

Although additional Signal equipment had been sent to the division, the presence of scattered groups of enemy soldiers in the division area delayed its use. German patrols similarly prohibited establishment of a landing strip for liaison planes. On General Grow's suggestion, a liaison plane from the corps appeared over the division command post on 7 August, and the pilot dropped a note on a panel laid out in a field. He then circled the area in a vain attempt to discover a meadow large enough to land on, for the terrain resembled the small hedgerow-enclosed fields of the Cotentin. After requesting by radio that the division bulldoze out one hedgerow to create a landing space the size of two fields, the pilot picked up a division message held aloft between lance poles, "wagged his wings, and went home with some flak on his tail."⁴⁰

Because the hedgerowed fields were terraced, it was difficult to find two adjacent open spaces with the same floor level. After discovering a surface suitable for a landing strip, the Signal officer borrowed a bulldozer from the engineers early on 8 August and cut down a hedgerow. Shortly after he released the dozer, the area he had selected for the landing strip came under severe artillery shelling. Judging the field unsafe for a landing, he arranged another pickup and drop by the plane expected from corps. Although the shelling had ceased when the plane arrived, the pilot inspected the field from the air and decided he needed still more space for a landing. He dropped his message, se-

cured the division message, and radioed: "See you tomorrow, get a longer field."

Meanwhile, at corps headquarters, it appeared likely that the anticipated German squeeze play against the 6th Armored Division soon might develop. When radio silence, imposed by General Grow to cloak his intentions before Brest, was momentarily lifted on the evening of 8 August, a cryptic message by high-powered radio informed corps that the division command post was "under attack, codes in danger, may destroy."

At Brest, on the morning of 8 August, a four-man German patrol guided the white-draped American jeep bearing M. Sgt. Alex Castle and the 6th Armored Division G-2, Maj. Ernest W. Mitchell, toward an outpost position. At the outpost, a German lieutenant blindfolded the two emissaries before taking them into the city. When the blindfolds were removed, Mitchell and Castle found themselves in an underground command post, face to face with several German officers seated at a table.

One German raised his hand and said, "Heil Hitler." After a momentary hesitation, Mitchell saluted. Presuming the German to be the senior commander, Mitchell handed him General Grow's surrender ultimatum. When the German denied knowledge of English, Castle translated the paper aloud:

HEADQUARTERS 6TH ARMORED DIVISION,
Office of the Commanding General, APO
256, US Army, 8 August 1944, MEMORANDUM
To: Officer Commanding German Forces in Brest.

1. The United States Army, Naval and Air Force troops are in position to destroy the garrison of Brest.
2. This memorandum constitutes an op-

⁴⁰ 6th Armd Div Msg, sent 2139, 6 Aug, received at VIII Corps CP, 0410, 7 Aug; Ltr, Given to Grow.

portunity for you to surrender in the face of these overwhelming forces to representatives of the United States Government and avoid the unnecessary sacrifice of lives.

3. I shall be very glad to receive your formal surrender and make the detailed arrangements any time prior to 1500 this date. The officer who brings this memorandum will be glad to guide you and necessary members of your staff, not exceeding six to my headquarters.

R. W. GROW
Major General, USA
Commanding

The German commander said he could not surrender. Mitchell asked whether he understood what that meant. The German said he did. Mitchell took back the ultimatum. The German commander heiled, Mitchell saluted. The two Americans were blindfolded and driven back to the outpost, where the bandages were removed, and Mitchell and Castle re-entered their lines and reported that the bluff had failed.⁴¹

With no alternative but to attack the city, General Grow requested heavy air support for the following day, 9 August. He wanted a continuous air attack for a minimum of three hours by waves of planes striking heavy guns, large oil tanks, and troop concentration areas. Planning to attack with two columns moving against the northeastern portion of the city, Grow shifted Read's CCB headquarters from the northern to the central column to take control of the troops that had been under CCR. Hanson's CCR headquarters moved to the right and assumed control of the units that had comprised Read's column.

⁴¹ Ltr, Mitchell to Grow, 5 Mar 53; *Abendmeldung*, 8 Aug, OB WEST KTB, Anlage 1217; the ultimatum is reproduced in Grow, "An Epic of Brittany," *Military Review*, XXVI, No. 11, p. 3.

The attack was to be made by CCB in the center and by Taylor's CCA on the left, with the four artillery battalions in position to support both columns.⁴²

Chances of success appeared reasonably good. It was true that nearly every village on the outskirts of Brest was garrisoned by a few Germans with antitank guns, that the entrances into some were barred by roadblocks of steel rails, log barricades, or tetrahedrons, and in some cases concrete pillboxes, and that foxholes had been dug along all the roads leading into Brest. However, the significant facts seemed to be that the division was in contact along a line from Milizac through Gouesnou to Guipavas, apparently the outer defenses of the city, and that the enemy had only three or four thousand soldiers, augmented by an unknown number of naval forces.⁴³

The attack was not to be made as scheduled. Since shortly before noon on 8 August, disturbing reports had been coming from rear outposts. Scattered enemy soldiers in stray vehicles had appeared suddenly, from nowhere it seemed. Several unit commanders complained throughout the day that troops of other commands were firing indiscriminately and endangering their men, yet investigation failed to disclose the source of the fire. The commander of the division trains, approaching Lessneven, reported that he was unable to enter the division rear area because of small arms and artillery fire, evidently from the rear of the combat commands deployed before Brest. These unaccountable reports were explained late

⁴² Msg, Grow to Middleton, 1500, 8 Aug, 6th Armd Div G-3 Jnl; Msg, Middleton to Grow, 0140, 9 Aug.

⁴³ 6th Armd Div G-2 Per Rpt 11, 8 Aug.

that afternoon when a battery of the 212th Armored Field Artillery Battalion captured Generalleutnant Karl Spang, commander of the 266th Division, and several of his staff. From documents they carried, the 6th Armored Division learned that the 266th, after having contributed forces to the Dinan and St. Malo garrisons, was moving from Morlaix to Brest to consolidate its remaining forces with the Brest garrison. Spang, whose capture was his first intimation that U.S. troops were "anywhere in the area," had preceded his unit in order to insure proper reception facilities for his men. By evening the situation that had been building up all day came to a head. The 266th Division, a static unit of perhaps regimental strength, was in contact with the armored division rear.⁴⁴

Threatened from the rear at nightfall as troops of the 266th stumbled into the armored division's outposts, General Grow canceled the attack on Brest and instructed his subordinate commanders to leave screening forces facing the port city. Reconnaissance troops were to seal off the exits to prevent the German garrison from sallying out to meet the 266th. The combat command columns were to reverse in place and drive generally northeast toward Plouvien in order to destroy the unsuspecting Germans, who were approaching in route march formation. Meanwhile, since the division headquarters might be overrun, several soldiers were posted at the electric code machines to destroy them with thermite canisters if necessary.

⁴⁴6th Armd Div G-2 Per Rpt 12, 0800, 9 Aug; AGp B Sitrep, 1715, 7 Aug, AGp Bla Letzte Mel-dung, 8.v.-10.viii.44.

Because wires linking the division command post to subordinate units had been cut and because silence was being maintained, General Grow dispatched a handwritten field order to his subordinates by messenger. Acknowledgment returned at once from CCB and CCR, but none came from CCA. Not until later was it discovered that a message center sergeant had neglected to deliver the order to General Taylor. Fortunately, the incoming Germans did not strike CCA but blundered into the other two combat commands.

Skirmishes resulting from tentative probing contacts made during the night developed on 9 August into a full-scale engagement. Read's CCB carried the main burden, Hanson's CCR contributed hardly less, and Taylor's CCA attacked later in the day. A group of fighter-bombers joined the action by blasting an enemy column near Lessneven. By evening the 6th Armored Division had taken almost a thousand prisoners and estimated that it had destroyed half of the enemy unit.⁴⁵

It took another day for the division to clear the area and gather in those of the 266th who did not manage to reach Brest by devious routes. After establishing a cordon around the landward side of Brest, the bulk of the 6th Armored Division settled down into a somewhat stable situation, beyond observed enemy artillery range. The division trains bivouacked. The infantry battalion of the 8th Division arrived. Task Force A appeared briefly near Lessneven.

⁴⁵Msg, Grow to Middleton, 1800, 9 Aug, 6th Armd Div G-3 Jnl; Msg, Grow to Middleton, 1910, 9 Aug.

neven before proceeding on another mission. A new airfield site was cleared, and regular courier service by planes commenced. The division radio teletype team erected a double-height antenna and secured satisfactory contact with corps headquarters.

Meanwhile, General Grow still pondered how to secure Brest. It was obvious that the defenses were much stronger than he had anticipated. The outer defense line barred swift entry, and the expectation of strongpoints within the city foreshadowed vicious street fighting. Artillery positions across the bay from Brest were out of reach of an armored attack across the landward approaches. The entire Brest complex appeared beyond the capabilities of an armored division reinforced only by an infantry battalion. Yet a glimmer of hope came from the uncertainty that no one seemed to know exactly how many Germans defended the port.

If a small German force held the city, it was possible that an armored drive in strength might overwhelm the defenders. To secure a good jump-off place for an attack, Grow planned to secure the high ground near Guipavas, which seemed to be a soft spot. From the high ground, his artillery could support without displacement a division attack all the way into the city.

Efforts by CCA and the attached infantry battalion on 11 and 12 August to secure the terrain near Guipavas failed.⁴⁶ It gradually became clear that additional

resources were needed: artillery to neutralize the guns in Brest and permit an advance through the outer defenses, infantry and a strong engineer attachment to attack the city proper, and fighter and medium bomber support to assist the assault troops and reduce the inner defenses. Still hoping he could eventually take Brest, General Grow requested a complement of heavy artillery. Until he received that, there was little he could do but continue to develop the outpost defenses. Enemy artillery was "much too strong" for anything more.⁴⁷

Unfortunately for Grow's hopes, the corps' heavy artillery was engaged at St. Malo, and not until that port fell would infantry and artillery become available for an attack on Brest. The 83d or the 8th Division, perhaps both, would then move west to join the 6th Armored Division. Until then, General Middleton advised,

I believe it unwise to become too involved in a fight at Brest unless you feel reasonably sure of success. I prefer that you watch the situation and wait until an infantry division arrives. Heavy artillery will arrive with the infantry division.⁴⁸

Any hope that General Grow had of taking Brest vanished on the evening of 12 August when he received word to contain the city with one combat command while relieving the 4th Armored Division at Lorient and Vannes with the others. Leaving CCA and the battalion of the 8th Division—about 4,000 troops—

⁴⁶ See Sgt. Joseph D. Buckley, *A History of the 50th Armored Infantry Battalion* (Frankfurt: Baier and Wurm, c. 1945.), pp. 24-27.

⁴⁷ Msg, Grow to Middleton, 1330, 11 Aug, received at VIII Corps CP, 1755, 11 Aug.
⁴⁸ Msg, Middleton to Grow, 2135, 11 Aug; see also, Msg, Galvin to McBride, 1400, 11 Aug, 6th Armd Div G-3 Jnl; Memo, Col. Evans to Col. Thomas J. Cross, 11 Aug.

at Brest, he completed the relief at Lorient and Vannes on 14 August.⁴⁹

In advancing to Brest, the division had lost about 130 killed, 400 wounded, and 70 missing. Destroyed or damaged combat vehicles totaled 50, other vehicles 62, guns 11. In contrast, the division had taken 4,000 prisoners.⁵⁰

Looking back after the war on the campaign, General Grow said he had been elated by the performance of his division in penetrating two hundred miles into Brittany, the most extended independent operation by a single division in the European theater. The 6th Armored Division had cleared the greater part of the peninsula, the proof being that before the end of the second week in August lone travelers covered long distances in the interior with no thought of danger. In addition to destroying what remained of the *266th Division* in Brittany, the 6th Armored Division had driven the other German troops in its sector into a "self-imposed prison." The division "had performed," General Grow was convinced, "the greatest cavalry-type operation of the war . . . [and] had proved the soundness of the . . . mechanized division and the hard months of training." The role of the cavalry in exploitation and the value of mobility on the battlefield, he felt, had been restored by the display of speed, initiative, and boldness that were the basic cavalry characteristics inherited by armored troops.

Disappointed, naturally, because he had not taken Brest, Grow was discour-

aged by the static mission of containment with which he was charged. Despite his repeated recommendations that the FFI be assigned the task of guarding the port cities so that the division might be free for more active and more compatible missions, the unit remained in Brittany for another month, guarding Brest, Lorient, and Vannes. The value of armor had been proved but was then, he felt, disregarded.

One galling question remained: Could the 6th Armored Division have taken Brest if it had arrived there sooner? Having been assured by the FFI that Brest would probably have fallen had it been attacked in strength a day or two earlier, General Grow could not forget the Dinan diversion, which had delayed the division about twenty-four hours; the slow approach of CCA into the Brest area, which had made it necessary for CCB to attack alone on 7 August; and the movement of the *266th Division* from Morlaix, which had prompted cancellation of the concerted attack planned for 9 August. With complete surprise in Grow's favor, a show of strength, he felt, might have been sufficient to persuade a vacillating commander with weak forces to capitulate.⁵¹

This attractive thesis was supported by the fact that only the *343d Division*, some cadre companies, relatively weak artillery, and two batteries of coastal artillery were available at the beginning of August to defend the fortress against attack from land or sea. The presence of many civilians in the city complicated the defense. The Germans could count on a garrison of only 15,000 men at max-

⁴⁹ Msg, Middleton to Grow, 1645, 12 Aug, received at 6th Armd Div CP, 2350, 12 Aug; Msg, Read to Grow, 2130, 13 Aug; Msg, Grow to Middleton, 2220, 14 Aug. All in 6th Armd Div G-3 Jnl.

⁵⁰ 6th Armd Div G-2 Per Rpt 15, 12 Aug.

⁵¹ Grow, "An Epic of Brittany," *Military Review*, XXVI, No. 11, pp. 3-9; [Committee 9], Super Sixth, p. 108.

imum, many of whom were required to reinforce strongpoints already established to combat an amphibious invasion. Limited amounts of building materials and transportation facilities for defense construction were other deficiencies. Having had to consider a seaward attack of first import, the Germans felt that the landward strength of the fortress was defective. The ground fortifications were so close to the installations they protected that an attack on the defenses constituted at the same time an attack on the city's vitals—in some instances, artillery emplacements, supply depots, and military workshops were even located outside the defensive line.

Balancing these disadvantages and destroying the thesis were other factors. The old French fortifications had provided the Germans foundation for a modern defensive complex. Large, deep, artificial caves in rocky terrain afforded shellproof shelter to large numbers of the garrison. Able to resist bombardment and heavy-caliber artillery, the troops at the beginning of August were considered by the Germans to be adequate in numbers and high in morale. To the 343d *Division* were soon added "splinters" of the 266th *Division* and, more important, the well-trained 2d *Parachute Division* (commanded by Generalleutnant Herman B. Ramcke, a devoted Nazi), the latter unit eventually forming the nucleus of the defense. After contact had been made with the 6th Armored Division near Huelgoat on 5 August, there was no longer the possibility of a surprise attack. The Germans had no doubt that an attack against Brest was imminent.⁵²

The fortress commander, Col. Hans von der Mosel (not Ramcke, as the Americans had thought), had rejected General Grow's surrender ultimatum on 8 August even before the 2d *Parachute Division* had joined his garrison.⁵³ The paratroopers had started at the beginning of August to move in two columns eastward from the Brest area toward Normandy, but Fahrmbacher, the XXV Corps commander, had ordered the movement halted almost at once because of the rapid American thrust into Brittany. In contact with U.S. armor near Carhaix and Huelgoat, then bypassed by the 6th Armored Division and in danger of isolation, Ramcke obeyed the OKW order that had instructed the forces in Brittany to move into the fortresses. Avoiding the Americans, the 2d *Parachute Division* slipped into Brest on 9 August from the south, by way of Douala. The division had lost, between 29 July and 12 August, about 50 dead, 200 wounded, and 100 missing, some as the result of FFI guerrilla action, some at the battle of Huelgoat. Three days after re-entering Brest, Ramcke became the fortress commander, Mosel his chief of staff.⁵⁴

By the time General Grow was able to launch his preliminary attacks on Guipavas on 11 and 12 August, the Brest garrison numbered about 35,000 Army, Navy, and Air Force troops. But before then, even without such overwhelming strength, the Germans had made evident their decision to defend with determination. The extent of their fortifications,

⁵² See Ltr, Mitchell to Grow, for American belief that Ramcke had turned down the ultimatum.

⁵³ H. B. Ramcke, *Fallschirmjaeger, Damals und Danach* (Frankfurt: Lorch-Verlag, c. 1951), pp. 30-46.

⁵² MS # B-731 (Fahrmbacher).

the size of the fortress complex, and Hitler's orders to resist to the last man were more than sufficient to keep a lone armored division from taking the largest port in Brittany.⁵⁵ Even though the VIII Corps G-2 as late as 12 August estimated that only 8,000 men defended Brest, he recognized that its defenses were far stronger than he had earlier judged.⁵⁶ It should have been obvious much sooner. By mid-July, SHAEF had concluded that the Brest garrison was likely to number at minimum 17,000 troops. The numerous defensible river valleys between Morlaix and Brest, the perimeter defenses at Landivisiau, Lesneven, and Landerneau, the landward fortifications of Brest, and the numerous antiaircraft emplacements all argued against painless possession of a port that was as vital to Hitler as to the Allies.⁵⁷ Although Patton lost his five-pound bet with Montgomery, the fact was that merely in pinning the vastly superior German force at Brest against the sea, the 6th Armored Division had achieved success.

A fluid front, fast-moving columns, and a rapidly lengthening line of communication had lessened corps control, had emphasized the necessity of individual initiative and judgment, improvisation and calculated risk. With no defined front except the direction in which the division was going, the cavalry reconnaissance squadron had main-

tained a flexible screen around the front and flanks that was retracted from or deflected around resistance too strong to overcome. A forward observer traveling with the head of a column could have artillery fire on a target as soon as the self-propelled pieces could drop their ammunition trailers. Casualties were moved forward with the division until convoys could be organized for evacuation. Prisoners were also carried along until they could be turned over, against their vehement protests, to the FFI, "who seemed only too glad to accept the responsibility for their care."⁵⁸ Tanks and armored cars sometimes escorted supply vehicles, and the division band defended valiantly a supply dump near Carhaix and prevented its capture by a small German force. The army had established a gasoline dump at Pontivy, but the division had to go all the way back to Avranches for other supplies. The necessity for speed had prompted the division to disregard danger from mines; only a few times, principally at fords, had mines been encountered. In retrospect at least, the campaign seemed to have been "a routine operation" that had been aided by extremely favorable weather.⁵⁹

Yet it was a spectacular achievement, an exhilarating accomplishment that went virtually unnoticed because of action elsewhere on a much larger scale.

⁵⁵ See [Committee 9], Super Sixth, p. 151.

⁵⁶ VIII Corps G-2 Weekly Per Rpt 8, 12 Aug.

⁵⁷ App. A to PS SHAEF (44) 29 (First Draft),

16 Jul, SHAEF G-3 File 24533/Opsn, Future Opsn.

⁵⁸ Hammond, 6th Armored Division.

⁵⁹ See *Combat History of the 128th Armored Ordnance Maintenance Battalion* (Wiesbaden, Germany: Wiesbaedner Kurier-Wiesbaedner Verlag, 1945) pp. 21-26.

CHAPTER XXI

St. Malo and the North Shore

The Decision at St. Malo

Anticipating quick capture of Brest, General Patton had acted to preserve the Brest-Rennes railroad as a fast means of transporting military cargo into the interior of France. The railway, running generally along the Brittany north shore, could be cut quite easily by destroying any of several important bridges. Patton had created Task Force A to secure the vital bridges before the Germans could demolish them.¹ (*See Map VIII.*)

Task Force A had a strength of about 3,500 men. Its headquarters, the 1st Tank Destroyer Brigade, controlled the 6th Tank Destroyer Group, the 15th Cavalry Group, and the 159th Engineer Battalion. The task force commander, General Earnest, had requested an infantry attachment, but no infantry was available during the hectic early days of August. The possibility that Task Force A would make contact with a substantial number of French Resistance forces provided hope that the FFI would perform such infantry functions as line of communications guard and command post security.

¹ The sources for this section are the VIII Corps G-3 Journal and File and the Task Force A After Action Report and Journal, August. Unless otherwise noted, documents referred to in this chapter are in the VIII Corps G-3 Journal and File.

At a conference with his principal subordinates on 1 August, General Earnest announced that Patton expected Task Force A to "race to the sea" to secure the main railway bridges and incidentally help the 6th Armored Division capture Brest. Proceeding from Avranches through Dol-de-Bretagne, Dinan, Guingamp, and Morlaix, the task force was to bypass resistance except at the bridges. Three structures near St. Brieuc and two near Morlaix comprised the specific objectives. All task force units were to carry rations for six days, fuel for two hundred and fifty miles, a basic ammunition load transportable in organic vehicles, and water chlorination tablets.²

Through the Avranches-Pontaubault bottleneck by early 3 August, Task Force A entered Brittany and struck resistance almost immediately at a point two miles short of Dol-de-Bretagne. The cavalry commander was lost at once, his jeep later found riddled with machine gun bullets. Since the task force was supposedly following the 6th Armored Division as far as Dinan, meeting opposition was somewhat of a surprise even though General Earnest had expected that small enemy units might hit the task force's flanks. Learning from civilians that Dol was strongly defended, Earnest decided to bypass the town on

² TF A AAR, Aug, and FO 1, 2 Aug; VIII Corps FO 9, 1 Aug, and Spec Map.

the south and continue westward. He requested VIII Corps to send infantry to reduce the bypassed Dol defenses.³

Interested in the strength of the St. Malo defenses, General Middleton instructed Earnest to probe northward toward St. Malo even as he drove westward toward Dinan. Beyond Dol-de-Bretagne, Earnest therefore split his column. The heads of both columns struck defensive positions about seven miles west of Dol, near Miniac. Some disorder occurred among U.S. troops engaging in combat for the first time, but Earnest quickly restored discipline and directed his cavalry to dismount and launch an infantry attack. Enemy resistance was quickly broken, but as the task force tried to push toward St. Malo, increasingly heavy resistance developed south of Châteauneuf-d'Ille-et-Vilaine.

Since the strong enemy forces defending the St. Malo-Châteauneuf-Dol area might involve Task Force A in an action that would prevent a rapid westward drive, General Earnest radioed for help. Aware that the VIII Corps had alerted the 83d Infantry Division for action in Brittany and believing that the 6th Armored Division was not far away, he called upon both the corps and the armored division in the hope that one would respond. "Please reply, need urgent," he radioed. "Rush troops."⁴

Infantrymen were in fact approaching Dol-de-Bretagne on the afternoon of 3 August, for early that morning Middleton had ordered the 83d Division to hurry a regiment to Pontorson so that

the regiment alone or the entire division, according to the way the situation developed, could follow the 6th Armored Division to Brest. The 330th Infantry reached Pontorson that afternoon and continued to Dol. Extensive defensive positions around Dol, including wire entanglements and antitank ditches, prompted the regiment to delay its attack until the morning of 4 August, but then the town was quickly secured.⁵

Although the 330th Infantry moved west beyond Dol-de-Bretagne for several miles without meeting resistance on 4 August, Task Force A pushing north that afternoon toward Châteauneuf-d'Ille-et-Vilaine encountered severe opposition, including fire from coastal guns and naval vessels in the St. Malo area.⁶

By this time a decision had to be made on St. Malo. General Bradley at first had specifically ordered the capture of St. Malo. When General Patton made no provision for its capture, Bradley had more or less acquiesced in Patton's concept of clearing the entire peninsula before getting involved in siege operations at the port cities. General Middleton, however, was becoming increasingly concerned over the large concentration of German troops in the St. Malo area. Bypassing the strongpoint in favor of more distant and alluring goals would not eliminate what might develop into a threat against the long lines of communication that would have to be established in Brittany. Allowing strong German forces to remain active at St. Malo would be like permitting a sore

³ Ltr, Earnest to OCMH, 6 May 54, OCMH Files; Msg, Earnest to Middleton, 1030, 3 Aug.

⁴ Msgs, Earnest to Middleton and Grow, 1600, 3 Aug; Msg, Earnest to Middleton, 1930, 3 Aug; TF A Jnl, entry 1255, 3 Aug.

⁵ VIII Corps G-3 Sec Memo, 0630, 3 Aug; 330th Inf AAR, Aug, Telecon, Col Conrad R. Boyle and Col Evans, 0945, 4 Aug, 83d Div G-2, G-3 Jnl.

⁶ TF A G-3 Sitrep 4, 1330, 4 Aug.

to develop into a cancer. Middleton favored immediate surgery.⁷

General Middleton's inability to obtain the 6th Armored Division to help Task Force A and the 330th Infantry prompted him to give the assignment of capturing St. Malo to General Macon and the 83d Division. Then Middleton learned that Patton was unwilling to let more than one regiment of the 83d participate in the attack, for Patton believed that the Germans would make only a token defense of St. Malo. Patton wanted the 83d Division to follow the 6th Armored to Brest and Task Force A to sweep the Brittany north shore.⁸

Developments in the St. Malo region on the morning of 4 August seemed to support Patton's view, since Germans manning outpost positions that comprised the outer defenses of the St. Malo fortress withdrew north toward Châteauneuf, a move that appeared to preface a show of force before capitulation. The experience of Task Force A that afternoon led to quite the opposite conclusion. The Germans had evidently withdrawn to consolidate and strengthen their defenses. Whatever the German intentions, it was obvious that the Americans needed additional troops around St. Malo.

Hoping that immediate, resolute action might achieve the desired result, Middleton ordered Macon to bring the entire 83d Division into the area to make a co-ordinated attack in conjunction with

⁷ 12th AGP Ltrs of Instr 1 and 2, 29 Jul and 3 Aug; see above, Ch. XVII. Middleton may have discussed this with Bradley when the army group commander visited the corps command post on 2 August. See Bradley, *Soldier's Story*, pp. 362-63.

⁸ Msg, Middleton to Macon, 4 Aug; 83d Div G-2, G-3 Jnl, entries 1110 and 1130, 4 Aug.

Task Force A. If St. Malo fell at once, Middleton would attach a motorized infantry battalion of the 83d Division to Task Force A and send Earnest off to fulfill his original mission.⁹

The result of the attack on 5 August proved that the reduction of St. Malo would take some time. Unwilling to hold Task Force A any longer, Middleton ordered Earnest to break contact during the night of 5 August and on the following morning to continue his mission of sweeping Brittany's north shore. In exchange for a platoon of tank destroyers that Earnest left with the 83d Division, he secured a motorized infantry battalion and a battery of 105-mm. howitzers. A medical collecting company from corps would join the task force on 8 August.¹⁰ In the matter of time, the effect of the diversion to St. Malo on Task Force A was double that imposed on the 6th Armored Division; it delayed Earnest's westward drive about forty-eight hours.

Sweeping the North Shore

Slipping out of the St. Malo area during darkness, Task Force A bypassed Dinan on the south and moved westward on 6 August toward St. Brieuc, thirty miles from Dinan.¹¹ Contact was made that afternoon with FFI groups commanded by Colonel Eon, who was already in possession of St. Brieuc. Task Force A found the three bridges near the town intact, and General Earnest detailed an engineer company to guard

⁹ VIII Corps Msg, 4 Aug.

¹⁰ Msg, Middleton to Earnest, 5 Aug; VIII Corps Msg, 2400, 5 Aug, and AAR, Aug; TF A FO 3, 1159, 5 Aug.

¹¹ Msg, Earnest to Middleton, 1330, 6 Aug.