

the artillerymen accepted and fulfilled all fire missions. They marked enemy attack concentrations with red smoke to lead fighter-bombers to lucrative targets. They also engaged enemy tanks at ranges of less than 2,000 yards. Finally, when German fire became too intense, they withdrew to new positions north of Villebaudon. There the 18th and the 65th Field Artillery Battalions were attached to the 14th Armored Field Artillery Battalion, which also assumed operational control of the 44th Field Artillery Battalion through its fire direction center. Controlling the fires of four battalions of 105-mm. howitzers, the 14th also co-ordinated missions for the XIX Corps Artillery, which sent a liaison officer to the battalion for this purpose.⁶⁶

At the end of 30 July, the XIX Corps still was seriously engaged in the Percy-Tessy-sur-Vire area. From the high ground between Percy and Tessy, the Germans shelled the American units effectively and interdicted the roads in the Villebaudon area at will.⁶⁷ Still trying to eliminate the German bridgehead at Tessy, General Corlett ordered the attack to resume on 31 July, but with a modification. From positions forming an arc from Moyon through Villebaudon to Percy, all three regiments of the 29th Division—the 116th on the left (north), the 175th in the center, and the 115th on the right (the 115th after relief near Percy by the 28th Division's 110th Infantry)—were to attack eastward toward Tessy and support another at-

tempt by CCA to destroy the bridgehead. While this attack was in progress, the 28th Division was to move south through Villebaudon to Percy to get into position for a drive south to Vire.

About noon, 31 July, two battalions—one from the 66th Armored Regiment and the other from the attached 22d Infantry—advanced eastward from Villebaudon toward Tessy-sur-Vire to spearhead a 29th Division supporting attack. Halfway to Tessy, the armored troops encountered several enemy tanks in a wood on the far side of a ravine. Unable to find a crossing site over the ravine and receiving heavy artillery fire, they halted and took cover while fighter-bombers attempted without success to dislodge the Germans. The troops of the 29th Division, like the spearhead, were unsuccessful in achieving more than limited advances.⁶⁸

Meanwhile the 28th Division was moving south toward Percy and on that day assumed responsibility for its zone. The move was far from successful, even though the division was moving through what was essentially a rear area.⁶⁹ Displaying the usual symptoms of a unit new to combat, the troops of the 28th Division would need several days to overcome a natural hesitancy to advance under fire, to become accustomed to maneuvering in unfamiliar terrain, and to learn the techniques of advancing through hedgerow country.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ [Pillsbury], 2d Armored Div in Opn COBRA, pp. 36-39.

⁶⁷ [Maj Franklin Ferriss], Notes on the Opns of the XIX Corps, 28 Jul 44-13 Jan 45 (hereafter cited [Ferriss], Notes), ML-2208; see Hodgson, R-58.

⁶⁸ 30th Div G-3 Jnl, entry 1440, 31 Jul.

⁶⁹ S. Sgt. Walter R. Tauchert, armed with a rifle and grenade launcher, destroyed two machine guns, routed an armored vehicle, and enabled his platoon to reach its objective. He was awarded the DSC posthumously.

⁷⁰ XIX Corps Msg, 1450, 31 Jul, 30th Div G-3 Jnl and File; 28th Div AAR, Jul.

A significant change in the situation occurred on 31 July in the 30th Division sector, where General Hobbs was trying for the fourth day to take Troisgots. For the attack on 31 July, Hobbs placed his entire attached tank battalion at the disposal of the 119th Infantry, which was to make the main effort in the center of the division front. The gesture was more impressive in theory than in fact since losses had reduced the tank battalion to thirty-four lights and mediums, of which only thirteen Shermans actually were available for front-line duty.⁷¹ Accompanied by these tanks, the 119th Infantry was to press in on Troisgots from three sides as the other regiments supported.

An infantry battalion and a few supporting tanks managed to get into Troisgots during the afternoon and destroy by tank fire and bazooka shells several enemy tanks and self-propelled guns, the heart of the German defense. Success was in a large measure due to 1st Lt. Harry F. Hansen of the 743d Tank Battalion, who dismounted from his tank and led two infantrymen with bazookas to positions from which to fire on three hostile tanks. Two burst into flame upon direct hits, the third retired.⁷² By evening the regiment was mopping up the village. The Germans had given way most reluctantly. The fall of Troisgots had been "no collapse."⁷³

Capture of Troisgots occurred as news

came to the Germans that Americans in the Cotentin were threatening Granville and even Avranches (indeed, had perhaps taken them) and that British and Americans were advancing toward the town of Vire. Withdrawal became imperative. Kluge's authorization for the *Seventh Army* to pull back to a line that would still protect Granville, Tessy-sur-Vire, and Vire seemed unrealistic.⁷⁴ The forces between Percy and Tessy began to withdraw, shifting slightly westward toward Villedieu and Gavray.

Suspecting the imminent collapse of the German positions, General Corlett ordered his subordinate commanders to maintain vigorous patrolling during the night to maintain contact with the enemy. "Watch . . . and see that he does not pull out," Corlett warned.⁷⁵ If a withdrawal was discovered, the units were to pursue. Since Corlett felt that the Germans would continue to hold Tessy-sur-Vire to cover their withdrawal, he planned still another attack for 1 August. Attaching CCA to the 29th Division, he ordered General Gerhardt to drive eastward again from Villebaudon to Tessy-sur-Vire while the 30th Division pressed against Tessy from the north. The 28th Division was to move south through Percy and attack toward Vire.⁷⁶

On the morning of 1 August, CCA spearheaded the 29th Division attack by again moving toward Tessy-sur-Vire with an armored battalion on each side of the highway. A unique armored point of five vehicles moved ahead of the force. A light tank, acting as a decoy,

⁷¹ [Ferriss], *Opns of 30th Div*, pp. 31-32; 30th Div Msg, 1005, 31 Jul, 30th Div G-3 Jnl and File.

⁷² Hansen was awarded the DSC.

⁷³ Telecon, Hobbs, 1510, 31 Jul; 30th Div G-3 Jnl, entries 0429 and 1855, 31 Jul; Hewitt, *Story of the 30th Infantry Division*, pp. 44-45; [Ferriss], *Opns of 30th Div*, p. 32.

⁷⁴ Telecon, 0030, 31 Jul, *AGp B KTB*; *AGp B* Msg, 31 Jul, *AGp B Op. Befehle*, p. 206.

⁷⁵ Telecon, Corlett and Hobbs, 1923, 31 Jul, 30th Div G-3 Jnl and File.

⁷⁶ XIX Corps Ltrs of Instr, 10 and 11, 31 Jul.

advanced along the road; two medium tanks, one hundred yards ahead of the light tank, moved along the sides of the road to flush and engage enemy tanks; and two tank destroyers, two hundred yards behind the light tank, advanced along the sides of the road, alert to reinforce the medium tanks by quick fire.

Taking advantage of ground mist, the men and vehicles of CCA crossed the ravine that had held up progress on the previous day and overran and destroyed a column of German vehicles. Although three American tanks entered the outskirts of Tessy during the morning, the Germans drove the crewmen out after all three tanks developed mechanical failures.

Earlier on 1 August General Hobbs had instructed the 120th Infantry to send a token force to participate in the capture of Tessy-sur-Vire. "We were suddenly ordered . . . to take off for Tessy," explained the commander of the rifle company selected for the mission, "so we took off."⁷⁷ Without an artillery forward observer, the company moved cross-country to within a mile of the town before an enemy machine gun and several mortars took the troops under fire. Knocking out the machine gun with grenades, the infantrymen infiltrated into the edge of Tessy. Having understood that Tessy had already been secured by CCA and that he was merely to set up roadblocks there, the company

commander was disconcerted when enemy forces appeared and drove his men out helter-skelter.

CCA mounted a second attack that afternoon and penetrated Tessy. Men of the 22d Infantry cleared the center of the town and crossed the river to establish outposts. In the meantime, several CCA tanks rumbling through the northern outskirts of Tessy restored spirit to the company of the 30th Division that had earlier been driven out. "The tanks could have had wooden guns," said one of the men. Their presence alone was invigorating. Together, infantrymen and tankers cleared the northern outskirts.⁷⁸

Getting into Tessy did not mean that the town was secure. German artillery shells continued to fall into the streets until the 35th Division of the V Corps across the river took high ground east of the town on the following day, 2 August. At that time, the 30th Division passed into XIX Corps reserve and CCA reverted to 2d Armored Division control.

The XIX Corps was still far from its post-COBRA objective. But it had contributed handsomely to the final success growing out of COBRA. By blocking for five days the German attempt to re-establish a defensive line across the Cotentin, XIX Corps had enabled troops on the First Army right to make a spectacular end run.

⁷⁷ Quoted in Hewitt, *Story of the 30th Infantry Division*, p. 45.

⁷⁸ Hewitt, *Story of the 30th Infantry Division*, pp. 45-46; [Ferriss], *Ops of 30th Div*, pp. 35-36; XIX Corps G-3 Per Rpts 54 and 55, 31 Jul and 1 Aug.

CHAPTER XVI

Breakthrough Becomes Breakout

The Outflanking Force

While General Bradley on 28 July was giving direction to the exploitation growing out of COBRA, General Collins' VII Corps still had not completed its assignment in the COBRA operation. The 1st Division, with Combat Command B of the 3d Armored Division attached, was establishing positions in the Coutances-Marigny area. The rest of the 3d Armored Division was engaged near Montpinchon. The 2d Armored Division, less CCA, was extending a line across the Cotentin from Notre-Dame-de-Cenilly to Cérences. The 4th Division, less the 22d Infantry, was hurrying to the Notre-Dame-de-Cenilly sector to reinforce the armored division. Only the 9th Division was out of contact with the enemy—needing rest, it was about to pass into corps reserve. Both the 30th Division and the 2d Armored's CCA had been transferred to the XIX Corps, and plans already were under way to redistribute some of the extra artillery provided the VII Corps for Operation COBRA.¹ (*See Maps VI and VII.*)

Still oriented to the west in accord with the COBRA plan, VII Corps would have to make a sharp turn to the south before taking part in the exploitation, a maneuver that well might delay its

participation. In hope of speeding the shift and holding traffic congestion to a minimum, General Collins first ordered reorientation and attack by the units that were farthest south in the corps sector, the 2d Armored and 4th Infantry Divisions, only to see this plan disrupted by the continued pressure against the 2d Armored Division the Germans exerted in trying to escape the Roncey pocket.² So long as this pressure persisted, the 2d Armored Division could not assume a new mission.

Having detached the 3d Armored Division's CCB from the 1st Division in order to provide an armored reserve under his original plan, General Collins saw a solution to his problem in reuniting the combat command with its parent division and using the 3d Armored in the exploitation attack. He ordered the 3d Armored to go south early on 30 July and pass through the 2d Armored in order to attack on the right and abreast of the 4th Division. To reinforce the 4th Division, since the 22d Infantry had passed to control of the XIX Corps, Collins provided it with the 1st Division's 26th Infantry. The remainder of the 1st Division was to be in reserve, but be prepared to move south on six hours' notice. The 9th Division was to

¹ VII Corps Opns Memos 52 and 53, 30 and 31 Jul.

² VII Corps Opns Memo 51, 29 Jul (confirming oral orders issued 26 Jul).

go into bivouac for rest and reorganization.³

The 3d Armored and 4th Divisions were ready to take up the post-COBRA exploitation on the morning of 30 July. The two divisions were to attack southeast for seven miles from Gavray to Villedieu-les-Poëles. The infantry was to take Villedieu, an important road center in the middle of the Cotentin about half way between Granville and the town of Vire, and high ground east of Villedieu, while the armor was to seize high ground and river crossing sites west of Villedieu.

The situation seemed propitious since the Germans west of the Vire River—perhaps 16,000 men and less than three tank battalions—were in retreat. Neither reserves nor a German defensive line north of the Avranches-Tessy-sur-Vire area was in evidence.⁴

Attacking with two regiments abreast on the morning of 30 July, the 4th Division encountered little opposition until it arrived about four miles north of Villedieu-les-Poëles. Here an artillery preparation and a battalion attack during the afternoon failed to eliminate the opposition. Excellent defensive terrain and the presence of strong enemy forces, particularly on the 4th Division left on ground south of Percy, brought operations to a temporary halt.

On the 4th Division right, the two combat commands of the 3d Armored Division in the meantime had driven toward Gavray and Hambye to cross the Sienne River abreast.⁵ Of the two, CCB

had less difficulty, despite poor country roads and wrecked German vehicles that had to be pushed off the roads before the columns could pass. Reaching Hambye in early afternoon of 30 July, CCB found a damaged bridge and met small arms fire from the south bank, but a small reconnaissance party supported by fire from the advance guard was sufficient to drive the Germans back. Engineers repaired the bridge by late afternoon, and the combat command continued the march south toward Villedieu-les-Poëles. Like the infantry, the armor ran into increasing resistance when nearing Villedieu. Since portions of the combat command still had to cross the Sienne before a full-scale attack could be mounted against the objective west of the town, Colonel Boudinot halted CCB and established perimeter defenses for the night.⁶

In moving to Gavray, CCA of the 3d Armored Division had been hampered by the presence of troops of other divisions. CCA's COBRA attack had brought it to, and in some places beyond, the Coutances-Lengronne highway, which had been pre-empted by, then turned over to, the VIII Corps. Since armor of the VIII Corps was driving south along this route, intermingling of VII and VIII Corps troops was inevitable. "Things were in wild disorder," General Collins later recalled. Extricating hundreds of CCA men and vehicles from what had become the adjacent corps sector was difficult work. Had CCA been able to use the main highway from Coutances through Lengronne to Gavray, its advance would have been simplified. But CCA, like

³ VII Corps Opns Memo 52, 30 Jul (confirming oral orders issued 29 Jul).

⁴ 3d Armd Div FO 5, 30 Jul.

⁵ 3d Armd Div FO 5, 30 Jul (confirming oral orders).

⁶ 3d Armd Div G-3 Per Rpt 36, 30 Jul.

CCB, had been relegated to a network of narrow, muddy, twisting roads that would have retarded movement even if hundreds of burned-out German vehicles had not blocked the way in Roncey and along the roads leading south and southeast. Furthermore, orienting CCA from west to southeast involved turning the advance guards, uncoiling columns, regrouping forces, and, as a result, much internal traffic congestion. The necessity of passing through the rear of the 2d Armored Division also added to traffic problems. Both General Collins and General Hickey had to give personal attention to traffic control at critical road intersections in order to get CCA on its way.⁷

In spite of all these difficulties, reconnaissance troops of CCA reached the Sienne River in the early afternoon of 30 July. They found the bridge to Gavray destroyed and the town, situated on the south bank, apparently held in strength. Conscious of high wooded ground across the river, where the Germans possessed good observation, concealment, and fields of fire, and acutely aware of enemy artillery, the reconnaissance troops made no effort to cross the little river before the main body of the combat command arrived.

In late afternoon the two leading task forces of CCA were in position to make an assault crossing. After two armored field artillery battalions laid down a fifteen-minute preparation and fired

counterbattery against several enemy pieces located by observation planes, the armored infantrymen waded into four feet of water to fight their way across. One task force appeared so hesitant in making its crossing that its commander, Lt. Col. Leander L. Doan, became impatient, dismounted from his tank, and personally led the assault.⁸ Actually, the Germans possessed little strength. Only scattered fire bothered the infantry as they crossed. In little more than an hour the two task forces had established a consolidated bridgehead and began to prepare for a counterattack that never came. Engineers set to work building a bridge so that tanks and other vehicles could cross the following morning.

Although both attacking divisions of the VII Corps were across the Sienne by the evening of 30 July, General Collins was markedly disappointed that no more spectacular advances had been made. He therefore altered the plan of attack.

For some time General Collins had been of the opinion that the 3d Armored Division was overcautious. He had, for example, seen dismounted reconnaissance personnel searching for enemy troops while American vehicles nearby passed back and forth unmolested. He also felt that the 3d showed lack of experience and needed aggressive leadership at the top. The command did not know, for example, "how to coil up off the road or close when it was stopped." Collins had observed a "long column going off the road through one hole in a hedgerow . . . one vehicle . . . at a time . . . blocking the road to the rear for miles, holding up supplies and transport-

⁷ VII Corps Opns Memo 51, 29 Jul (confirming oral orders, 28 Jul); Interv by author with Gen Collins, 2 Sep 55; Talk by Gen Collins at the Armored School, Fort Knox, Ky., 19 Jan 48 (in the Library of The Armored School); Ltr, Collins to Hechler, 9 Dec 45, quoted in Hechler, VII Corps in Operation COBRA, p. 219.

⁸ Colonel Doan was awarded the DSC for this action.

tation coming forward." To replace the 3d Armored Division, Collins brought the 1st Division south to take responsibility for the 3d Armored Division zone. This gave him "two exceptionally able commanders" in Generals Huebner and Barton.⁹

Attaching CCA to the 1st Division and CCB to the 4th Division—thereby reducing the 3d Armored Division headquarters to an administrative agency charged only with supplying and servicing the combat commands—Collins ordered the infantry divisions to attack abreast, each spearheaded by the attached armor. With COBRA completed, he visualized a more distant objective ten miles south of Villedieu-les-Poëles: the 4th Division was to proceed through Villedieu to St. Pois, which earlier, until the Tessy-sur-Vire battle developed, had been a XIX Corps objective; the 1st Division was to drive to Brécéy and beyond, across the Sée River.¹⁰

The challenge of rapid advance came a day too early for the 4th Division, for the division lacked troops. Though the organic regiment that had been attached to the XIX Corps had been replaced by the 1st Division's 26th Infantry, the 26th now passed to its parent unit. Another of the 4th Division's organic regiments, the 8th Infantry, would not arrive from the Notre-Dame-de-Cenilly region until too late for the first day of renewed attack. Only one regiment, the 12th Infantry, plus the attached armor, was on hand. When the infantrymen attacked toward Villedieu-les-Poëles, they could

make only minor gains. At the same time, CCB moved eastward along the vulnerable left flank of the division and spent most of the day building bridges, reorganizing, and reducing occasional enemy roadblocks.

Not until the evening of 31 July, after the arrival of the 8th Infantry, was the 4th Division altogether ready to drive south. Calling his principal subordinates together, General Barton made it clear he had in mind rapid, sweeping advances. "We face a defeated enemy," he told his commanders, "an enemy terribly low in morale, terribly confused. I want you in the next advance to throw caution to the winds . . . destroying, capturing, or bypassing the enemy, and pressing"—he paused to find the correct word—"pressing *recklessly* on to the objective."¹¹ The units of the 4th Division and the attached armor took General Barton at his word when they renewed the attack on 1 August.

Meanwhile, developments had occurred even more rapidly on the corps right, where CCA spearheaded the 1st Division attack on 31 July. One task force drove quickly against scattered German forces that were employing occasional tanks and antitank guns in ineffective delaying actions. Hitting the broad side of an enemy column—light armor and personnel carriers—moving southwest from Villedieu toward Avranches, tankers of this task force disorganized and dispersed the enemy with fire at close range, though fast-falling twilight helped a large part of the column to escape. Sensing the proxi-

⁹ Gen Collins' Talk at The Armored School; Ruppenthal Notes, ML-2185.

¹⁰ VII Corps Opns Memo 53, 31 Jul (confirming oral orders 30 Jul).

¹¹ CI 30 (4th Div); see Hechler, VII Corps in Operation COBRA, pp. 236-37.

mity of stronger enemy forces, and unwilling to chance contact while his own troops were dispersed, General Hickey ordered the task force into defensive positions for the night near the village of l'Epine.

More spectacular was the thrust of another task force under Colonel Doan that cut the Villedieu-les-Poëles-Granville highway just west of Villedieu in the late afternoon of 31 July. As Doan was searching for a good place to halt, he received a message that General Collins wanted him to continue twelve miles farther to the final objective, Hill 242, south of Brécey. Doan spurred his force on. Looking ahead to a railroad embankment where he could expect opposition, he asked for fighter-bombers to fly column cover to strafe and bomb the tracks as their last mission in the fading light of day. When the ground column crossed the railway unopposed, the tankers noticed several unmanned antitank guns. Though the enemy crews later returned to their positions to oppose the infantry in wake of the armored spearhead, the effective work of the fighter-bombers had spared the armor what could have been a costly engagement.

Bypassing one of its original objectives, Hill 216 southwest of Villedieu-les-Poëles, Doan's task force barreled down the main road to Brécey during the early evening hours of 31 July. When the commander of the point had difficulty selecting the correct road at an intersection, Colonel Doan himself took over in his command tank. Making a Hollywood-type entry into Brécey, the task force commander took pot shots with his pistol at surprised German soldiers who were lounging at the curb

and in houses along the main street of the town.¹²

Though the principal bridge south of Brécey had been destroyed, Doan's command prepared a hasty ford by hand-carrying rock to line the river bed. Infantrymen waded the stream and subdued scattered small arms fire. Tanks and vehicles followed. The final objective, Hill 242, lay three miles to the south, and only when his men reached a wooded area on the north slope of the hill did Doan permit a halt.

On 1 August, a week after the beginning of Operation COBRA, VII Corps was near the base of the Cotentin, more than thirty miles due south of the Périers-St. Lô highway. General Collins had reversed his field and made an extraordinary gain that outflanked the German left.

The Breakout to Avranches

In the coastal sector of the Cotentin an even more outstanding achievement was developing. Under the supervision of General Patton, the Third Army commander, VIII Corps had been demonstrating vividly just how much Operation COBRA had accomplished.

When General Bradley instructed General Patton to supervise the VIII Corps exploitation growing out of COBRA, he gave Patton charge of operations that intimately and personally concerned the Third Army commander. The quicker Patton got the VIII Corps to the threshold of Brittany, the sooner he would be able to enter battle at the head of his army.

¹² 3d Armd Div CCA interv. cited in Hechler, VII Corps in Operation COBRA, pp. 246-48; 3d Armd Div CCA AAR, Jul.

To enable Patton to supervise the VIII Corps, General Bradley had asked him to serve as his deputy for the forces on the right.¹³ Though Patton remained in the background of command to the best of his ability, his presence was unmistakable, and his imprint on the operations that developed was as visible as his shadow on the wall of the operations tent.

The situation facing the VIII Corps on the evening of 27 July was challenging. On the one hand, the Germans were making a general withdrawal, which in effect invited the Americans to exploit. On the other hand, serious obstacles kept the Americans from making a rapid advance—the profusion of mines, wrecked vehicles, and enemy delaying forces. Furthermore, the infantry divisions that had carried the VIII Corps attack in COBRA filled the roads, and from the east came the VII Corps and the threat of congestion. As though the potential confusion between VII and VIII Corps units was not enough, a new corps, the XV, was scheduled to enter the line between the VII and the VIII as soon as the Third Army became operational.¹⁴

For all these drawbacks, the absence of organized German resistance on 27 July and the urge to reach the edge of Brittany exerted an overpowering influence. General Bradley, after conferring with General Patton on 27 July, had already ordered General Middleton to disregard the COBRA limit of advance

north of Coutances, and infantrymen of the VIII Corps were streaming south as quickly as engineers could clear paths for them through mine fields.¹⁵

That evening, as orders from Bradley shifted the First Army from COBRA into exploitation, Patton manifested his influence by substituting armor for infantry. Two armored divisions were to spearhead the attack to the south.

In the COBRA attack, the lone armored division available to the VIII Corps, the 4th under Maj. Gen. John S. Wood, had been pinched out near the starting line. Located on the Carentan-Périers isthmus in corps reserve, the 4th Armored Division was behind the infantry forces completing their COBRA assignments when General Middleton ordered General Wood to move. Shortly after daylight, 28 July, Wood was to pass through the 90th Division and proceed through Périers and toward Coutances as far as Monthuchon. Expecting troops of the VII Corps to have secured Monthuchon by that time, Middleton told Wood to co-ordinate with Collins' units so that he could continue through Coutances to Cérences, twenty-two miles south of Périers and nine miles south of Coutances.¹⁶

The second armored force was a new unit, the 6th Armored Division under Maj. Gen. Robert W. Grow, attached from the Third Army. Middleton alerted Grow to move from his assembly area north of la Haye-du-Puits and attack on the right of the 4th Armored

¹³ XV Corps G-3 Memo, Conf at Comd Post VIII Corps, 282000 Jul, 29 Jul, XV Corps G-3 Jnl and File; Pogue Interv with Bradley, Washington, 1948, Pogue Files.

¹⁴ XV Corps G-3 Memo, Conf at Comd Post VIII Corps, 282000 Jul, 29 Jul, XV Corps G-3 Jnl and File.

¹⁵ XV Corps G-3 Memo, Conf at G-3 Office, Hq Third U.S. Army, 281600 Jul, 29 Jul, XV Corps G-3 Jnl File.

¹⁶ 4th Armd Div G-3 Jnl, entry 2115, 27 Jul, Overlay to Accompany FO 2, 26 Jul, and FO 3, 28 Jul; VIII Corps Msgs, 1810, 27 Jul, and 0125, 28 Jul, 4th Armd Div G-3 Jnl File.

Division down the Cotentin coast. Grow was to pass through the 79th Division, bypass Coutances on the west, and drive to Granville, twenty-eight miles south of Coutances.¹⁷

The plan of action for 28 July thus projected twin thrusts by the 4th and 6th Armored Divisions moving abreast through two infantry divisions, the 90th and the 79th. In the expectation that XV Corps was to be inserted on the VIII Corps left, and, anticipating that the new corps would compress the 4th Armored Division zone of advance, General Middleton intended to assign the main effort to the 6th Armored Division on the right. Followed by the 79th Division, the 6th Armored Division would subsequently drive from Granville to the base of the Cotentin near Avranches.¹⁸

To make possible armored operations in a corps zone jammed with infantry troops and strewn with mines, Middleton ordered the infantry divisions to intensify their demining programs and to clear the main routes. The VIII Corps Engineer, Col. William R. Winslow, hastily organized teams to teach members of the armored divisions how to remove new types of German mines.¹⁹ To assure control and balance while the armored divisions passed to the front, General Middleton instructed the troops to halt for further orders after capturing Granville and Cérences.²⁰

The 6th Armored Division reconnoitered its projected zone of advance on the afternoon of 27 July. The following morning, as the infantry divisions of the VIII Corps continued to advance against no opposition, Grow received the order to start rolling.²¹ CCA (Brig. Gen. James Taylor) moved quickly to Lessay, where traffic congestion because of combat damage to the town, bridge repair, and mine fields retarded progress. Getting through Lessay was difficult, but by early afternoon CCA was moving rapidly toward Coutances. The only opposition to what resembled a road march came from an enemy roadblock two miles northwest of Coutances, where a few German infantrymen and one tank tried to delay the column. Bypassing Coutances on the west, the leading units of CCA moved a short distance down the coastal road toward Granville before halting for the night.²²

In the left of the VIII Corps zone, the 4th Armored Division had begun to advance shortly after daybreak, 28 July, when CCB (Brig. Gen. Holmes E. Dager) moved through Périers toward

²¹ VIII Corps Msg, 1600, 27 Jul, and G-3 Jnl, entries, 0113, 0200, and 1045, 28 Jul; 6th Armd Div Msg, 2210, 27 Jul, FUSA G-3 Jnl; 6th Armd Div AAR, Jul.

²² The basic sources for the action in the VIII Corps sector described below are: G-3 Section, *Combat Record of the Sixth Armored Division in the European Theater of Operations, 18 July 1944-8 May 1945*, compiled under direction of Maj. Clyde J. Burk (Germany: Steinbeck-Druck Aschaffenburg, 1945) (hereafter cited as *Combat Record of the Sixth Armored Division*), an excellent documentary source, pp. 1-8; Capt. Kenneth Koyen, *The Fourth Armored Division* (Munich, Germany: Herder-Druck, 1946), pp. 7-21; F. P. Halas, *VIII Corps Operations, 26-31 July 1944*, a preliminary MS, Hist Div USFET (1945), OCMH Files.

¹⁷ 6th Armd Div AAR, Jul, and G-3 Jnl, 28 Jul.

¹⁸ XV Corps G-3 Memo, Conf at Comd Post VIII Corps, 282000 Jul, 29 Jul, XV Corps G-3 Jnl and File.

¹⁹ 357th Inf Jnl, entry 2220, 27 Jul; ETOUSA Engr Hist Rpt 10, *Combat Engineering*, p. 35.

²⁰ VIII Corps Msgs, 0125 and 0130, 28 Jul, to 4th and 6th Armd Divs, FUSA G-3 Jnl.