

of his reserves," the enemy appeared incapable of halting a First Army advance.⁶ If eight divisions were shifted from the *Fifteenth Army*, the Germans could perhaps continue to fight along a general line from Rennes through Mortain, Falaise, and Trouville and thus prevent the emergence of Allied forces from Normandy. Otherwise, there could only be abandonment of the "no retreat" policy. Beyond that, it was possible even to foresee complete German collapse in the very near future. "Only discipline," the First Army G-2 wrote,

and habit of obedience to orders keeps the front line units fighting. It is doubtful that the German forces in NORMANDY can continue for more than four to eight weeks as a military machine. One more heavy defeat such as the recent breakthrough battle which commenced 25 July will most probably result in the collapse of the forces now at the base of the CHERBOURG Peninsula. Surrender or a disastrous retreat will be the alternative for the German forces. In the next four to eight weeks the current situation may change with dramatic suddenness into a race to reach a chaotic Germany.⁷

So optimistic an assessment, though completely warranted, was not to endure for long once the character of German resistance on the immediate First Army front was manifest.

The German Task

In planning a counterattack to regain Avranches and restabilize their Normandy defenses, the Germans had to stiffen their resistance in order to preserve the conditions under which a counterattack was possible. If the defensive

line east of Avranches were lost, regaining Avranches would avail little. At the same time, the assembly areas for the forces that were to launch the counterattack had to be protected. To accomplish these tasks was to prove difficult, for the Germans had relatively few troops in Normandy at the beginning of August. (*See Map IX.*)

Losses had been exceedingly high among the divisions in contact with the Allies during June and July. Hausser, the *Seventh Army* commander, counted eight divisions that had practically been destroyed in the Cotentin during the month of July alone: *Panzer Lehr*, *5th Parachute*, *17th SS Panzer Grenadier*, and *91st*, *352d*, *275th*, *243d*, and *77th Infantry Divisions*.⁸ This did not take into account the *16th Luftwaffe Field Division* and the *326th Division*, annihilated near Caen and Caumont, respectively. It did not include the divisions in Brittany and on the Channel Isles that had to be written off as far as the Normandy front was concerned: the *2d Parachute*, the *343d* and *319th Infantry Divisions*, and parts of the *265th* and *266th*. Nor did it mention that the *21st*, *9th SS*, *10th SS*, and *12th SS Panzer Divisions* had been badly crippled in the Caen and Caumont sectors. Only a few divisions of Eberbach's *Fifth Panzer Army*, the weak *3d Parachute* and *353d Divisions* (the latter temporarily presumed lost during COBRA and now reduced to kampfgruppe size) of Hausser's *Seventh Army*, and the armored divisions scheduled to launch the Avranches counterattack still retained combat effectiveness. Like all the troops in Normandy, these too had suffered from

⁶ FUSA FO 3, 1 Aug.

⁷ FUSA G-2 Est 13, 1 Aug.

⁸ MS # B-179 (Hausser)

uninterrupted combat, inferior equipment, inadequate matériel and supplies, and Allied air superiority. Though the men were still fighting grimly, commanders were concerned lest the will to resist suddenly vanish.⁹

Two infantry divisions were scheduled to reinforce the battered units holding the Normandy left flank and also to relieve the armored divisions scheduled to counterattack. The 363d moved through Tinchebray during the first days of August and into the Brécey-Vire line to relieve the 2d and the 2d SS *Panzer Divisions* by 5 August.¹⁰ The 84th, supposed to relieve the 116th *Panzer Division*, was committed on 2 August in defense of the Sourdeval sector and became engaged in such violent combat that it was unable to accomplish the relief as quickly as hoped.

Despite heavy pressure exerted by the First U.S. Army, the *Seventh Army* managed, by stubborn resistance and skillful withdrawal, to retain a defensive line that, while not solid, was at least cohesive. The XLVII *Panzer Corps* headquarters gave up responsibility for the center to prepare for the counterattack, and the II *Parachute* and the LXXXIV *Corps* together fought along the Brécey-Vire line. On the right (east), the II *Parachute Corps*, controlling only the 3d *Parachute Division* (reinforced by a regiment of the 5th *Parachute Division*) defended the town of Vire. On the left, the LXXXIV *Corps* had the more complicated job of getting the armored divi-

sions out of the line without upsetting the precarious defensive balance. In this the corps depended heavily on the kampfgruppe of the 353d *Division*. On the extreme left, under LXXXIV *Corps* control, remnants of the 5th *Parachute* and 275th *Divisions* held weak blocking positions south of the Sée River near Juvigny.¹¹

During the first week of August, five factors gave the German commanders pause. First, they often doubted that they could prevent the counterattack assembly areas from being overrun. Second, they wondered whether the transfer of armored divisions (the 2d and the 116th at the end of July, and the pending transfer of the 1st SS in August) from Eberbach's forces would so weaken the right wing that the British and Canadians would be able to effect a penetration south of Caen. Third, they were aware of the threat of encirclement by co-ordinated British and American drives to the town of Flers—the British by a continuation of the southeastward thrust from Caumont, the Americans by a northeastward thrust from Fougères through Domfront. Fourth, they were concerned with the threat to the *Army Group B* rear posed by American forces driving toward le Mans. Fifth, they worried that loss of high ground around Mortain—excellent terrain from which to launch offensive action—might inhibit the counterattack toward Avranches. These thoughts added to the burdens of the holding battle immediately preceding the counterattack.¹²

⁹ MS # B-179 (Hausser); MS # B-725 (Gersdorff).

¹⁰ On how the movement of the 363d *Division* was consistently harassed by air attack, see Leigh-Mallory, "Despatch," Fourth Supplement to the *London Gazette* of December 31, 1946, p. 63.

¹¹ MS # B-346 (Blauensteiner); MS # B-725 (Gersdorff); MS # B-179 (Hausser).

¹² MS # B-725 (Gersdorff); MS # B-179 (Hausser); MS # B-722 (Gersdorff).

The Drive to Mortain

On the First U.S. Army right, the VII Corps had outflanked the German left by 1 August when troops of the 3d Armored Division's Combat Command A (attached to the 1st Division) pushed across the Sée River at Brécey. Between Brécey and Avranches, a distance of ten miles, yawned the gap through which the Third Army skittered toward Brittany, and since the Third Army would take responsibility for holding the Avranches corridor open, VII Corps had to move east to get out of the way. The VII Corps moved toward Mortain, a road center near commanding ground twenty miles east of Avranches between the Sée and the Sélune.¹³ (*Map 13*)

General Collins, the VII Corps commander, ordered General Huebner, the 1st Division commander, "to envelop the enemy's left flank and exploit the breakthrough of his defenses" by seizing the high ground and road centers in the Mortain area. The 1st Division was to sweep southeastward across the front of and pinch out General Barton's 4th Division, which was attacking south from Villedieu through St. Pois to the Sée River, and was to make contact with General Eddy's 9th Division, which was to attack south toward Sourdeval and the high ground north of Mortain.¹⁴

The 1st Division turned eastward

¹³ First U.S. Army, *Report of Operations, 1 August 1944-22 February 1945*, 4 Vols. (Washington, 1946), I, 3. (In footnotes throughout the remainder of the volume, all references cited as First U.S. Army, *Report of Operations*, are to the 1 August 1944-22 February 1945 report. See also footnote 15, Chapter I.) VII Corps Tactical Study of the Terrain, 17 Jul.

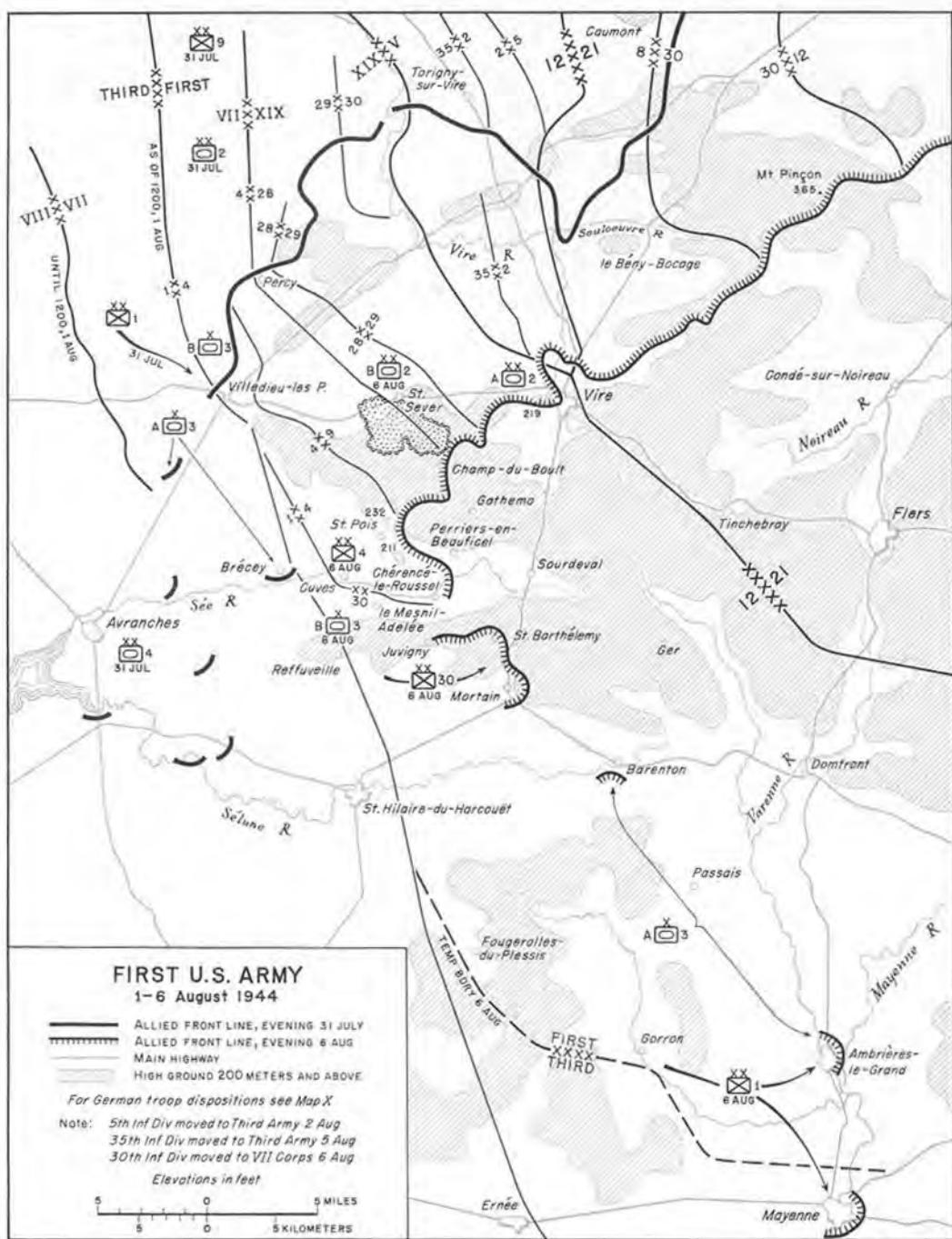
¹⁴ VII Corps FO 7, 1 Aug; see 4th Div Spec Opn Rpt, St. Pois.

toward Mortain, the attached CCA of the 3d Armored Division acting as a spearhead while the infantry regiments mopped up. Extremely broken terrain, roads twisting and turning around hills and crossing narrow, steep-walled valleys, gave the Germans ample opportunity to ambush. Against them, the 1st Division used fire power liberally, overran elements of the 275th *Division*, and took Reffuveille, le Mesnil-Adelée, Juvigny, and St. Barthélémy. On the afternoon of 3 August, the 1st Division entered Mortain after dispersing the reconnaissance battalion of the 2d *Panzer Division*. General Huebner immediately outpostted the high ground east of town.¹⁵

The relatively easy capture of Mortain contrasted with operations in the remaining portion of the VII Corps front, where the Germans manned an unbroken defensive line between St. Pois and Vire. The 84th *Division* held tenaciously to Sourdeval, a scant six miles north of Mortain, but the remnants of the *Panzer Lehr Division*, which ostensibly covered Mortain, Barenton, and Passais, could not prevent patrols of the 1st Division from reaching Fougerolles-du-Plessis and Barenton, twelve miles south and seven miles southeast of Mortain, respectively.

The natural inclination to push the 1st Division along the path of least re-

¹⁵ MS # B-725 (Gersdorff); Jules et Gilles Buisson, *Mortain et sa Bataille* (Rennes, 1947), pp. 47ff. A representative action in this advance was one in which 2d Lt. Harold B. Selleck of the 26th Infantry, who had been reconnoitering an approach route for his battalion, encountered a hostile tank-infantry force, which opened fire. Selleck deployed his few troops, engaged the enemy, and captured more than a hundred prisoners, a Mark IV tank, and considerable amounts of equipment and supplies. He was awarded the DSC.



MAP 13

D. Holmes, Jr.



TROOPS ADVANCING FROM JUVIGNY
southward toward Mortain.

sistance, into exploitation toward the successive objectives of the Domfront-Mayenne and Alençon-le Mans lines, gave way to a more sober calculation. At Mortain the division positions formed a conspicuous salient on the German left flank and presented a potential threat to the rear of the German units fighting along the St. Pois-Vire line. Aware of the withdrawal of the *2d Panzer* and the *2d SS Panzer Divisions*, American commanders misinterpreted German troop movements as attempts to escape the threat on the flank. While other First Army units exerted pressure from the north, the 1st Division consolidated positions at Mortain to prevent enemy escape and to guard against counterattack from the north. At the same time, the division artillery took numerous targets to the north and northeast under fire, on 4 August alone firing 105

missions, of which 28 were harassing, 14 were against tanks, 15 were counterbattery, 24 were antipersonnel and antivehicular, and 5 were interdiction and preparation.¹⁶

As the XV Corps, on the right of the VII Corps, began to advance toward Laval and le Mans, General Hodges instructed General Collins to move to the south to cover the XV Corps north flank. In compliance, the 1st Division on 6 August displaced across the Sélune River south of Mortain to Gorron and Ambrières-le-Grand and, having met only slight interference, started to relieve the 30th Division at Mayenne.¹⁷ To replace the 1st Division at Mortain, Hodges shifted the 30th Division from Tessy and XIX Corps control. The 1st Division was then free to exploit eastward from Mayenne toward Alençon in a drive paralleling the XV Corps thrust to le Mans.

In contrast with the 1st Division experience, the 4th Division struck determined resistance in the hills just north and northwest of St. Pois on 2 August. The 3d Armored Division's Combat Command B, attached to the 4th Division and spearheading the attack, was not far from St. Pois, but the armor awaited arrival of the infantry before resuming the attack. The rest of the division moved south from Villedieu in what appeared to resemble a gigantic traffic jam on 2 August but what was in actuality a rapid movement. General Barton had decided that "the quickest way to get them there [was to] put them all on the road at once."¹⁸

From the forward positions just north

¹⁶ 1st Div AAR, Aug.

¹⁷ VII Corps Ops Memo 57, 4 Aug.

¹⁸ 4th Div Spec Opn Rpt, St. Pois.

of St. Pois, Barton had to advance about six miles and seize three objectives, each two miles apart: the town of St. Pois, Hill 211, and a bridgehead across the Sée River at Chérencé-le-Roussel.¹⁹ Although General Collins contemplated sending the 4th Division beyond Chérencé-le-Roussel to the high ground north of Mortain in the Gathemo-Sourdeval area, the stubborn resistance in the St. Pois sector disrupted this plan.²⁰ The 116th Panzer Division had been hastily withdrawn from the line near Tessy on 1 August to counter the American thrust toward Brécey, and this force had been committed in time to halt CCB and the 4th Division.²¹

Impatient to get the three objectives so that the 4th Division might go into reserve for rest as promised, General Barton applied at St. Pois a lesson learned at Villedieu. On 3 August he sent a task force of infantry and armor to bypass St. Pois on the west. Moving about five miles "without firing a shot," the task force crossed the Sée River at Cuves, four miles west of Chérencé-le-Roussel. On the following day CCB and attached infantry fought eastward from Cuves along the south bank of the Sée River, then crossed the river again at Chérencé-le-Roussel and established a bridgehead on the north bank of the Sée. While the task force was thus outflanking and enveloping the enemy, three regiments of the 4th Division attacked abreast from the northwest toward St. Pois. The 12th Infantry on

the left strove to gain Hill 232, the 22d Infantry in the center attacked the town of St. Pois, and the 8th Infantry on the right drove on Hill 211. The going was difficult against the guns of the 116th Panzer Division, and by evening the objectives were still not secured. When the attack was halted and orders given to dig in for the night, the rifle company officers of a battalion of the 8th Infantry requested and secured permission to continue as a measure of respect for their commander, Lt. Col. Erasmus H. Strickland, who had been wounded that day. The assault carried to the crest of Hill 211, and at dawn, 5 August, the regiment was ready to repel the strong but obviously final German counterattack.

Although St. Pois technically remained in German hands that morning, the town was virtually encircled. The Germans began to withdraw to the southeast to protect Sourdeval. From the hills around St. Pois, men of the 4th Division hastened the enemy's departure by bringing down artillery fire and calling in fighter-bombers to attack the columns. The cannon company of the 8th Infantry fired 3,200 shells and burned out three howitzer tubes, the 4.2-inch mortar company depleted all its ammunition stocks, and the 81-mm. mortars expended 3,000 rounds.²²

The division mission completed by the end of 5 August, General Barton released CCB to control of the 3d Armored Division, assembled the 4th Division at St. Pois in the VII Corps reserve, and looked forward to giving his troops four

¹⁹ VII Corps FO 7, 1 Aug.

²⁰ VII Corps Ops Memo 55, 3 Aug (confirming oral orders, 2 Aug).

²¹ MS # B-725 (Gersdorff); Hosp Intervs, GL-93 (316), IV.

²² 4th Div Spec Opn Rpt, St. Pois; 4th Div G-3 Jnl, 4-5 Aug. Pvt. Joseph J. Giordano of the 8th Infantry was awarded the DSC for heroic action on 5 August.

or five days of rest, replete with "hot showers, hot food, USO shows . . . Red Cross doughnut girls."²³

Like the 4th Division, General Eddy's 9th Division encountered strong opposition. Moving from a rest area to assembly near Villebaudon on 1 August, the 9th Division prepared to advance twenty miles to high ground north of Mortain against what appeared to be disorganized enemy forces.²⁴ Two regiments abreast gained ten miles in two days, a rapid advance for the difficult terrain, but then progress slowed as they moved through hilly hedgerow terrain well defended by the 353d *Division* reinforced by the remnants of the 352d *Division* and a small task force of the 6th *Parachute Regiment*. The 9th Division advance was tedious in the face of numerous mines and strong delaying forces at roadblocks and on critical terrain features. As the division threatened the Forêt de St. Sever, which concealed troops and semipermanent supply installations, resistance stiffened. The newly arrived 394th *Assault Gun Brigade*, which had come forward to participate in the counterattack, was subordinated to the LXXXIV *Corps* to protect the Forêt de St. Sever, and the brigade's heavy artillery concentrations and antitank rockets further slowed the 9th Division attack.²⁵

In order to speed the movement of the 9th Division to the Sée River and beyond to Gathemo, the immediate di-

²³ VII Corps Notes for CofS, 4 Aug, VII Corps G-3 Jnl and File; Col. Gerden F. Johnson, *History of the Twelfth Infantry Regiment in World War II* (Boston, 1947), p. 168.

²⁴ VII Corps FO 7, 1 Aug; 9th Div FO 15, 2 Aug, and AAR, Aug.

²⁵ MS # B-725 (Gersdorff); FUSA G-2 Per Rpt 49, 29 Jul.

sition objective, General Eddy secured General Collins' approval for a wide flanking attack. He sent a regiment westward through Villedieu-les-Poëles, southward through Brécey, eastward through Chérencé-le-Roussel, and then northeastward to Gathemo to encircle the German troops in the St. Pois-St. Sever-Calvados sector. Contact with the two regiments attacking south would complete a two-pronged squeeze play ending at Gathemo.²⁶

Directed through the 4th and 1st Division sectors, on 5 August the 39th Infantry of the 9th Division passed through the 4th Division bridgehead held by tanks and infantry at Chérencé-le-Roussel and attacked toward the northeast. Although stiff resistance prevented progress, other contingents of the division discovered a soft spot. The 60th Infantry moved with surprising rapidity through the Forêt de St. Sever against occasional artillery and mortar fire. That afternoon, a battalion temporarily gained possession of the crossroads village of Champ-du-Boult, two miles northwest of Gathemo, though a counterattack by the 353d *Division* reserve supported by the 6th *Parachute Regiment* drove the battalion out.²⁷

Continuing the attack on 6 August, the 9th Division regained Champ-du-Boult in the north and increased the threat to Perriers-en-Beauficel in the south. With only three miles separating the two division hooks, General Collins anticipated quick consolidation. As he began to plan the movement of the 9th to the south to cover the eastward thrust

²⁶ VII Corps Ops Memo 57, 4 Aug, and Notes for CofS, 4 Aug.

²⁷ 9th Div and 39th Inf AAR's, Aug; MS # B-725 (Gersdorff).

of the XV Corps to le Mans, the Germans counterattacked.²⁸

During the first six days of August, General Collins had faced contrasting situations on his corps front. On his right, he had essentially the same opportunity for exploitation enjoyed by the Third Army's XV Corps, yet he had been bound to the First Army and its requirements and consequently was unable to capitalize on the fluid situation there. With the exception of the 1st Division, the VII Corps components had taken part in combat that resembled the earlier battle of the hedgerows. Stubborn resistance, skillful withdrawal, and effective delaying action in *bocage* terrain had resulted in a slow and hard advance. Whereas the 1st Division sustained less than 250 casualties between 2 and 7 August, the 3d Armored Division lost almost 300 men, the 4th Division 600, and the 9th Division nearly 850.²⁹ Although the figures hardly approached the intensity of losses in July, they indicated clearly a major difference in the character of the opposition met on different sectors of the front.

The Battle for Vire

Hard slugging characterized combat all along the remainder of the First Army front. On the immediate left of the VII Corps, the XIX Corps had been occupied for five days in smashing German attempts to re-form a defensive line from Tessy to the Cotentin west coast, but on 2 August, with Tessy finally captured, General Corlett began to drive

southeastward toward the town of Vire.³⁰ As the 30th Division settled down at Tessy for several days of rest, the 28th and 29th Divisions, each with an attached combat command of the 2d Armored Division, attacked abreast from the Percy-Tessy line in what was hoped would be pursuit of a defeated enemy.³¹

Difficult terrain and stubborn resistance transformed the hoped-for pursuit into a protracted fight. The action of the 28th Division, which was manifesting the usual characteristics of a unit newly committed to combat, complicated the picture. On the first day of attack the division sustained almost 750 casualties, and not until the attached CCB moved to the front to lead the advance did the troops begin to move with any assurance and competence. Two days later, on 4 August, the 28th captured St. Sever-Calvados, eight miles southeast of Percy. At the same time the 29th Division, with CCA attached, reached positions northwest of the town of Vire after hard fighting.³²

General Gerow's V Corps had also been moving toward Vire from the north. The corps objective was a line several miles north of Vire where the corps was to be pinched out by the converging advances of the adjacent forces. By 1 August the British on the left had already pinched out the 5th Division, and General Irwin prepared to join the Third Army. The two remaining divisions of the V Corps, the 35th and the 2d, crossed the Vire-Soulouevre River line

²⁸ FUSA FO 2, 28 Jul.

²⁹ Sgt. Harold B. Cordes of the 22d Infantry, which was still attached to the 2d Armored Division, was awarded the DSC for heroic action on 2 August.

³⁰ 28th and 29th Div AAR's Aug; [Ferriss], Notes.

²⁸ VII Corps Ops Memo 59, 7 Aug (confirming oral orders 6 Aug).

²⁹ FUSA Daily G-1 Rpts, Aug.

on 2 August and pushed south with the intent of "maintaining strong pressure against the enemy and insuring contact at all times."³³

The Germans were withdrawing behind strong rear-guard action and were using the terrain advantageously, but General Gerow still hoped to gain enough momentum to go beyond his designated limit of advance. He requested permission from General Hodges to capture the town of Vire if the prospect became feasible. The army commander at first agreed, but on second thought refused because he was unwilling to chance the confusion that might result from intermingling XIX and V Corps forces.³⁴

The 2d and 35th Divisions reached their objectives by 5 August, the former having sustained nearly 900 casualties in the process, the latter almost 600.³⁵ As General Baade prepared to take his 35th Division, which was no longer in contact with the enemy, out of the sector to join the Third Army, Maj. Gen. Walter M. Robertson's 2d Division established defensive positions north of the town of Vire.

The XIX Corps, according to General Bradley's post-COBRA instructions, was to have driven southeastward through Vire toward Tinchebray, thereby cutting across the V Corps front and pinching it

³³ FUSA FO 3, 1 Aug; V Corps FO 17, 1 Aug. Capt. William C. Miller of the 35th Division was awarded the DSC for heroic action on 2 August.

³⁴ *V Corps Operations in the ETO*, p. 158; Conf Notes, Gerow and Irwin, 31 Jul, 5th Div G-3 Jnl and File.

³⁵ FUSA Daily G-1 Rpts, Aug. Pfc. Joseph A. Elwell of the 2d Engineer Combat Battalion, who volunteered to remove mines blocking the advance, and Pfc. Lawrence Georgeatos of the 38th Infantry posthumously received the DSC.

out. General Hodges modified these plans when increasing emphasis was placed on maintaining unrelenting pressure on the enemy. Instead of allowing the V Corps to remain idle just north of Vire, Hodges designated Tinchebray, eight miles southeast of Vire, as the next V Corps objective. To replace the departing 35th Division, he at first gave Gerow the 30th Division but, when he sent the 30th to Mortain instead, he substituted the 29th for it. After Vire was captured, the 29th Division would pass to V Corps control. Since the new V Corps sector would be narrow, Gerow was to attack with the 2d and 29th Divisions in column to capture Tinchebray. The XIX Corps would continue southward from Vire toward Domfront and Mayenne to cover the northern flank of the XV Corps (which was driving eastward toward le Mans) and also to cut off and encircle the enemy forces in the St. Pois-Gathemo area.³⁶ But before these plans could be put into effect, the town of Vire had to be taken. The task fell to the 29th Division and its attachment, CCA of the 2d Armored Division.

Vire, an old fortified town of 8,000 inhabitants, is built on hills dominating the Norman *bocage* and is the center of several converging roads. The town overlooks the Vire River and a tributary, the Vaux de Vire. Long a religious and artistic center, it was by virtue of its location a military prize. The townspeople in 1944 came to regard their privations of that year as a double agony. The Allied aerial bombardment of 6 June, part of the attempt to hamper German troop movements at the time of the

³⁶ FUSA FO's 4 and 5, 4 and 5 Aug; *V Corps Operations in the ETO*, map on p. 162.

invasion, had nearly destroyed the town; the actual struggle for the town by the ground forces in August reduced the town to rubble. Late in July, as the sound of artillery came increasingly closer, the citizens were hardly reassured when German troops urged them not to be afraid. "We'll defend your town house by house," they promised.³⁷

The *LXXXIV Corps'* indefatigable kampfgruppe of the *353d Division*, supported by elements of the *363d Division*, and the *II Parachute Corps'* *3d Parachute Division* were responsible for the town. Roadblocks covered by antitank guns and excellent positions on dominating ground comprised the defenses.³⁸

The battle for Vire started on 5 August when 29th Division tanks and infantry drove down the Tessy-Vire highway. Any hope that the Germans would abandon Vire vanished quickly, for they gave immediate notice of their intentions by striking the spearhead of the U.S. attack, the 2d Armored Division's CCA, at Martilly, less than a mile from the center of the city. A tank company assembled nineteen tanks in two fields beside the highway in preparation for crossing the Vire at a stone bridge. No sooner were the tanks assembled along the hedgerow perimeters of the fields than enemy artillery knocked out ten tanks with a disastrous concentration of fire. Although the remaining tanks moved out at once in an attempt to cross the Martilly bridge, continuing fire from dominating ground knocked out four additional tanks and prevented the crossing. Reconnaissance parties searching

for alternate sites found the ground too soft for tanks to ford the stream.

Other tanks had better luck. They secured Hill 219, west of Vire, against slight opposition and gave the Americans terrain that was extremely favorable for offensive action against the town. Since the presence of CCA tankers and infantrymen on Hill 219 constituted a serious threat to the German defense, strong counterattacks were launched from Vire throughout the day. The American positions became so precarious that General Gerhardt that evening dispatched the 116th Infantry as reinforcement.

To reach Hill 219, the 116th Infantry moved in three battalion columns, the men of each advancing single file through the hedgerowed fields, the columns about a field apart. Isolated groups of Germans concealed in scattered farmhouses and foxholes and along the hedges were quickly eliminated. The regiment reached the crest of Hill 219 late on the night of 5 August. By the following morning it was evident that this was the best jump-off point for an assault against Vire.

By that time General Corlett had reached the conclusion that it would be unprofitable to continue to employ the 2d Armored Division's combat commands to spearhead the infantry division's attacks. The broken terrain and the lack of a good road net made the area basically unsuitable for armored operations. The corps commander felt that the tanks could add little to infantry capabilities, in fact they actually clogged the few available roads and impeded the infantry advance. Furthermore, during the five days between 1 and 6 August, the combat commands had sustained

³⁷ André Letondot, "La Double Agonie de Vire," in Herval, *Bataille de Normandie*, I, 288.

³⁸ MS # B-725 (Gersdorff); MS # B-346 (Blauensteiner).