

eighty-five miles away. Then, after driving about fifty miles to Mons-Sedan, the army was to turn gradually to the east and advance a hundred and twenty-five miles through Liège-Arlon, the duchy of Luxembourg, and across the Rhine River between Cologne and Koblenz to the southern fringe of the Ruhr.⁴⁸

The terrain, the best invasion route to Germany, posed no special problems. The army would generally follow the Oise River valley to Landrecies, the Sambre River valley from Maubeuge to Namur, the Meuse River valley to Liège. Only in the right side of the zone were there several obstacles—the Marne, the Aisne, and the Meuse Rivers crossed the routes of advance in succession, and later the Ardennes interposed its rugged terrain. But if the army could move quickly, and there seemed no reason why it should not, it would forestall effective opposition on these terrain features. In the left part of the army zone, where General Hodges was to make his main effort to support the British, no major waterways or terrain obstacles intervened. Enemy resistance was expected to be ineffective along the whole army front.

Hodges had four corps, only two of which were immediately available. Gerow's V Corps in the center was liberating Paris. Haislip's XV Corps headquarters, commanding the forces in the Mantes-Gassicourt bridgehead, was to rejoin the Third Army after being replaced by Corlett's XIX Corps headquarters. Collins' VII Corps was to take over the Melun bridgehead. With Corlett on the left and Collins on the

right, Hodges would launch a twin pursuit to encircle Paris and drive to Péronne and Laon. Heavy artillery was to remain west of the Seine for the time being. Supplies for the pursuing troops seemed adequate.⁴⁹

Collins' VII Corps attacked to the northeast from Melun on 26 August and quickly unhinged the *LVIII Panzer Corps* line near Meaux. Dispersing the defenders and passing within a mile of the *First Army* command post near Fontenay-Trésigny, American tankers sped through Château-Thierry and Soissons on 28 August, reaching Laon two days later. On the last day of the month armored troops were at Rethel and Montcornet, a hundred miles beyond the Seine. General Rose, who had developed the 3d Armored Division "into a marvelous thing, . . . built up morale, taught the division how to . . . fight," led the advance, with the 9th Division (commanded now by Maj. Gen. Louis A. Craig) and Huebner's 1st Division clearing the corps zone behind the armor.⁵⁰

Until the XIX Corps headquarters took over the Mantes-Gassicourt bridgehead, XV Corps continued in command. Hobbs' 30th Division reinforced Wyche's 79th (which had held the bridgehead for a week with the help of extensive artillery support and a "big program of harassing and interdicting fires") on 27 August, and Brooks' 2d Armored Divi-

⁴⁹ FUSA Ltr, FA and TD's, 27 Aug. FUSA G-2 Jnl and File, L-379 (56).

⁵⁰ Collins' Talk, 19 Jan 48; VI Corps AAR, Aug. FO 9, 26 Aug, and Opns Memo 76, 26 Aug; 9th and 1st Div AAR's, Aug; MS # B-728 (Emmerich). S. Sgt. Lafayette G. Pool of the 32d Armored Regiment, who commanded the lead tank of an armored column for three days and alone accounted for four German tanks, three antitank guns, and approximately fifty vehicles, was awarded the DSC.

⁴⁸ 12th AGp Ltr of Instrs 6, 25 Aug, and Memo, Future Opns, 25 Aug, ML-205.

sion crossed the Seine on 28 August to protect the left flank of the bridgehead. The 79th and 30th began to expand their hold on the east bank by seizing and securing badly broken and heavily wooded ground. Thirty-five artillery battalions fired "a generous amount of ammunition" in support.⁵¹

At noon, 29 August, as Haislip's XV Corps headquarters started to move to an assembly area southeast of Paris and eventual Third Army assignment, Corlett's XIX Corps took command of the three divisions east of the Seine. Since the troops were emerging on terrain favorable for rapid advance and since the organized resistance of the *LXXXI Corps* had disintegrated, Corlett moved the 2d Armored Division into the lead, and the corps drove forward against virtually no opposition. Two days later the corps was fifty miles to the east, on a line between Beauvais and Compiègne.⁵²

Gerow's V Corps joined the pursuit on 29 August in the army center when Cota's 28th Division, after parading in Paris, joined Barton's 4th. Two days later Oliver's 5th Armored Division passed through both infantry divisions to move into the lead. In five columns, with three combat commands abreast,

the armor dashed to the Forêt de Compiègne, hampered only occasionally by hastily erected roadblocks. There, the troops met units under control of the *LVIII Panzer Corps*. Bugged down in poor terrain, hindered by some confusion of communications, the tankers let 4th Division infantry pass through to clear the forest and take the city of Compiègne, forty-five miles northeast of Paris. In the early morning hours of 1 September, contingents of the corps got across the Aisne River between Compiègne and Soissons.⁵³

For the soldiers, the countryside had become a monotonous blur of changing scenery. Their eyes bloodshot and tear-filled from sun, wind, dust, and weariness, they followed a blinding road all day long and at night strained to keep the cat eyes of the vehicle ahead in sight.⁵⁴ Little seemed spectacular except the lack of opposition and the growing feeling that they would soon reach Germany. "Unfortunately," it often seemed, "the Germans pulled out of the town before we arrived."⁵⁵ Those infantrymen who clung to the tanks of the advance units were grateful that the "tank-riding detail" got them "first into the towns, with first shot at the cheers, the cognac, and the kisses."⁵⁶

There were exhilarating moments such as the one in the little village of Braine (on the Vesle River ten miles east of Soissons). When the French stationmaster informed American tankers

⁵¹ Notes of Msgs, 0900, 23, 26, 27, and 28 Aug. Notes of Hodges-Haislip Conf, 1130, 1330, 26 Aug. XV Corps CofS Memo, 2015, 27 Aug. Opns Instrs 8, 2100, 27 Aug. XV Corps CofS Jnl and File; [Ferriss], Notes; XV Corps and 79th Div AAR's, Aug. 1st Lt. Alfred P. McPeters of the 315th Infantry was posthumously awarded the DSC for heroic action that day.

⁵² TUSA Operational Dir to XV Corps, 26 Aug; XV Corps CofS Memos, 27 and 28 Aug; Hodges to Menoher, 28 Aug; First U.S. Army, *Report of Operations*, I, 30. 1st Lt. James L. Mosby of the 120th Infantry, who singlehandedly destroyed an antitank position on 29 August, was awarded the DSC.

⁵³ *V Corps History of Operations in the ETO*, pp. 213ff; 5th Armd, 4th, and 28th Div AAR's, Aug and Sep; CI 32 (4th Div).

⁵⁴ 3d Armored Division, *Spearhead in the West* (with G-3 Supplement) (n.p., n.d.), p. 81.

⁵⁵ 1st Lt. C. A. Wollmer, Hosp Intervs, IV, GL-93 (316).

⁵⁶ 314th Infantry, *Through Combat*, p. 32.

passing through that a German train coming from Paris was due in fifteen minutes, no one was interested, no one except Sgt. Hollis Butler, who commanded a gun section of the 468th Anti-aircraft Artillery Automatic Weapons Battalion (self-propelled). German planes had been virtually nonexistent east of the Seine, and his men had not fired for several days. Although a train was bound to be less exciting than a plane, Sergeant Butler pulled his carriage mounting a 37-mm. gun and dual .50-caliber machine guns out the column and covered the railroad so that his men could shoot a few rounds. When the train appeared, the crew quickly disabled the locomotive and raked the cars with machine gun fire. Turning themselves for the moment into infantrymen, the artillerymen advanced in squad formation with marching fire, captured thirty-six cars (among them machine shops for tank repair) and seventy prisoners. Local FFI members were on hand to take the prisoners, and the Americans got into their vehicles and rejoined the column. Because the train blocked the tracks, it was easy for men of the 54th Armored Field Artillery Battalion to capture a second train thirty minutes later.⁵⁷

While the First Army was having such easy success, the 21 Army Group was also getting across the Seine and toward the Somme, some seventy miles distant. The First Canadian Army, instructed to drive up the Channel coast with the main weight on the right for pursuit purposes and at the same time to develop right hooks to secure the

Channel ports, faced a more difficult problem in getting across the Seine. Not only was the river wider between Rouen and the sea, German troops had been deflected downstream by the American drive down the west bank and were fighting with desperation to maintain escape routes across the river. Canadian forces nevertheless secured five bridgeheads—two in the Elbeuf-Rouen area, three between Rouen and the coast—and on 30 August, against slight opposition, entered and liberated Rouen, the capital of Normandy and the second largest port in France.

The Second British Army, beset by logistical difficulties, retained one corps west of the Seine and used its transportation facilities to support the two corps making assault crossings near Vernon and Louviers. Armored forces departed the Vernon bridgehead on 29 August, but weather, scattered mine fields, and small German pockets of resistance kept the advance to a mere twenty miles. On the afternoon of the following day, as the weather improved and resistance diminished, British tankers drove forward with increasing speed. After continuing to advance through the night, they reached Amiens early on 31 August and, with FFI assistance, secured the city and took several bridges over the Somme intact. Eberbach, the *Seventh Army* commander who had just signed an order for the defense of the Somme River line, was captured.⁵⁸

With the capture of Amiens, the last sector of the German Somme-Marne defense line fell into Allied hands, a line earlier penetrated by the Third Army

⁵⁷ VII Corps AAR, Aug; 3d Armored Division, *Spearhead in the West*, pp. 84-85.

⁵⁸ Montgomery, *Normandy to the Baltic*, pp. 201ff; Stacey, *Canadian Army*, pp. 207ff.

capture of Châlons and the First Army advance northeast of Paris. With the exception of the Albert Canal and Meuse River water line, which appeared undefended, virtually no obstacles seemed to lie between the armies making the main Allied effort and the western approaches to the Rhine.

CHAPTER XXXII

Toward the Heart of Germany

The Mons Pocket

At the end of August 1944 the Allied armies were like knights of old who set out in quest of the Holy Grail but were not averse to slaying dragons and rescuing damsels in distress along the way. The Allies desired the Channel ports to assuage their logistical aches; the Pas-de-Calais coastal area to neutralize the German V-weapons; the liberation of north-west France, Belgium, and the Netherlands; and the destruction of the enemy forces remaining between the Seine and Germany. But their fundamental objective was the Rhine River.¹ (See *Map XV*.)

Some Allied commanders believed that an immediate crossing of the Rhine would lead to quick capture of the Ruhr. The apparently disintegrating German military organization then would collapse and carry with it a tottering German political structure. That would be the end of the war.² As the First Army G-2 put it:

Critical situations on the Western and Eastern front, in the Balkans, in Finland,

¹ See Ltr, Eisenhower to Bradley, 29 Aug. 12th AGp File Mil Objs, I; 12th AGp Memo, Future Opns, 25 Aug. ML-205. The RAF Bomber Command alone had dropped 24,000 tons of bombs per month for the past two and a half months on the V-weapon launching sites in the Pas-de-Calais without decisive effect. Harris, *Bomber Offensive*, p. 236.

² See Montgomery, *Normandy to the Baltic*, p. 200, and Guingand, *Operation Victory*, p. 414.

and in German industry, particularly oil, must deprive any sane German of the last vestiges of hope. The only important question is how long it will take the vast majority of Germans in and out of the military forces, who can accept surrender to the Allies without fear of death or dishonor, to overthrow the elaborate and powerful system of control exercised by the relatively few for whom surrender means death as criminals and who will naturally choose to fight so long as there is one brave or fanatical German soldier between them and the enemy.³

Threatened also by the Soviet advance in the east, which had come to within one hundred and fifty miles of the German border, the Germans no longer seemed to have sufficient forces to make a stand anywhere short of the West Wall—or Siegfried Line, as the Allies called it. A complex of permanent-type fortifications of varying strength and depth along the western frontier of Germany, the West Wall extended from the Dutch border near Kleve to Switzerland north of Basle. To the Allies, the only sound military strategy for the Germans seemed to be to rush repairs on these fortifications and immediately withdraw from France to them, using delaying action to retard the Allied advance.⁴

³ FUSA Weekly Intel Summary 4, 29 Aug.

⁴ *Ibid.* The name Siegfried Line originated in World War I, when the Germans applied the code name *SIEGFRIEDSTELLUNG* to a rear de-

On the basis of this estimate, the overriding Allied goal became the desire to reach the Rhine before the Germans could organize an effective defense at the West Wall. The West Wall was no longer the impressive shield it had once been. The Germans had neglected and partially dismantled it after their victories in 1940. They had stripped most of its armament for use at the Atlantic Wall. Its works had fallen into disrepair, and no appreciable number of troops manned the line in the summer of 1944. Yet the West Wall remained an important psychological barrier for both the Germans and the Allies.⁵ If the Allies could reach it before the Germans could man it (either with troops retreating from Normandy or with others already in Germany), the Allies would probably be able to get through to the Rhine with little difficulty. The pursuit east of the Seine was thus to display some of the aspects of a race.⁶

Though the Albert Canal and Meuse River formed a natural obstacle favorable for defense far in front of the West Wall, it hardly seemed possible that the remnants of the *Seventh Army*, the de-

feated *Fifth Panzer Army*, and the shrunken *Fifteenth Army*, all located in the northwest portion of France, in Belgium, and in the Netherlands, could re-establish a stable front short of the German border. Only the overstrained Allied supply lines might stop a rapid Allied advance. In the face of the glowing opportunity for continued pursuit of disorganized forces, the Allies decided to keep moving as long as possible. The armies were to "go as far as practicable," General Bradley announced, "and then wait until the supply system in rear will permit further advance."⁷ The hope was to get at least through the West Wall to the Rhine.

If the German high command had anything to be thankful for, as *OB WEST* staff members later recalled, it was that the Allies failed to conduct an immediate and ruthless exploitation of the Seine River crossing at Mantes-Gassicourt by an enveloping movement along the east bank of the Seine to Le Havre. That kind of maneuver, the Germans thought, would have led to the complete destruction of the *Fifth Panzer* and *Seventh Armies* and would have created an irreparable gap between the *Fifteenth* and *First Armies*. The path to the northeast—to Germany—would have been undefended, and further resistance in France would have been futile. Since the Allies had not elected this course, the Germans continued to fall back toward the Schelde estuary, the Albert Canal, and the Meuse River, trying to maintain a fairly orderly withdrawal in the hope that a continuous front might be re-established there. The ports of

fensive position established in 1916 behind the central portion of the Western Front. Extending from St. Laurent, just east of Arras, through St. Quentin to Missy-sur-Aisne, four miles east of Soissons, the line played an important role as the battle front fluctuated during the last two years of the war. The Germans fell back on it in the early spring of 1917, and from there launched their last great offensive in France in March 1918. They withdrew to the same position in September and were finally dislodged from it by the Allied counter-offensive in October.

⁵ CI 361-A (XIX Corps); Charles B. MacDonald, *The Siegfried Line Campaign*, UNITED STATES ARMY IN WORLD WAR II (Washington, 1961); Cole, *Lorraine Campaign*, p. 194.

⁶ See Montgomery, *Normandy to the Baltic*, pp. 198-99.

⁷ 12th AGp Admin Instrs 13, 27 Aug; The Siegfried Line, TSFET Hist Sec MS, 1946, OCMH Files, Ch. 4, p. 1.

Calais, Boulogne, and Dunkerque, about to be isolated, were to be held in compliance with Hitler's fortress policy directed against Allied logistics.

If the Germans could maintain a defensive line at the Schelde, Albert, and Meuse, they would retain the Netherlands and its naval bases, air warning service, and food and war production; they would deny the Allies the port of Antwerp, preserve the territorial integrity of Germany, and protect the Saar and the Ruhr. Most important, they would gain time to repair and rearm the West Wall.⁸

The troops extricated from Normandy west of the Seine and those in the Pas-de-Calais tried to maintain a cohesive front close to the northern coast of France. Screening their landward flank with mobile units, they hoped by delaying action to blunt Allied spearheads thrusting into that flank and thereby to gain time to reach the Schelde-Albert-Meuse line. German commanders insisted that the Allied pursuit was hesitant and that orderly resistance could be successful despite inferiority in strength and resources. Yet congested roads, traffic bottlenecks, an insufficient number of bridges and ferries, the fatigue of continuous movement, Allied strafing from the air, and the lack of information on the general situation created a depressing feeling of defeat.⁹

Model was no longer master of the *Army Group B* situation. With hope of holding at the Somme-Marne River line shattered, he found himself issuing futile

orders that were out of date before the disorganized units received them. The *Fifteenth Army*, in precarious command of the Channel ports, was in danger of being cut off and isolated. The *Fifth Panzer Army*, which had moved inland to take command of the bulk of the remaining armor, was unable to hold around Soissons. The *Seventh Army* had scarcely begun to resurrect its ghost divisions at the Somme when it lost its commander, Eberbach, who was taken prisoner on 31 August. Unable to form a cohesive battle line, Model by 3 September saw no course open except withdrawal to the West Wall. The Germans had been routed and whatever resistance occurred was to a large extent the product of individual initiative on the lower echelons.¹⁰

Whether the Germans in northwest France could withdraw more quickly than the Allies could advance was the important question. To the Allies, the answer seemed negative on the basis of comparative motorization alone. More precise indications were also available. The XIX Corps on the First Army left seemed to have outraced enemy forces that were apparently moving eastward in an attempt to block the Allied pursuit.¹¹ Various Resistance groups in northern France were of the opinion that the Germans did not have enough men, matériel, and mobility to establish and hold a strong defensive line anywhere short of the West Wall.¹² Despite

¹⁰ See Hitler Msg. 0530, 3 Sep, *AGp Fuehrerbe-fehle*; *AGp B Tagesmeldungen*, 1 Sep; First U.S. Army, *Report of Operations*, I, 31-32.

¹¹ 30th Div G-2 Per Rpt 72, 30 Aug; 28th Div G-2 Rpt, 1 Sep; VII Corps G-2 Memo for VII Corps CofS, 31 Aug. VII Corps G-2 Jnl and File.

¹² XIX Corps Mil Intel Team Rpt 101, 30 Aug. FUSA G-2 (Comd Echelon) Jnl and File.

⁸ *OB WEST, a Study in Command*, pp. 160-61, 175.

⁹ Among the many personal documents see, for example, MS # B-236 (Sponheimer) and MS # B-596 (Gerber).

weather conditions that prevented extensive air reconnaissance during the last days of August, Allied pilots noted large German groups in various stages of disorganization drifting east and northeast across the First U.S. Army front—more than a hundred enemy armored vehicles near St. Quentin, more than three hundred miscellaneous vehicles clogging the road net northeast of Amiens. By 1 September only a few German tanks remained on the Second British Army front.¹³

Recognizing that the Germans could hope to organize resistance only at the Albert–Meuse line, General Bradley temporarily shifted his sights from the Rhine River in favor of a maneuver to block the German retreat and eliminate the major part of the German forces in France. To accomplish this, Bradley decided to turn the army from a northeasterly direction to the north. Hodges' troops, by racing across the Franco-Belgian border to cut the Lille–Brussels highway, might sever the escape routes of approximately two panzer and eight to ten infantry divisions that appeared to be west of a north–south line from Laon to Mons, Belgium.¹⁴

This projected advance resembled the third envelopment that earlier Patton had tentatively planned east of the Seine. In effect the maneuver would reinstate

the earlier boundary line that had been drawn by Montgomery and then changed at Bradley's request. At the conclusion of its northward drive, the First U.S. Army would have compressed the British and Canadians into a narrow zone ending at the Schelde estuary. The British and Canadians would then be facing out toward the sea. Apparently without consulting higher headquarters, General Bradley ordered General Hodges to execute the maneuver.

The most important objective of the shift in direction was the city of Tournai, Belgium, and during the afternoon of 31 August the First Army G-3, Brig. Gen. Truman C. Thorson, arrived at Corlett's XIX Corps headquarters to outline the new plan. Instead of driving through Montdidier and Péronne and turning gently eastward toward Mons, Corlett was to go north beyond Péronne to Tournai, a hundred miles ahead of the corps' leading units, and then north to Ghent, forty miles farther. The immediate objective, Tournai, was to be taken within forty-eight hours—at the latest by midnight, 2 September.¹⁵

The precise deadline for reaching Tournai reflected additional motives. General Bradley thought that the British would advance less rapidly than the Americans and that the Germans holding Tournai would consequently constitute a threat to the First Army left flank. More important, an airborne operation was scheduled to take place at Tournai against General Bradley's wishes. Bradley had consistently opposed the use of airborne troops during the pursuit because he believed that ground forces alone could gain distant objectives and

¹³ VII Corps G-2 Rpt 87, 31 Aug; Telecon, FUSA G-2 Air and FUSA G-2, 2305, 31 Aug, FUSA G-2 (Comd Echelon) Jnl and File; Telecon, FUSA and V Corps, 0545, 1 Sep, and FUSA G-2 Air to V Corps G-2, 1915, 1 Sep, V Corps G-3 Jnl; Second Br Army G-2 to XIX Corps G-2, 1710, 1 Sep, XIX Corps G-2 Jnl.

¹⁴ XIX Corps G-2 Est, Possible Lines of Action Open to the Germans, 1200, 28 Aug; FUSA G-2 Est 23, 31 Aug; First U.S. Army, *Report of Operations*, I, 33ff; see Cole, *Lorraine Campaign*, p. 12.

¹⁵ [Ferriss], Notes.

because he felt that available aircraft would be better employed to bring supplies to the ground units rather than to transport airborne troops. Overruled by Eisenhower, Bradley had warned that ground units would secure the Tournai drop zones before airborne troops could land there. To insure the correctness of his prediction, he ordered General Hodges to get the XIX Corps to Tournai despite the fact that Tournai was within the British army zone.¹⁶

General Hodges was under another impression. He thought that the reason why Bradley wanted additional speed on the different axis was his desire to link up with the paratroopers scheduled to drop on 3 September.¹⁷

To get to the Belgian border in the short time allowed, Corlett used all his available trucks, chiefly of artillery and antiaircraft units, to motorize two regiments of the 79th Division and one of the 30th—this in addition to the organic transportation that enabled each infantry division to motorize one regimental combat team. With the 2d Armored Division leading two almost completely motorized infantry divisions, the XIX Corps set forth to bypass resistance and make night marches if necessary in order to reach Tournai at the appointed hour. "Get a good night's sleep and don't worry," the armored commander, General Brooks, advised Corlett, "it's in the bag." Nearby, the excited corps chief of staff exclaimed, "Hot pursuit!"¹⁸

Col. John H. Collier's CCA of the 2d

Armored Division crossed the Somme early on 1 September after bypassing a pocket of resistance at Montdidier, which the 79th Division soon eliminated, and on 2 September—two hours before the midnight deadline—reached Tournai. While a regiment of the 30th took the city, both infantry divisions assembled in the objective area around midnight. General White's CCB arrived after a two and a half hour engagement with an enemy column that resulted in the destruction of 96 German vehicles and 28 guns. The Reserve had just enough gasoline to reach the objective but instead assembled about ten miles short of it to keep a small supply of fuel on hand for emergencies. Except for these two instances of resistance, the corps had advanced against only the faintest kind of opposition.¹⁹ Even destroyed bridges had failed to slow the rate of advance. In keeping with procedure that had become standard, engineers laid a treadway bridge first, then built a Bailey bridge nearby. When the Bailey was completed, the traffic was diverted to it, and the treadway was pulled up for the next crossing.

American incursion into the British zone had begun to look like a habit, and one of General Montgomery's aides visited Corlett on the afternoon of 2 September to protest. Montgomery wanted XIX Corps halted short of Tournai so that American troops would not interfere with the British advance, but it was too late to stop the columns. When Hodges informed Corlett later in the evening that a change in plans made

¹⁶ Bradley, *Soldier's Story*, pp. 401-02; 12th AGp Memo for Rcd, 2 Sep, ML-205; Ltr, Bradley to OCMH, 7 Jan 55, OCMH Files.

¹⁷ Sylvan Diary, 31 Aug.

¹⁸ Telecon, Corlett and Brooks, 2015, 31 Aug. XIX Corps G-3 Jnl and File; Wyche Diary.

¹⁹ XIX Corps and 2d Armd, 79th, and 30th Divs AAR's, Aug and Sep.

a halt necessary, the leading troops were virtually on the objective.²⁰

The XIX Corps halted at Tournai, as much because the units were out of gasoline as because of orders. While British troops, who had reached the vicinity of Tournai shortly after the Americans, swept beyond, XIX Corps processed a disappointing total of only 1,300 prisoners. A small captured barge loaded with German gasoline enabled reconnaissance units to mop up the area. Meanwhile, Corlett waited for further instructions and gasoline supplies.

The Tournai airborne operation had in the meantime been canceled. Awakened at daybreak on 3 September by a complaint from Montgomery that American troops were blocking the roads at Tournai, Bradley was satisfied that they had also blocked the airborne drop.²¹ General Eisenhower had tentatively decided on 2 September to cancel the operation on the announced theory that the purpose of the drop—to bar German escape routes to the east—had been achieved by ground action. After conferring with Montgomery, the Supreme Commander confirmed his decision. In the meantime, the commander of the First Allied Airborne Army, General Brereton, had announced poor weather conditions as the official reason for canceling the drop.²²

Like XIX Corps, V Corps had received instructions to advance north. It was to cut the Lille–Brussels highway at Leuze (ten miles east of Tournai) and Ath. Using artillery, tank destroyer, antiaircraft, and engineer transportation facilities, General Gerow formed provisional truck companies to motorize his infantry.²³ With the 4th Division, reinforced by a 5th Armored Division combat command, in the lead, and the remainder of the armor and the 28th Division following, V Corps accelerated its pace on the evening of 31 August. The corps advanced continuously until the morning of 2 September when, in the vicinity of Landrecies, about twenty miles short of the border, most of the units ran out of gasoline. Gerow received word from Hodges later in the day to remain on the Cambrai–Landrecies line, but his order to halt did not reach all the elements of the 5th Armored Division. By afternoon of the 3d, CCB was about eight miles south of Leuze, and its reconnaissance elements were on the final objective. The only resistance, encountered near Landrecies, had been overcome without difficulty. Relatively few prisoners were taken.²⁴

Although most bridges in the V Corps zone had been destroyed by the Germans, a few had been seized intact and

²⁰ Corlett to Hodges, 1645, 2 Sep, XIX Corps G-3 Jnl and File; First U.S. Army, *Report of Operations*, I; Ltr, Corlett to OCMH, 2 Sep 53.

²¹ Bradley, *Soldier's Story*, p. 403.

²² 12th AGp Memo for Rcd, 2 Sep, ML-205; Huston, *Airborne Operations*, Ch. VII, p. 19; SHAEF 24500/3/Ops (Airborne), *Employment of Airborne Forces* [26] Aug, SHAEF File 24533/Ops; 21 AGp Dir, M-522, 29 Aug, Pogue Files. "In the 40 days since the formation of the First Allied Airborne Army," General Brereton wrote on 16 September, "we have planned 18 different opera-

tions, some of which were scrubbed because our armies moved too fast and others because Troop Carriers were engaged in air supply." Brereton, *Diaries*, p. 343. See also AEAF Ltr, *Airborne Ops to Further OVERLORD*, 6 Jul, SGS SHAEF File 373/2. *Employment of Airborne Forces in Opn OVERLORD*; SHAEF Msg to AGWAR, FWD-12907, 16 Aug. SHAEF Msg File, *Plans and Ops*.

²³ V Corps Ltr of Instrs, 31 Aug.

²⁴ *V Corps History of Operations in the ETO*, pp. 216ff.; Gerow to Oliver, 2 Sep, V Corps G-3 Jnl and File; First U.S. Army, *Report of Operations*, I, 30ff.