and the sea ap-

proaches to Granville and Cancale. Its coastal guns had been out of range of the 83d Division artillery pieces during the early part of the battle, and its fire had been a nasty source of harassment. The division had requested the island blasted "as quickly as we can and as often as we can," and the VIII Corps had promised to "work on it from the air and naval angle." Bombers attacked the island during the night of 6 August and again on 11 August, but naval gunfire did not become available until much later. Meanwhile, the corps had brought heavy artillery into the St. Malo area, and from 9 August on the pieces shelled the island to prevent interference

<sup>65</sup> Memo, Evans for Cross, 11 Aug; Memo, Middleton for Macon, 14 Aug, 83d Div G-2, G-3 Jnl File; VIII Corps G-3 Per Rpt 61, 14 Aug, and Msg, 2300, 15 Aug; 83d Div G-2, G-3 Jnl, entries 2253, 15 Aug, 0955, 16 Aug, 1132, 16 Aug, and 2050, 17 Aug; Notes by General Ferenbaugh on Middleton-Macon conversation at St. Servan, 16 Aug, dated 17 Aug; Additional Notes from Middleton, 1000, 18 Aug.