

two combat command columns ready for the westward drive along the backbone of the Brittany peninsula to Brest.

Because of the lack of contact with the enemy and the fluidity of the general situation, the 6th Armored Division G-2 hazarded no guess on enemy capabilities or intentions. He nevertheless provided an accurate enemy order of battle in Brittany: the *2d Parachute Division*, likely to be in the St. Malo area; regimental combat teams of the *265th*, *266th*, and *275th Infantry Divisions*, dispersed in the peninsula; and the *343d Infantry Division*, probably in Brest. The G-2 refrained from estimating the strength of the units except to assert that they were undoubtedly below table of organization authorizations.⁵

Leading the division on 1 August, CCR drove westward toward Pontorson. Six miles beyond Pontaubault, near Brée, the advance guard—a company each of tanks and infantry and a battery of artillery, moving in that order—was almost through a defile when the enemy opened fire on the rear of the column with artillery, mortars, bazookas, and small arms from well-camouflaged positions overlooking the road. Three self-propelled artillery pieces were destroyed at once. As armored infantrymen and tanks deployed to engage the enemy, Hanson radioed Grow that he was going to attack rearward with the advance guard and squeeze the enemy against the approaching main body of CCR. Unwilling to be diverted from securing the river crossing at Pontorson, Grow radioed Hanson to keep moving, to leave the opposition entirely to the main body. The principal force of CCR

subsequently eliminated the position in a three-hour engagement, sustained seventy casualties, destroyed several pieces of German horse-drawn field artillery, knocked out an 88-mm. gun, and captured nearly a hundred prisoners. Sgt. John L. Morton of Battery A, 231st Field Artillery Battalion, alone killed thirty Germans with a carbine and sub-machine gun.⁶

Meanwhile, the advance guard had taken Pontorson, captured a bridge across the Couesnon intact, and established a bridgehead inside Brittany. "Mission accomplished," Hanson radioed. "Have had considerable casualties, wounded and dead. Am short of ammunition, gas, and water. Will not be able to go on without help. Am holding bridgehead for the night." Though this report revealed something less than unbridled optimism, it was enough to justify preparing CCB to pass through to continue the attack. In the meantime, Taylor's CCA had been securing the Antrain crossing uncontested.⁷

Sunrise, 2 August, found the division in the clear, "with no boundaries to worry about, no definite enemy information, in fact nothing but a map of Brittany and the knowledge that resistance was where you found it." General Grow felt he "owned *all* roads in Brittany," and he could go where he pleased as long as he drove toward Brest.

Taylor's CCA moved westward from Antrain through Combours and Béc-

⁶ Morton was awarded the DSC.

⁷ Hanson to Grow, 1832, 1 Aug, 6th Armd Div G-3 Jnl; T. Sgt. Charles D. Byrd, *The 15th Tank Battalion, a Record of Action* (Amorbach, Germany: Miltenberg, Gottlob Volkhardtsche Druckerei, 1945), (hereafter cited as Byrd, *15th Tank Battalion*) pp. 24-28.

⁵ 6th Armd Div G-2 Per Rpt 4, 31 Jul, and Jnl, entry 1125, 1 Aug.

herel almost to Quédillac, a distance of nearly thirty-five miles. Nowhere did the command meet organized resistance. Read's CCB passed through CCR at Pontorson and avoided Dol-de-Bretagne, but ran into opposition on the outskirts of Dinan. Because a captured overlay showed the Dinan defenses to be strong, Grow instructed Read to bypass Dinan on the south and continue westward.⁸ By the time Grow's message arrived, some of CCB was already fighting at Dinan. When several unexpected fighter-bombers appeared overhead, Read requested the pilots to bomb and strafe Dinan to mask a withdrawal. While the planes attacked and armored artillery fired on the town, CCB backtracked, moved southwestward, and halted for the night near Bécherel, about thirty miles west of Pontorson. In keeping with the maxim of reinforcing success, Grow had earlier switched CCR to follow CCA, which had met no resistance.

Late on the night of 2 August, General Grow conferred with his major commanders and staff to consider the problems that faced them. Though the division was well into Brittany and deployed for action, certain deficiencies already threatened continued progress. There were no well-established lines of communication or supply, and German planes over Avranches threatened to delay the division trains. The 79th Division, scheduled to follow the armor, had been diverted to the east, and no infantry was available at the moment to take its place. Though the 83d Division might eventually move into Brittany, it would require a minimum of

several days to catch up with the armored division. Finally, no one knew what to expect from the enemy, who had offered such varying opposition as the scattered resistance west of Antrain, the strong defense of Dinan, and the roadside ambush near Brée.⁹ In view of these facts, the question was to determine how the 6th Armored Division might best perform its mission.

The division chief of staff cautioned against driving wildly through Brittany, recommended establishing firm bases of supply, and advised that the division should be kept consolidated and advancing in a relatively compact mass for security. General Grow dismissed these suggestions with the statement that he didn't have time to go slow—he had to get to Brest.

This announcement provoked several gasps of astonishment. Ignorant of Patton's verbal order to Grow and not yet in receipt of the corps order changing the division objective, Grow's subordinates had not thought much beyond Evran and Dinan on the Rance River, twenty-five miles west of the Couesnon. With Brest suddenly revealed as the objective, the entire operation took on new significance. The prospect of a single division driving more than two hundred miles through enemy territory was at once exciting and sobering.¹⁰

So pronounced was the fatigue of the

⁸ 6th Armd Div G-3 Jnl, entry 2300, 2 Aug, and G-2 Per Rpts 5 and 6, 1 and 2 Aug; Msgs, Middleton to Grow, 1520, 1620, and 1645, 2 Aug; VIII Corps Sitrep 95, 2 Aug, and FO 10, 2 Aug; 79th Div G-3 Per Rpt 35, 2 Aug; Msg, Middleton to Wyche, 2 Aug.

¹⁰ 6th Armd Div FO 5, 1 Aug. The 128th Field Artillery Battalion, organic to the 6th Armored Division, officially noted in the battalion journal at 0930, 3 August: "objective announced to be Brest."

⁹ 6th Armd Div G-3 Jnl, entry 0930, 2 Aug.

staff officers and commanders (some fell asleep during the conference) that Grow postponed the advance until noon of 3 August. The delay not only would permit several additional hours of rest but also would enable the cavalry reconnaissance squadron to take its proper place at the front and on the flanks of the columns, a procedure impossible to this point because of the speed of the commitment into Brittany and the traffic congestion near Avranches.

The division shoved off at noon, 3 August, with the cavalry troops where they belonged. Taylor's CCA drove fifteen miles to the west, missed a turn at a crossroads, and ran into organized resistance near Mauron. Deciding that it would be more difficult to reverse direction in order to regain the correct route, Taylor attacked to eliminate an estimated enemy force of 250 men so that he could reach his original route of advance by side roads. After a three-hour fire fight, the Mauron defenses were reduced.

Meanwhile, Read's CCB drove west from Bécherel, detoured several miles to the north to avoid the tail of CCA at Mauron, and gave impetus to the attempts of a small group of Germans near Broons to flee. After having moved virtually unopposed for more than thirty miles that day, CCB received an inexplicable order to halt, an order doubly incomprehensible since Grow had that day switched CCR onto CCB's trail.

The explanation lay in word from General Middleton, who had radioed General Grow, "Do not bypass Dinan and St. Malo. Message follows by courier."¹¹ The messenger from corps

reached Grow, who was observing Taylor's attack at Mauron, and handed him a penciled note on a sheet of scratch paper. "Protect your front," Middleton instructed, "and concentrate so that we can move in on St. Malo tomorrow." Middleton had decided that he needed to take St. Malo at once. General Earnest's Task Force A and a portion of General Macon's 83d Division were in the St. Malo area; General Grow was to take command of these forces, add the weight of his 6th Armored Division, and launch a co-ordinated attack on the port city.¹²

General Grow's reactions were conflicting. How was he going to get to Brest by Saturday if he was diverted to Dinan and St. Malo? He first protested the corps order by radio and by officer courier and requested reconsideration of the changed mission. He then obeyed. "Mission changed," he radioed his chief of staff. CCA was to assemble near Mauron. CCB was to turn north to outflank Dinan, and CCR was to be ready to move north against Dinan.¹³ Unable to reach CCB by radio, Grow pursued the combat command in his armored car. Although he toyed with the idea of letting CCB continue westward alone, he decided that this would violate the spirit of the corps order.

After stopping CCB several miles short of Loudéac, General Grow changed his scheme of maneuver. On the chance that Middleton might accede to his re-

¹² Memo, Middleton for Grow, recorded in the 6th Arm'd Div G-3 Journal as having arrived "No time 3 Aug." The actual message is missing from the file. It has been reconstructed through interviews with General Grow and Colonel McBride.

¹³ Msg, Grow to Middleton, 3 Aug, VIII Corps G-3 Jnl File (4 Aug); Msg, Grow to McBride, 1700, 3 Aug, 6th Arm'd Div G-3 Jnl.

¹¹ Msg, Evans to Grow, 1345, 3 Aug; 6th Arm'd Div G-3 Jnl, entry 1615, 3 Aug.

quest and rescind the diversion to Dinan, Grow determined to keep CCB where it was, ahead of the division and on the road to Brest. Since the CCA headquarters was closer to Dinan and since an excellent highway led northward for thirty miles from Mauron to Dinan, Grow formed a special task force from CCR troops, placed Taylor's CCA headquarters in command of it, and sent it north toward the new objective.¹⁴

The officer courier who had gone to the corps headquarters to request reconsideration of the changed mission returned late that night and reported, "The answer was no." The disappointment at the division headquarters was so bitter that the G-3 section published the "Results of Operations" as "None."¹⁵

The division headquarters on the morning of 4 August was developing an attack plan for action against Dinan when, around 1100, General Patton arrived unannounced at a wheat field near Merdrignac where the headquarters was located.¹⁶ General Grow, who had just come out of his tent, saw the army commander's jeep turn into the field and was pleasantly surprised. The division chief of staff, who was walking across the field toward General Grow, was nearby when Patton got out of his jeep. The division G-3 emerged from his operations tent in time to hear Patton's first words.

The army commander appeared to be

controlling an outburst of anger with difficulty.

"What in hell are you doing setting here?" he demanded of General Grow. "I thought I told you to go to Brest."

Grow explained that his advance had been halted.

"On what authority?" Patton rasped.

"Corps order, sir," Grow said.

The division chief of staff had already put his hand into the pocket of his shirt. Grow had given him the note he had received from Middleton and had asked him to get it into the division message file. The chief of staff still had it in his pocket. He handed it to Patton.

The three officers watched Patton read Middleton's note. When he finished, he folded the paper and put it into his pants pocket. "And he was a *good* doughboy, too," Patton said quietly as though talking to himself. Then he looked at Grow. "I'll see Middleton," he said. "You go ahead where I told you to go."

One hundred miles east of the 6th Armored Division, the VIII Corps headquarters, toiling under the handicap of its communications problem with the divisions, was only vaguely aware of developments at the front.

On 2 August, when Grow had ordered his northern column (CCB) to bypass Dinan, he had notified the corps of his action. The corps noted that the armored division "pursuant to verbal orders Army Commander bypassed Dinan and is proceeding S and W." Later, news came that contingents of the division were in Dinan. Apparently on the basis of this information, the Third Army believed that the division had "passed through Dinan." When Gen-

¹⁴ Msg, Grow to Middleton, 1910, 3 Aug.

¹⁵ 6th Armd Div G-3 Per Rpt 7 [4 Aug]; see also Msg, Grow to Middleton, 0330, 4 Aug [Sitrep 10].

¹⁶ On the Dinan attack details, see Ltr, no heading, 0730, 4 Aug; Grow to CO, Combat Team, 83d Div, 0525, 4 Aug, and entry 1007, 4 Aug. All in 6th Armd Div G-3 Jnl and File.

eral Earnest's Task Force A encountered enemy tanks and infantry near Dinan on the following morning (3 August), it was reasonable for Middleton—who believed that the 6th Armored Division had been through there on the previous evening and consequently could not be far away—to order Grow to “assist Task Force A at that point.” As indications of enemy build-up in the Dinan–St. Malo region increased, Middleton began to experience a growing uneasiness. Though the 83d Division had begun to advance toward Pontorson, it could not possibly get there for another day. Learning that the 6th Armored Division had in reality bypassed Dinan, Middleton diverted it from its Brest run. His explanation: “We are getting too strung out. We must take Dinan and St. Malo before we can proceed.”¹⁷ What appeared unreasonable to Grow was reasonable from Middleton's point of view.

Later on 3 August, when the pilot of a light artillery plane reported the locations of the 6th Armored Division columns, General Middleton realized that the armor had advanced much farther beyond Dinan than he had thought. When he learned of the imminent arrival of infantry troops in the Dinan–St. Malo sector, he changed his message to Grow from an order to a request. “Task Force ‘A’ and 83d Division will attack St. Malo tomorrow,” he radioed Grow. “Can you participate with one combat command . . .?” Later that

evening Middleton withdrew even this request. “I wanted you to assist in capture of St. Malo,” he informed General Grow. “However it is apparent that your advance precludes this Continue your original mission.”¹⁸

Shortly after midnight, when the Third Army G–3 telephoned to ask whether the 6th Armored Division had really been diverted toward St. Malo, the VIII Corps G–3 assured the caller that the division was proceeding toward Brest. The assurance was wishful. The corps had had only the briefest of contacts with the division when the division courier had arrived to transmit General Grow's request for reconsideration of his mission. But the courier had departed hastily without learning that the original mission was again in force. Since then no word had come from the division, no acknowledgment of the restoration of the old mission, no information on General Grow's intentions or activities. Several hours after daylight, 4 August, a message finally came. “Urgently recommend no change in division mission [toward Brest],” General Grow had radioed the previous evening. “Both of my commands far beyond St. Malo. . . . would take another day to attack Dinan from west.”¹⁹

The corps tried again. “Proceed on original mission toward Brest,” Middleton radioed. Soon afterwards the corps received another message from the division, but it was no acknowledgment. “[Original] Mission changed,” read the

¹⁷ VIII Corps Sitrep 97, 2 Aug; Msg, Galvin to Evans, 1630, 2 Aug; TUSA Sitrep 5, 2 Aug, and Msg, 1845, 2 Aug; Msg, Middleton to Grow, 1110, 3 Aug; Memo, Middleton for Grow, 3 Aug, 6th Armd Div G–3 Jnl File.

¹⁸ VIII Corps Arty Msg, 1800, 3 Aug; Msgs, Middleton (signed Evans) to Grow, 1800, and Middleton to Grow, 2150, 3 Aug.

¹⁹ Msg, Maddox to Evans, 0145, 4 Aug; Msg, Grow to Middleton, 3 Aug, received at VIII Corps CP, 0700, 4 Aug.

message that General Grow had wired twelve hours earlier, "preparations being made for new mission [toward Dinan and St. Malo]." By this time, Patton's Household Cavalry was frantically trying to relay the corps order authorizing the division to continue toward Brest. Not until early that afternoon did the corps at last hear that Grow was in receipt of authority to continue on his original mission. Middleton then notified the troops in the Dinan-St. Malo sector that the armored division would not participate in the action there.²⁰

Resolving the temporary confusion did not solve the problem of communications. On the contrary, as the 6th Armored Division plunged farther westward into Brittany, the problem became more acute.²¹ On the night of 4 August Middleton received a clear indication of Grow's progress. The division commander requested all pertinent data on the Brest defenses, he needed a ground pilot who could guide the division into the city, and he wanted the air force to refrain from destroying the bridges between him and his objective. Later, Grow radioed that he needed additional air support and sixty feet of Bailey bridging, that members of the FFI had assured him they would clear the approaches to Brest for the division, and, finally, "We expect to be in Brest tonight." Whether Grow meant the night of 4 or of 5 August was not clear. Still later, Grow reported that he was actually

moving against his objective.²² These fragmentary pieces of information hardly gave corps headquarters a clear picture of the situation. Periodic progress reports took thirty-six hours to get from the division to the corps command post and were out of date when they arrived.

Suspense at corps was not resolved on the morning of 6 August when the next message from Grow arrived. The division commander reported simply that enemy groups in the rear were making supply operations extremely difficult. "If additional troops are not furnished to keep supply routes open," he stated, "division must live off the country which cannot furnish gasoline or ammunition. Air support essential but ground security is equally essential at once."²³

Although Middleton restrained his intense concern regarding the whereabouts of the armor, General Patton could not. Patton asked the XIX Tactical Air Command to get some fighter-bombers over Brest and find out what was happening. Specifically, he wanted to know where the 6th Armored Division was and whether it could take Brest without assistance. Also, the pilots were to tell Grow that if there was any possibility at all of taking the port city without infantry reinforcement, he was to do so at once. At the same time, Patton instructed his Household Cavalry to get busy and tell him whether Brest had or had not been taken.²⁴

²⁰ Msg, Middleton to Grow, 0915, 4 Aug; Msg, Grow to Middleton, 1910, 3 Aug; Msg, 6th Cav Gp to Cav Detachment with 6th Armd Div, 1040, 4 Aug; Msg, Middleton to Macon, 1348, 4 Aug.

²¹ See, for example, Msg, Middleton to Grow, 1715, 4 Aug.

²² Msg, Grow to Middleton, received by VIII Corps, 2200, 4 Aug; Msg, Grow to Middleton, 2110, 4 Aug, 6th Armd Div G-3 Jnl File, received by VIII Corps, 1205, 5 Aug; Msg, Grow to Middleton, 5 Aug.

²³ Msg, Grow to Middleton, 0535, 6 Aug.

²⁴ Msg, XIX TAC to 6th Armd Div, intercepted by VIII Corps, 6 Aug; TUSA Info Serv Msg, Lt Colin Satterfield to VIII Corps, 1330, 6 Aug.

It was not long before the Household Cavalry announced, "Brest is ours." Not long afterwards came the correction, "Brest was not ours," and it would "probably not fall until tomorrow."²⁵ His patience gone, Middleton rapped out a message to Grow. "This headquarters has no information as to your present positions," he wrote. "Radio this headquarters at once."²⁶

But communications difficulties precluded the regular flow of information. Corps could only guess what was happening. Estimates of enemy intentions were vaguely optimistic but of little real value. The corps G-2 reasoned that, considering the highly disorganized state of the enemy, the disruption of German supply operations, the lack of reserves, and the growing activity of the FFI, the Germans in Brittany could do no more than offer a "spotty and sporadic [delaying action] culminating in a short token defense of the city of Brest."²⁷ Whether this was true or false, whether the 6th Armored Division was inside Brest or still outside, whether it was heavily engaged, in danger of being destroyed and needful of help, or having an easy time taking and securing the port were vital questions that could not be answered until word came from General Grow.

On the other hand, it seemed to corps that the strong fortifications known to exist around Brest would make the effort of a single armored division seem like the impact of an insect against the shell

of a turtle. After a conference with Patton, Middleton radioed Grow to develop the situation wherever he was, whether "in front of or in Brest." If Grow could not capture and secure Brest without help, Middleton wrote,

. . . then we will reinforce you with the necessary force. As for me, I do not want you to become too involved so that you cannot take care of yourself. However, I feel that the situation at Brest should be clarified before [additional] troops are sent. Furthermore, at this time no one can say what should be sent. . . . While supply and evacuation is an Army function, yet if I can assist you in these matters do not hesitate to call.²⁸

After that there was little for Middleton to do except to wait and hope for the best.

In the wheat field near Merdrignac, near noon on 4 August, Patton's unexpected arrival at the 6th Armored Division command post had virtually coincided with the receipt of corps permission for the division to continue toward Brest.²⁹ It did not take long for General Grow to flash the news to all subordinate commands: "Division proceeds at once on original mission to Brest. Dinan will not (repeat not) be attacked."³⁰ Assured that all units had received the re-orientation westward, Grow wired Middleton that he would move early that afternoon.³¹ Actually, however, it took the division most of the afternoon to get ready. The effect

²⁵ TUSA Info Serv with 6th Armd Div Msg, 1120, 6 Aug; TUSA Info Serv Msg, Satterfield to VIII Corps, 1330, 6 Aug.

²⁶ Msg, Middleton to Grow, 1720, 6 Aug.

²⁷ VIII Corps G-2 Per Rpt 49, 3 Aug; see also G-2 Per Rpt 51, 5 Aug.

²⁸ Memo (by radio), Middleton for Grow, 6 Aug.

²⁹ Msgs, Evans to Grow, 0915 and 1100, 4 Aug, 6th Armd Div G-3 Jnl (Delayed Msgs due to radio silence received 4 Aug); TUSA Info Serv Detachment to 6th Armd Div, 1145, 4 Aug.

³⁰ Radio signed Galvin, 1125, 4 Aug.

³¹ Msg, Grow to Middleton, 1230, 4 Aug.

of the abortive diversion toward Dinan was to delay the thrust on Brest almost a day.

While the division made preparations, Patton told Grow that he had come for three reasons: he had wanted to see how the unit was functioning, he had some information to impart, and he wanted to discuss supply, particularly gasoline. He admitted that he was pleasantly surprised to find the division so far into Brittany.³² He revealed that the division would have no infantry support until later since the 83d Division would have to knock out St. Malo before proceeding to Brest. Finally, he said he was planning to send gas forward for the division on the following day and asked where Grow wanted it delivered. Looking at the map, Grow selected the town of Pontivy, twenty-five miles west of the leading division troops. The army commander was momentarily startled. Designating a supply point ahead of the combat troops rather than behind them indicated that Grow intended to advance so fast and so far that Pontivy by the following day would be a rear area suitable for a supply dump. Patton grinned. "You'll get your gas there," he promised.

Because destroyed bridges and mined fords near Loudéac and Pontivy temporarily delayed the parallel armored columns early on the evening of 4 August, General Grow took advantage of a full moon and clear weather to order a night march. There was no opposition. Members of the FFI became bolder and

not only acted as guides and information agents but also harassed and hurried the departure of small German garrisons from the interior towns.

Learning from the FFI that about two thousand German paratroopers had destroyed the bridges at Carhaix and were preparing to defend there, General Grow ordered the columns to bypass that town on north and south. Avoiding entanglement there on the morning of 5 August, both columns drove toward Huelgoat, less than forty air miles from Brest. As it began to seem likely that the division would be in the port city by nightfall and win General Patton's wager with Montgomery, about five hundred Germans with artillery and tanks stopped the advance near Huelgoat. Mined defiles, heavily wooded areas, and the presence of Germans in good defensive positions forced the division into an engagement that lasted several hours.³³ The units finally cleared the enemy and prepared for what was hoped would be the final dash to Brest.

Pursuing interior routes and piloting his columns between Morlaix and Landivisiau, which he had been apprised were occupied by the Germans, General Grow pushed his troops forward on the morning of 6 August. Read's CCB moved rapidly north, then west, and struck a strong roadblock six miles south of Morlaix, obviously an outpost position. After sustaining several casualties, CCB withdrew and bypassed the resistance. That evening, when reconnaissance

³² An aide who accompanied Patton later informed Grow that Patton had had to discard several maps during his trip to the division command post. Each time he ran off one map sheet onto another was an occasion for jubilant profanity.

³³ See Byrd, *15th Tank Battalion*, pp. 29-31. 2d Lt. James I. Durden of the 15th Tank Battalion, who was killed when he went forward on foot to clear a mine field under enemy fire and lead drivers along safe paths, was posthumously awarded the DSC.

troops encountered opposition at Lesneven—fifteen miles from Brest—a French volunteer delivered a surrender ultimatum to the German garrison at Lesneven. No reply came, and the combat command attacked, drove the enemy out, and took possession of the town.

Taylor's CCA, in contrast, advanced slowly over devious country lanes not marked on maps available to the troops. By nightfall the command was between Morlaix and Landivisiau. Hanson's CCR, which had switched routes near Huelgoat to follow CCA, changed again to reinforce the faster moving CCB.

Although the 6th Armored Division was in the vicinity of Brest by the evening of 6 August, it was hardly in position to attack or even to demonstrate against the objective. How strong the city defenses were and what the Germans intended to do were yet to be discovered.

Earlier that day an American fighter-bomber had appeared over the division column and the pilot had radioed Patton's request for information: "What is situation in Brest? Where are your forces? . . . Does 6th Armored Division need Infantry assistance?" Grow answered that he thought Brest would be defended and that he needed an infantry division to support his attack on the city. This was what had prompted the instruction that Grow was to develop his situation "in front of or in Brest" until further clarification of the situation permitted sending additional troops to Brest.³⁴ Until then, the 6th Armored Division was to go it alone.

³⁴ Msg, Weyland to Grow, 1210, 6 Aug; Msg, Grow to Weyland, 1250, 6 Aug; Memo (by radio), Middleton for Grow, 6 Aug; Msg, Patton to Grow (via plane), 1820, 6 Aug.

General Grow felt that he had a good chance of taking Brest. German morale was extremely low. The division advance had so disrupted German communications that local commanders probably had little if any knowledge of the situation. Because German strength in Brittany had been drained away into Normandy, what remained was of miscellaneous nature and low caliber. Although the 6th Armored Division had no accurate information on how many Germans defended Brest, a number in excess of 3,000 hardly seemed likely. They were probably capable of fighting delaying action on the radius of a fifty-mile circle around Brest and drawing back gradually into the fortress. Remembering that Granville, the first important division objective in the Cotentin, had surrendered to a tank platoon, General Grow decided that a show of force might satisfy the German requirements of honor and bring about the surrender of Brest. He ordered Read's CCB, which was closest to the city, to move against Brest the next morning, 7 August.³⁵

Attacking southwest from Lesneven, CCB bypassed Plabennec on the north. After destroying a large antiaircraft warning system and observation post near Milizac, the combat command came under severe fire from artillery pieces in Brest. Seven miles north of the city, CCB had struck the hard shell of the fortress.

Meanwhile, on 7 August, the remainder of the division arrived in the Brest area. CCR in late afternoon reached the vicinity of Gouesnou, about four

³⁵ 6th Armd Div G-2 Per Rpt 9, 6 Aug.

miles north-northeast of the center of Brest. CCA moved to the vicinity of Guipavas during the evening and night, but not as far toward Brest as Grow would have liked. Deployed in three columns and from four to seven miles from the center of the city, the 6th Armored Division was in contact with the Brest defenses.

It was apparent by this time that the Germans intended to defend and that they had adequate means to do so. Heavy artillery fire harassed the division throughout 7 August, serving notice that the element of surprise had been removed.³⁶ To take the fortress, the division would have to stage a full-scale attack. Needing a day to reorganize for a co-ordinated effort, Grow decided to give the German garrison one more chance to surrender. If the Germans were planning only a token defense, perhaps a surrender ultimatum might produce the desired result. While the division prepared an attack for 9 August, the G-2 and a German-speaking master sergeant drove toward the enemy line on the morning of 8 August in a jeep draped in white sheets and flying a flag of truce.

From the corps perspective, the situation appeared to be quite different: the evidence pointed to a strong defense of Brest. A hard-fought battle had developed at St. Malo. Captured overprints of the Lorient fortifications and the experience of the 4th Armored Division showed strong defenses there. Why should the Germans give only token opposition at Brest? General Middleton was certain that the reduc-

tion of each port city would be a difficult task requiring heavy artillery and a force of perhaps one armored and two infantry divisions. With only four divisions under his control, Middleton visualized protracted operations ahead, particularly since he felt that the increasing importance of developments east of Brittany might rob him of some of his resources. Proceeding with his program of reducing the German port cities one by one, with St. Malo first on the agenda, he could do little to aid his forces elsewhere; but at the same time he expected little from them.³⁷

General Patton, who felt that his Household Cavalry gave him a better knowledge of what was happening in Brittany and who had received word that Grow planned to attack Brest, decided that the 6th Armored Division ought to have some reinforcement. He therefore ordered Middleton to move an infantry battalion of the 8th Division from Rennes to Brest. Early on the afternoon of 8 August, a battalion started westward to join the 6th Armored Division.³⁸

Soon afterwards, a report came to army announcing that a large German force was moving toward Brest from the northeast.³⁹ If this were true, the 6th Armored Division was about to be squeezed and crushed between the moving force and the Brest garrison. Concern over the potential fate of the division was intensified by the inadequate communications.

³⁷ Memo, Evans for Maddox, 7 Aug.

³⁸ TUSA Info Serv Patrol Msg, received at VIII Corps CP 1156, 8 Aug; TUSA Memo to VIII Corps, 8 Aug; VIII Corps Memo to 8th Div, 8 Aug; 6th Armd Div G-3 Jnl, entry 0410, 8 Aug.

³⁹ TUSA Info Serv Msg, 1350, 8 Aug.

³⁶ 6th Armd Div G-2 Per Rpt 10, 7 Aug.