

the *LXXXI* those in the center, and the *I SS Panzer* (on the east bank) those on the left. The armored units under the *II SS Panzer Corps* and concentrated on the southern flank of the German bridgehead west of the Seine had no designated sector of their own. Though thousands of troops—estimated by the Second British Army between forty and fifty thousand—were still west of the Seine, the Germans were hoping to organize a coherent front on the east bank. There the *Fifth Panzer Army* would operate in a sector between the *Fifteenth Army* (in the coastal area south to Le Havre) and the *First Army* (covering Paris and the rest of the *Army Group B* front).⁶⁴

Model on 25 August instructed Dietrich to withdraw the few units still west of the Risle River across the river that night, and all the forces in the Seine River bridgehead behind the Seine in one bound on the following night. Once across the Seine, the army was to organize and reinforce positions in such a manner as to assure successful defense of the river line. In addition, the remnants of the armored units were to be formed into two reserve groups—one to be located northeast of Rouen, the other near Beauvais. The *II Parachute Corps* headquarters was to move to Nancy for rehabilitation under control of the *First Parachute Army*. The *Seventh Army* was to move the remnants of eleven divisions unfit for combat—the *3d Parachute*, the *84th, 85th, 89th, 243d, 272d, 276th, 277th, 326th, 363d*, and *708th Infantry*, plus other splinter units—to the Somme River-St. Quentin area in the rear for

rehabilitation. In addition, all elements of these units that could be spared were to construct fortifications along the Somme.⁶⁵

Thus, though the Germans were preparing to defend along the Seine, the plans seemed impossible of execution. According to one estimate—probably too low—of the battle strength of the *Fifth Panzer Army* on 25 August, 18,000 infantrymen, 314 artillery pieces, and 42 tanks and self-propelled guns were arrayed against the Allies who, in addition to their overwhelming superiority in the air, in ammunition, and in gasoline-line supplies, were estimated to have more than 100,000 infantry in line and 90,000 in immediate reserve, 1,300 artillery pieces deployed and 1,100 in reserve, 1,900 tanks in operation on the front and 2,000 more in reserve.⁶⁶ Holding at the Seine appeared a slim prospect. The Somme River line seemed to offer the only possible position for the next stand.

Before any stand could be made, the troops jammed against the west bank of the Seine had to be extricated and brought across the river. They were virtually trapped. Three days had been necessary in July and early August to move two divisions abreast westward across the Seine toward the front; it was therefore obvious that a crossing in reverse under the unfavorable conditions of late August would allow little more than personnel to get to the east bank. The approaches to the ferries were inadequate, and the remnants of the *Seventh Army* congested the approaches. By 25 August eighteen major ferries and several smaller ones were still operating

⁶⁴ *Fifth Pz Army KTB*, 24 and 25 Aug; *Second Br Army Intel Summary 81*, 2400, 24 Aug; see also *AGp B KTB*, 21 and 25 Aug.

⁶⁵ Model Order to Dietrich, 25 Aug, *AGp B KTB*, *Anlage 46*.

⁶⁶ *Fifth Pz Army KTB*, *Anlage 50*.

in the Rouen area; miscellaneous boats and rafts made hazardous trips; one small bridge to Rouen was still intact. These facilities were hardly adequate for the thousands of troops who in some instances fought among themselves for transportation across the river. Orderly movement was difficult if not impossible. Though it was generally agreed that tanks were to be saved first, SS formations often insisted that they had priority over all other units, and it was sometimes necessary for high-ranking commanders to resort to the use of force or at least the threat of force in order to carry out the semblance of an orderly procedure. Some "unpleasant scenes" took place at the Seine.⁶⁷

Despite some disorder and panic, the Germans managed to get a surprisingly large number of troops to the east bank of the Seine, mostly on 26 and 27 August. To the Germans, it seemed that the British and Canadians did not push as hard as they might have. Neither did the Allied air forces seem as active as usual during the critical days of the withdrawal. The Seine ferries that remained in service operated even during daylight hours.⁶⁸

This achievement was rather hollow. There was no longer any option of defending at the Seine or even hoping for an orderly withdrawal east of the river. The escaping units were weak and close to exhaustion.

⁶⁷ LXXXI Corps KTB, *Anlagen, Karen*; Telecon, Blumentritt, Speidel, Jodl, 1045, 25 Aug, AGp B KTB; MS # B-758 (Kuntzen) and MS # B-807 (Kuntzen); Montgomery, *Normandy to the Baltic*, p. 176; Second Br Army Intel Summary 81, 2400, 24 Aug; AGp B KTB, 21 and 25 Aug.

⁶⁸ OB WEST, a Study in Command, p. 162; see Leigh-Mallory, "Despatch," Fourth Supplement to the *London Gazette* of December 31, 1946, p. 67, for an opposite point of view.

In contrast, the Allies, having closed to the lower Seine north of Paris and being in possession of a bridgehead held by the 79th Division, were ready to undertake post-OVERLORD operations east of the Seine.

Through the Paris-Orléans Gap

A day after operations along the lower Seine had started, those directed toward the upper Seine south of Paris began. On 21 August the XX Corps attacked eastward from Dreux and Chartres, the XII Corps from Châteaudun and Orléans. The objective of the two corps, moving abreast, was the Paris-Orléans gap—the Seine River line south of Paris.⁶⁹

Confronting the two corps was the German *First Army*, commanded now by General de Panzertruppen Otto von Knobelsdorff, who was trying to gather forces to defend the upper Seine and a line southward through Nemours, Montargis, Gien, and Orléans. His immediate task was to delay the Americans by blocking the main roads until new divisions promised for the Western Front could be brought up to defend the line of the Seine. The only delaying forces available were security troops, local garrisons, antiaircraft detachments, and stragglers from scattered units, all with hopelessly inadequate equipment.

Those portions of the 48th and 338th Divisions that had met the Americans at Chartres fell back to the Seine to join other newly arriving and as yet uncommitted portions that gathered at Melun, Fontainebleau, and Montereau. These were far from impressive forces—the 48th

⁶⁹ 12th AGp Memo for Rcd, 19 Aug, including additional notes of conf, Bradley and Patton, 1730, 19 Aug, ML-205; TUSA Dir, 20 Aug.

was without combat experience, inadequately trained, and deficient in equipment; the 338th lacked organic transportation and became partially mobile only after commandeering French vehicles. At Montargis, which Hitler had ordered strongly defended, were assembled the erstwhile defenders of Orléans—fragments of the 708th Division and the usual quota of security troops and supply personnel. The 348th Division and the 18th Luftwaffe Field Division were on the way from northern France to the First Army but were diverted later toward the Seine north of Paris.⁷⁰

On the American side, General Eddy, former commander of the 9th Division, took General Cook's place in command of XII Corps and was given the mission of driving to the Yonne River at Sens, seventy miles east of Orléans.⁷¹ After attaching the 137th Infantry, 35th Division, to the 4th Armored Division, General Eddy on 20 August ordered General Wood to attack. CCA (with a battalion of attached infantry) pushed off in a drive that gathered speed as it progressed. Though the tankers found Montargis defended and the bridge over the Loing River at the town destroyed, reconnaissance troops located a damaged but usable bridge at Souppes-sur-Loing, fifteen miles north of Montargis. Ignoring Montargis, CCA dashed to Souppes-sur-Loing on 21 August, crossed the river, and, against occasional small arms

⁷⁰ MS # B-003 (Hoehne); MS # B-728 (Emmerich); MS # B-732 (Hold); *First Army FO 2, 16 Aug.*, translated and reproduced in Annex 1 to TUSA G-2 Per Rpt 69, 19 Aug. MS # P-166 (Casper) is the principal German source.

⁷¹ The following account is taken from the XII Corps, 4th Armd Div, and 35th Div AAR's, Aug. CI 354.

fire, raced to Sens. Spearheads entered the city that afternoon and took the German garrison so by surprise that some officers were strolling in the streets in dress uniform—tourists who had missed the last truck home. Having captured the city, CCA established a bridgehead on the east bank of the Yonne by the morning of 22 August.

To eliminate those Germans concentrated at Montargis, the 35th Division pushed to the western outskirts of the city while CCB of the 4th Armored, which had also crossed the Loing River at Souppes, turned south to outflank the defenses. A co-ordinated attack crushed the resistance and liberated the town on 24 August. After clearing Montargis, armor and infantry proceeded to sweep the area eastward to Sens.

From Sens, CCA of the 4th Armored Division drove forty miles to the outskirts of Troyes on the morning of 25 August. There the bulk of the command launched a frontal attack in desert-spread formation. With tanks approximately a hundred yards apart and tankers firing their weapons continuously, the troops charged across three miles of open ground sloping down toward the city. Inside Troyes, the Germans fought back. Though street fighting continued through the night, the Americans were in possession of the greater part of the city by nightfall. That evening a column crossed the Seine a few miles north of the city. Not until the following morning, when this column drove into the rear of the German garrison, did the battle come to an end.⁷²

⁷² Col. Bruce C. Clarke, the CCA commander, and Maj. Arthur L. West, Jr., who led the armored attack, were awarded the DSC.



FERRYING JEEPS ACROSS THE SEINE IN THE EARLY MORNING FOG

Meanwhile, the 35th Division pushed through Joigny to St. Florentin, thereby protecting the corps right flank east of Orléans.

Armor and infantry had worked together smoothly. Crossing their columns west of Montargis, the divisions had performed a difficult maneuver efficiently. Casualties were extremely light, prisoners numerous.

While advancing to the Seine, Eddy had also protected the army group south flank. Patton had relieved him of guarding the Loire River west of Orléans by assigning that task to the VIII Corps. East of Orléans, part of the 35th Division, CCR of the 4th Armored, and cavalry troops patrolled a line from Orléans through Gien to Joigny until the 319th Infantry of the 80th Division

moved from Angers to relieve them.⁷³ The other regiments of the 80th Division (attached to the XII Corps) marched from Argentan to assemble near Orléans.

On the left of XII Corps, when General Walker received word to take XX Corps eastward and secure Seine River bridgeheads between Melun and Montereau, reconnaissance patrols of the 7th Armored Division had already moved to Rambouillet and the Seine River. The virtual absence of enemy forces convinced American commanders that little would oppose the advance.⁷⁴

⁷³ Msg, Middleton to Patton, 19 Aug. VIII Corps G-3 Jnl and File.

⁷⁴ The following is taken from the 5th Div AAR, Aug; Irwin Diary; XX Corps, pp. 84-89; *Fifth Infantry Division in the ETO*.

In driving from Chartres to Fontainebleau and Montereau (fifteen miles apart), General Irwin's 5th Division would cross a wide plateau cut by narrow valleys and two rivers, the Essonne and the Loing, which afforded the Germans outpost positions for Seine River defenses. With Fontainebleau as the primary objective, Irwin committed two regiments abreast on 21 August. The 10th Infantry, on the right, moved to Malesherbes, reduced unexpectedly heavy local opposition, crossed the Essonne River on two bridges still intact, and continued three miles before stopping for the night. The 2d Infantry, on the left, met a strong garrison at Etampes. Unable to reduce the resistance, the regiment encircled the town, isolated the garrison, and set about investing the town systematically. Unwilling to be delayed, General Irwin committed his reserve, the 11th Infantry, in the center. The 11th skirted Etampes on the south and crossed the Essonne River, which proved to be no major obstacle. The 5th Division thus had advanced about forty miles during the day and still had two regiments abreast for a final thrust to the objectives.

On 22 August the 10th Infantry encountered increasing resistance while attacking from Malesherbes toward la Chapelle, which fell that evening. There, the regiment was in position either to reinforce the attack on Fontainebleau or to continue to Montereau. For a while it appeared that reinforcement of the 11th Infantry drive toward Fontainebleau would be necessary, for that regiment had advanced barely five miles on 22 August before running into a counterattack. Early the next morn-

ing, 23 August, the resistance faded, enabling the 11th Infantry to move the twelve miles to Fontainebleau before noon.

At the Seine, Lt. Col. Kelley B. Lemmon, Jr., a battalion commander, discovered the bridge destroyed. He swam the river, found five small boats on the east bank, tied them together, and paddled them back for the troops to use to establish a bridgehead. Meanwhile, Capt. Jack S. Gerrie, a company commander, and T. Sgt. Dupe A. Willingham, a platoon sergeant, had found a canoe, and they paddled across the Seine to reconnoiter the east bank. Detected by Germans, Gerrie covered Willingham while the sergeant swam back to organize a firing line on the west bank. Under cover of this fire, Gerrie also swam back.⁷⁵

After a short fire fight with elements of the 48th Division, riflemen began to cross the Seine in random boats found along the bank. By the following day, 24 August, a battalion had paddled across, engineers had installed a treadway bridge, and the entire 11th Infantry was east of the Seine River.

When it had become apparent on 23 August that the defenders of Fontainebleau were about to melt away, Irwin had sent the 10th Infantry on to Montereau. Men of the 10th forded the Loing River not far from its juncture with the Seine, and vehicles crossed at Nemours, already liberated by the FFI. On 24 August, the regiment cleared Montereau. That evening, after engineers brought assault boats to the river, the infantrymen established a

⁷⁵All three received the DSC.



ADVANCING UNDER FIRE TOWARD FONTAINEBLEAU

bridgehead on the east bank of the Seine. In the face of a feeble counterattack by the 48th Division on the following morning, the entire 10th Infantry crossed the river.⁷⁶

The 2d Infantry, meanwhile, had taken Etampes on 22 August. When it was clear that these troops would not be needed to reinforce the other regiments, they crossed the Yonne River between Montereau and Sens.

The 5th Division had moved rapidly and aggressively almost seventy miles to Montereau and almost sixty miles to Fontainebleau. The attack displayed

good command judgment and flexibility of maneuver.

On the left at Dreux, General Silvester's 7th Armored Division had received the mission of driving to Melun and crossing the Seine there, ten miles north of Fontainebleau and twenty-five miles south of Paris.⁷⁷ Straddling the Seine at the apex of a long, V-shaped bend, the town of Melun is divided by the river into three parts. The principal portion is on the right (east) bank; the modern part is on the left; the third section is on an island in the center of the river, the site of a Roman camp dating from the time of Caesar's Gallic

⁷⁶ Pvt. Harold A. Garman of the 5th Medical Battalion was later awarded the Medal of Honor for having, under fire, rescued from drowning wounded men being evacuated across the river.

⁷⁷ The following is taken from the XX Corps and 7th Armd Div AAR's, Aug; CI 285, GL-165; XX Corps, pp. 84-89; and personal papers of General Silvester.

wars. A highway bridge, still intact, joined the three parts of town.

The problem of taking Melun was not simple since the Seine is 250 to 300 feet wide there. Twisting and turning between steep banks, it presents a serious natural obstacle. The *48th Division* occupied a defensive sector fifty miles long between Montereau and Corbeil; at Melun and in possession of dominating ground along the right bank of the Seine was a reinforced infantry regiment.

General Silvester suspected that Melun would be strongly held and doubted that the Germans would permit the bridge across the Seine there to remain intact for long. Charged still with maintaining security at Dreux and mindful of the proximity of Paris, he retained CCB at Dreux. He sent CCR on 21 August directly to Melun to seize the bridge and take the town by frontal assault if possible, to perform a holding mission if not. At the same time, he dispatched CCA in the main effort to cross the river several miles north of Melun and threaten the town from the rear.

CCA on the left and CCR on the right gained thirty miles on 21 August despite rather difficult terrain—steep hills and narrow valleys, thick woods (including the great forest of Rambouillet), and innumerable villages that afforded the enemy excellent opportunities for road-blocks, mine fields, and ambush. On 22 August, though artillery fire near Arpajon delayed CCA, CCR reached the railway embankment on the outskirts of Melun. The bridge across the Seine was still standing and in good condition.

Hoping to take the enemy by surprise, General Silvester ordered CCR to attack at once without an artillery preparation. When the combat command did so, Ger-

man artillery, automatic weapons, and small arms fire soon halted the attack. Another assault the same evening, this time after an air attack and a twenty-minute preparation by three battalions of artillery, was also unsuccessful. The troops then took defiladed positions and prepared to make a third attack on the following day.

Before the combat command could attack on the morning of 23 August, the Germans destroyed the bridge. Recognizing that CCR, which lacked assault boats, could then perform only a diversionary and holding action at Melun, General Silvester canceled the attack the combat command had scheduled, then turned his attention to CCA, held up near Arpajon.

Prodded forward on 23 August, CCA late that afternoon reached the Seine near the village of Ponthierry, about seven miles downstream from Melun. Since the bridge at Ponthierry was destroyed, armored infantrymen crossed the river in assault boats several hundred yards to the north at the hamlet of Tilly and established a slender bridge-head that evening. Division engineers worked through the night to bridge the river.

Meanwhile, the corps commander, General Walker, had appeared at the CCR command post near Melun late on the morning of 23 August. Dissatisfied with what he considered the idleness of CCR, he ordered an immediate attack. That afternoon armored infantrymen of CCR advanced to the river. Enough of the bridge structure remained to give foot soldiers passage to the island in the middle of the stream. While Walker virtually took control of the local operation, an infantry company scrambled

across the wreckage of the bridge and secured the island.⁷⁸ The only result of this success was the liberation from a prison on the island of several hundred French felons who fled to the west bank, where civil affairs personnel, military police, and civilian authorities took them into custody. Heavy fire from the east bank of the Seine inflicted numerous casualties on CCR units. The action appeared stalemated.

Downstream at Tilly, however, engineers completed a treadway bridge on the morning of 24 August, and tankers and artillerymen of CCA crossed at once to reinforce the bridgehead and establish blocking positions to the north and east.

⁷⁸ General Walker received the DSC, as did his aide-de-camp, 1st Lt. David W. Allard, who swam across the Seine River under enemy fire to get information for the corps commander.

Immediately behind came CCB, relieved of its duty at Dreux. Across the river and on the east bank, CCB turned south and drove toward Melun. Hasty mine fields and small roadblocks slowed the advance, but early on 25 August armored columns of CCB entered Melun from the northeast and dispersed the defenders.

As the result of the action by the XII and XX Corps between 20 and 25 August, the Third Army had four bridgeheads across the upper Seine River south of Paris between Melun and Troyes. North of Paris along the lower Seine, the First Army had another bridgehead at Mantes-Gassicourt. And on 25 August, in the most dramatic act of liberation to take place in France, the Allies were securing still another bridgehead across the Seine at Paris.

CHAPTER XXIX

The Liberation of Paris

Allied Plans

As American troops neared Paris, soldiers recalled the "fanciful tales of their fathers in the AEF" and began to dream of entering the city themselves.¹ Despite their hopes, despite the political, psychological, and military significance of the city, and even though any one of three corps had been capable of liberating Paris since mid-August, the Allied command had long before decided to defer liberation on the basis of tactics, logistics, and politics.

Before the cross-Channel attack, Allied planners had thought it likely that the Germans would hold on firmly to Paris. With two potential switch lines in the Marne and Oise Rivers, the Germans would possess not only favorable defensive positions but also a most suitable base for a counteroffensive. To attack Paris directly would therefore probably involve the Allies in prolonged street fighting, undesirable both because of the delay imposed on operations toward Germany and because of the possibility of destroying the French capital. Yet the Allies would need to reduce the German defenses at Paris before they could initiate action beyond the Seine River. The best way to take the capital, the planners indicated, would be to by-

pass and encircle it, then await the inevitable capitulation of the isolated garrison.²

Staff officers responsible for supply favored this course. Because the Combined Chiefs of Staff had advised the Supreme Commander that he was to distribute relief supplies to liberated areas if he could do so "without hindrance . . . to the logistical administrative support required to sustain the forces allocated . . . for the defeat of Germany," the logisticians saw Paris in terms of a liability. The Allied civil affairs commitment there could not help but drain supplies from the combat units and adversely affect military operations.³

The civil affairs commitment seemed particularly large in August because Allied bombing and French sabotage directed against German transport had virtually isolated the capital from the provinces. A famine of food, coal, gas, and electricity threatened the city. Planners estimated that four thousand tons of supplies per day would be required, which, if converted to gasoline

¹ PS SHAEF (44) 11 (Final), SHAEF Plng Staff, Post-NEPTUNE, Courses of Action After Capture of the Lodgment Area, Sec. II: Method of Conducting the Campaign, 30 May, SGS SHAEF File 381, Post-OVERLORD Plng.

² CCS to Eisenhower, W-42278, 27 May, SGS SHAEF File 014.1, Civil Affairs in Northwest Europe, I; PS SHAEF (44) 11 (Second Preliminary Draft), Post-NEPTUNE Ops, 22 Jul, SHAEF File 18008, Post-OVERLORD Plng, G-3 Plans.

¹ Bradley, *Soldier's Story*, p. 384.

for the combat troops, was "enough for a three days' motor march toward the German border." In view of the disintegration of the German forces in Normandy, which invited immediate Allied pursuit operations toward Germany, the necessity of diverting troops and supplies to Paris on humanitarian grounds, though difficult to reject, seemed unwarranted, particularly since the military supply lines were already strained and since continued military pressure east of Paris might bring the war to a quick end. The Allies felt that the Germans in Paris could only delay the Allied advance, and because the Allies would soon have other crossing sites over the Seine, an unnecessary challenge might provoke the Germans into destroying the city.⁴

The political factor working against immediate liberation stemmed from the aspirations of General Charles de Gaulle, chief of the Free French movement. Though Marshal Henri Pétain headed the government in France, de Gaulle several days before the invasion had proclaimed his own National Committee of Liberation the provisional government of the French Republic. By making possible de Gaulle's entry into Paris and thus unavoidably intervening in the internal affairs of France, General Eisenhower "foresaw possible embarrassment."

⁴ Msg, Eisenhower to Koenig, SGS SHAEF War Diary, 5 Aug; Adrien Dansette, *L'Histoire de la Libération de Paris* (Paris, c. 1946) (hereafter cited as Dansette, *Libération de Paris*), pp. 70-78. Dansette is a basic source for this chapter. Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe*, p. 296; Bradley, *Soldier's Story*, pp. 384-87; 21 AGp Gen Operational Situation and Dir, M-519, 20 Aug; Montgomery, *Normandy to the Baltic*, p. 176; PS SHAEF (44) 11, Post-NEPTUNE Opns (First Draft), 12 Aug, Final, 17 Aug, SHAEF File 18008, G-3 Plans.

The result might be the imposition of a government on France that the French people might not want.⁵

These logistical and political factors played a part in the Allied decision to postpone the liberation, despite recognition that "Paris will be tempting bait, and for political and morale reasons strong pressure will doubtless be exerted to capture it early."⁶ The circumstances were such as to give full play to the desire to spare Paris and its two million inhabitants devastation and injury. Ever since the preliminary phases of Operation OVERLORD when Allied planes had attempted to destroy the German communications network in France, pilots had attacked railroad marshaling yards outside Paris rather than terminals inside the city, and in August the same motivation applied in the decision to swing ground troops around the capital rather than through it.

German Hopes

The German high command had long had "grave worries" that loss of Paris to the Allies would publicize the extent of the German reverses. Because of this and because of Hitler's tactical plans, the Germans decided at the beginning of August to hold the French capital.⁷

At the same time that Hitler had conceived the Mortain counterattack, he had had to consider seriously the possible eventuality of withdrawing his forces from Normandy, perhaps from

⁵ Pogue, *Supreme Command*, p. 241, and Ltr, Pogue to author, 28 Nov 54, OCMH Files.

⁶ PS SHAEF (44) 11 (Second Preliminary Draft), Post-NEPTUNE Opns, 22 Jul, SHAEF File 18008, Post-OVERLORD Plng, G-3 Plans.

⁷ OB WEST, *a Study in Command* (pp. 136, 138, 142ff., and 155) is a useful source.