

appeared in a cloud of dust on the roads to Brest. Since Signal personnel were unable to lay telephone cables fast enough and far enough, the division depended to a large extent on the high-powered SCR-399 long-distance radio, which proved unsatisfactory. As many as eight different transmitters working on the assigned corps frequency were often heard at the same time. With the corps radio communications net so jammed and signals so faint because of distance, the division had to wait for radio time. Often a code group had to be repeated six to ten times to insure accurate reception.<sup>42</sup>

A corps cable teletype team had been attached to the 6th Armored Division in the Cotentin, but it had been unable to keep up with the rapid advance and was replaced in Brittany by a radio teletype team using very high frequency beam antenna equipment. The new team was instructed to beam its equipment on a prominent hill near Avranches, where the corps expected to place a receiving station on 1 August. Because the enemy still was ensconced on the hill and because German planes were attacking U.S. troops and installations in the Avranches area, the corps Signal section set up its receiving station near Bréhal instead. Without knowledge of the change of location, the division radio teletype team beamed on the wrong place. Had the distance between sender and receiver been shorter, the correct location would have easily been found, but beyond fifty miles the equip-

ment was unreliable, and contact was not established for several days.<sup>43</sup>

With radio teletype nonoperational, with high-power radio erratic, and with wire and cable lacking, communications devolved upon messengers who traveled long distances by jeep. Sometimes a round trip between division and corps headquarters took the better part of a day. Messengers were excellent targets for bypassed enemy groups and individual snipers in the far-reaching no man's land between the corps and division command posts, and they had to have ingenuity, patience, and luck. An officer courier, Capt. Hans H. Marechal, who started from the VIII Corps command post for the 6th Armored Division headquarters about noon one day proceeded through Antrain and beyond Loudéac until French civilians warned him that several hundred Germans with a few tanks still held a town ahead. Detouring south to Pontivy, the captain met and joined a convoy of gasoline trucks going to the division. A destroyed bridge caused another change in route. At the town where the division command post had last been reported, Marechal learned from civilians that the division had moved on to another town. Eventually, he found a solitary military policeman who was awaiting the arrival of the division trains. The convoy halted, but Marechal continued alone in search of the division command post. Another reported pocket of enemy forced another detour, and then he was "off the map." Noticing tank tracks in the road, he followed them and reached the

<sup>42</sup> Ltr, Lt Col William J. Given to Gen Grow, 12 Jan 53, OCMH Files; 146th Armored Signal Company, *The Signal Circuit* (Luxembourg, 1945), p. 7.

<sup>43</sup> Interv with Col Claude E. Haswell, Third Army Sig Sec Executive Officer, 1st Lt Richard Stockton's Hosp Intervs, ML-2234.

armored division command post nine hours after he had departed the corps headquarters. Returning by the same route early the following day, Marechal discovered that Germans drifting across Brittany to find refuge in the port cities made the roads hazardous for single American vehicles. Fortunately, civilians warned him in time of hostile groups, and he regained the corps command post twenty-four hours after he had left. An enlisted man of the 6th Armored Division, who often carried messages to the corps though unable to read or write or follow a map, returned to the division on one occasion after a two-day trip—with a bullet in his back and two captured Germans on the hood of the jeep he was still driving.<sup>44</sup>

The hazardous journeys to supply information between corps and divisions were often futile, since situations changed so rapidly that the messages were frequently out of date by the time they were delivered.<sup>45</sup> The division artillery observation planes might have been used for liaison and thus have provided a faster means of communications but, in the case of the 6th Armored Division at least, most of the planes were out of action. Rough landing fields in Normandy and enemy fire had accounted for most of the casualties. The absence of landing strips in Brittany—because the fast-moving division lacked time to clear landing fields—kept the corps artillery observation planes grounded.<sup>46</sup>

Patton's Household Cavalry provided

an additional channel of communications. One armored car with a high-powered SCR-506 radio, as well as several armored jeeps, accompanied each armored division. The radio car possessed choice and workable frequencies, and the armored jeeps, often entrusted with situation reports, were able to shoot their way through small roadblocks. Even though the cavalrymen were burdened with their own radio traffic and could absorb only a small part of the division communications, they sometimes relayed division messages.

Because of all these difficulties, the interval between the sending of a message and the receipt of its acknowledgment from the addressee usually exceeded thirty-six hours.<sup>47</sup> Before the end of the first week in August, the 6th Armored Division was about 150 miles west of Avranches. It was so far away from the corps that Middleton advised Patton that he had practically no control and little knowledge of the division operation, and thus virtually denied responsibility for the division activities. "This headquarters" he wrote, "has made repeated attempts to establish radio contact with the 6th Armored Division without success. A special messenger was dispatched . . . but his time of arrival cannot be stated. This headquarters will continue efforts to establish radio contact. . . ." <sup>48</sup>

In the face of these difficulties, confusion and misunderstanding were inevitable. Having outrun communica-

<sup>44</sup> Capt Marechal's Notes, 6 Aug, VIII Corps G-3 Jnl; Ltr, Given to Grow, 12 Jan 53.

<sup>45</sup> VIII Corps AAR, Aug.

<sup>46</sup> Msg, Middleton to Grow, 1715, 4 Aug.

<sup>47</sup> 6th Armd Div Ltr to VIII Corps, Rpts Submitted 6-7 Aug, 8 Aug, and Telephonic Msg from VIII Corps Sig Officer, 0855, 6 Aug. Both in VIII Corps G-3 Jnl.

<sup>48</sup> Msg, Middleton to Patton, 1700, 5 Aug.

tions in the interest of exploitation, the division commanders found it difficult to understand why their messages to corps were apparently being ignored, why they received so little assistance and guidance. Needing to react quickly to fast-changing situations, they could hardly wait for orders, which might be out of date by the time they arrived. As General Wood, the 4th Armored Division commander, later recalled, "The situation at the time was . . . extremely fluid. I had to make decisions on my own responsibility, since there were no orders from higher authority. Of course, everything went 'according to plan,' but at that time no one in the higher circles had [yet] discovered just how . . . the plan [fitted] . . . the events. . . . We were moving on our own. We could not wait for directions or objectives to be passed down from higher authority."<sup>49</sup>

Supplies were secured on the basis of expediency. Because of the development of the main stream of the European campaign outside Brittany, the VIII Corps was semi-independent. A tactical headquarters, it had to assume certain administrative and logistical responsibilities. Permanent supply dumps were out of the question because the breakthrough had never stopped. "Within a couple of days [we] were passing out rations like Santa Claus on his sleigh, with both giver and receiver on the move. . . . The trucks were like a band of stage-coaches making a run through Indian country. We got used to keeping the wheels going, disregarding the snipers, and hoping we wouldn't

get lost or hit."<sup>50</sup> Supply depots remained north of Avranches during the early part of the month, and gasoline and ammunition convoys added to traffic complications in the Avranches bottleneck. Convoys had to have armed escorts because of hostile pockets along the lines of communication in Brittany. At first, 40-mm. antiaircraft batteries were used for escort duty. Later in the month the 54th Antiaircraft Brigade assumed the task of guarding the supply routes with the aid of members of the French Forces of the Interior (FFI).

The FFI in Brittany was a sizable force numbering about 20,000 armed members.<sup>51</sup> During July preparations had been made in London to activate a unified command to direct this large and dispersed but potentially strong underground force. General Koenig had designated Col. Albert M. Eon as the commander of all the FFI in Brittany and had taken him to visit General Montgomery's 21 Army Group headquarters in Normandy, where the army group chief of staff, Major-General Sir Francis de Guingand, had briefed both French officers on future operations. The French leaders learned that the

<sup>50</sup> Interv with William M. King, 44th Armd Inf Bn, 6th Armd Div, Hosp Intervs, II, ML-2235, GL-93 (104).

<sup>51</sup> TUSA AAR states that the FFI membership in Brittany numbered about 30,000, but the *Journal des Marches et Opérations du Commandement des F. F. I. en Bretagne* (4 juillet au 10 septembre 1944) (hereafter cited as *Journal des Marches*) gives the figure used above. The *Journal* was submitted as an after action report by the commander of the FFI in Brittany, Col. Albert M. Eon, and the manuscript is in the files of the Section Historique de l'Armée Française. Lieutenant Colonel Lugand, Maj. Jean Vial, and Capt. André Méric of the French Army historical section kindly made this source and others available to the author in the summer of 1953.

<sup>49</sup> Ltr, Wood to OCMH, 24 Mar 54, OCMH Files.

Americans planned to penetrate Brittany along two principal axes—Dinan—Brest, and Avranches—Rennes—Redon—and they hoped to be of assistance.

The Allies had planned to promote intensified FFI activities in Brittany only after trained guerrilla leaders, arms, ammunition, and supplies had been dropped into the area. This program was to have been completed about the time U.S. troops made their appearance on the peninsula, but American exploitation was so rapid that the FFI had to begin operating before the program could be fully realized.

General Bradley's 12th Army Group assumed command of the FFI in Brittany on 29 July and placed it under the control of the Third Army. Plans were made to parachute a small reconnaissance party into Brittany during the night of 2 August to establish a command post for Colonel Eon, but poor weather conditions forced cancellation of the drop. On 3 August the British Broadcasting Corporation radioed a coded message to the FFI in Brittany to begin general guerrilla activities short of open warfare. Because American troops had already sped beyond Dinan and Rennes by 4 August, General Koenig requested Colonel Eon to parachute into Brittany with his staff, take command of Resistance operations at once, and assume an initial mission of seizing and securing high ground north of Vannes in the Quiberon Bay area. Although some French officers, including Eon, had had no jump experience, the command group parachuted into Brittany during the night of 4 August. At the same time, 150 men were dropped in the Morlaix area to seize and preserve the railroad trestle bridges there. On

the following night, ten American gliders towed by British aircraft were landed between Vannes and Lorient to bring in armored jeeps, weapons, and ammunition to support local FFI troops who were ready to take the Vannes airfield. On 6 August the FFI command made contact with a U.S. armored patrol and learned that the Americans, with the assistance of local French Resistance groups, had already cleared a large part of the peninsula.<sup>52</sup>

The weather had turned hot and dry in August, and mechanized columns raised clouds of grit and dust as they drove over the sun-baked earth. Sun glasses became precious possessions, goggles a necessity. Overhead, the clear weather gave perfect visibility for Allied fighter-bombers.

As fluid as the situation was to become in Brittany, the immediate preliminary to it was quite the opposite. Getting troops out of Normandy and into Brittany was a difficult problem. In the coastal sector of the Cotentin there were only two main highways running southward, and debris, dead animals, and wrecked vehicles, as well as mines, obstructed traffic, while destroyed villages and damaged towns blocked it. Bulldozers had had to clear lanes through rubble in some places—particularly in Avranches—before normal military traffic could pass. Convergence of the two highways at Coutances and again at Avranches posed ad-

<sup>52</sup> Journal des Marches; 6th Armd Div Msg to VIII Corps G-2, 1410, 3 Aug; TUSA 11th Spec Force Detachment Ltr, Resistance Activities and Plans (Brittany), 4 Aug; TUSA Memo to VIII Corps, 5 Aug; Msg, Middleton to Grow, 1405, 5 Aug.

ditional difficulties. Engineers constructed a cutoff at Coutances to keep traffic moving along both routes and opened a subsidiary road from Avranches to Pontaubault. Pontaubault was the most critical traffic point of all, for through that village had to be funneled all the vehicles moving into Brittany. Establishing traffic priorities and assuring compliance with them required perseverance and patience as well as attention to detail. Task Force A was given three hours to move its 3,500 men through the Avranches-Pontaubault bottleneck; it was to arrive in Avranches "precisely at 0200, 3 August, not before" and was to clear Pontaubault exactly by 0500. "Still spending most of my time as a traffic cop," wrote a division commander. It was not unusual to see high ranking officers acting as military policemen at critical traffic points, but the payoff was the feat of getting two armored divisions into Brittany in less than forty-eight hours.<sup>53</sup>

Several bridges over the *Seé* and the *Sélune* Rivers, the road approaches to these crossing sites, and the dams nearby were of extreme importance. During the first few days of August the German Air Force appeared in relative strength over the Cotentin in a belated effort to block by bombardment the American entrance into Brittany. Antiaircraft

protection, a matter of small importance during July, became a vital adjunct of the breakout and exploitation. Gun crews, enthusiastic that they had an opportunity at last to participate in action against the enemy, shot down more than a score of planes around Avranches during the first week of August.

Though operations in Brittany later diminished in importance, the prospect of success at the beginning of August led to high expectations. Normandy had been slow and painful; Brittany appeared to be fast and exhilarating. Beyond the initial physical obstructions at Avranches, one fact shone brightly: the Germans had little with which to oppose the exploitation of the breakout into Brittany.<sup>54</sup> Confusion of purpose and method on the American side, which was to mar the breakout, stemmed from the abruptness of the change from static to mobile warfare and from the contrasting personalities of the leaders involved. With fluidity the overriding condition, the Americans broke out of the Cotentin into the relative freedom of a war of movement in Brittany, a difference that seemed to be symbolized by the man of the hour, General Patton.

<sup>53</sup> Msg, Middleton to Earnest, 2 Aug; Comments, Gen Grow to author 27 Apr 54, OCMH Files.

<sup>54</sup> App. A to PS SHAEF (44) 29 (First Draft), Enemy Dispositions and Possible Reaction (in Brittany), SHAEF G-3 File 24533/Opns, Future Opns; TUSA AAR, I, 16; Notes, 1 Aug, 83d Div G-2, G-3 Jnl and File.

## CHAPTER XIX

# Rennes, Lorient, and Nantes

On the afternoon of 1 August, General Wood's 4th Armored Division thrust southwestward from Pontaubault toward Rennes, the capital of Brittany. On the eastern edge of the province, at the base of the peninsula, and about midway between the north and south shores, Rennes is the commercial center that links Brittany to the interior of France. A city of over 80,000 inhabitants, Rennes is the hub of an extensive road network. No less than ten main highways converge there. Sixty miles southwest of Rennes are Vannes and Quiberon. Sixty miles south by southwest is St. Nazaire. Sixty miles due south is Nantes. To the southeast are Châteaubriant and Angers, towns on the roads to Orléans, Chartres, and even Paris. (*Map VIII*)

For the 4th Armored Division, Rennes was about the halfway point between Avranches and Quiberon. Whether Rennes was to be a stopover, as General Middleton, the VIII Corps commander, expected, or whether the 4th Armored Division was to continue to the southwest in a rapid drive to Quiberon, as General Patton anticipated, was not quite clear. The corps commander had instructed General Wood only to take Rennes, but when the Third Army took control, Patton ordered Wood to go beyond Rennes to Quiberon in order to seal off the entire Brittany peninsula.

With the fluid situation and precarious communication emphasizing the need for initiative on the division level, General Wood felt that he had wide latitude in interpreting and executing his assignment.<sup>1</sup>

From Pontaubault the 4th Armored Division's CCA raced forty miles southwest on the afternoon of 1 August, reaching the northern outskirts of Rennes by early evening. There the advance guard struck surprisingly strong opposition. An assault by a company of armored infantry supported by twenty-five Sherman tanks failed to penetrate the enemy positions, and the leading units of CCA withdrew several miles under the cover of smoke to organize a stronger attack.<sup>2</sup>

Two Luftwaffe companies manning 88-mm. antiaircraft guns in defense of the Rennes airport had stopped CCA. In support of the antiaircraft gunners were perhaps a hundred infantrymen with eight machine guns and three anti-tank guns. Elsewhere in the city were a few troops from a naval torpedo and spare parts depot and a company of infantry. Although the city had not been

<sup>1</sup> VIII Corps Opns Instrs, 31 Jul (fragmentary verbal orders), and FO 9, 1600, 1 Aug; Ltr, Wood to OCMH, 24 Mar 54, OCMH Files. Unless otherwise indicated, all messages in this chapter are from the VIII Corps G-3 Journal and File.

<sup>2</sup> 4th Armd Div AAR, Aug; Koyen, *Fourth Armored Division*, p. 21.

fortified as a strongpoint, the Germans recognized its value as a communications center and sought to hold it. At the same time that Fahrmbacher had sent a *kampfgruppe* under Bacherer toward Pontaubault to stop the American breakout, he dispatched a small force of the *91st Division* to Rennes. Under the command of a lieutenant colonel, the force reached the city just before the Americans appeared, but too late to participate in the action at the airport. Expecting a further American effort against the city, the *91st Division* troops prepared to resist. As they were doing so, two German Army replacement battalions numbering about 1,900 men reached Rennes from le Mans. Issued machine guns and *panzerfausts*, the replacement troops hastily took to the field in the northern outskirts of the city.

The German reinforcements had arrived just in time. During the evening of 1 August about thirty P-47 Thunderbolts attacked the Rennes defenses and American artillery shelled the flak positions in preparation for a full-scale assault by the combat command. In a two-hour fight, terminating shortly before midnight, the Germans held. CCA withdrew.

The defenders, who knocked out eleven American tanks and took twenty prisoners, were reinforced later that night when Koenig, the *91st Division* commander, arrived in the city with two assault guns. Taking command of the Rennes garrison, Koenig prepared for an all-out defense.<sup>3</sup>

Realizing on the morning of 2 August

that the defenses of Rennes were stronger than anticipated, General Wood concluded that the 4th Armored Division was not going to be able to roll through the city as it had through Avranches. On the contrary, CCA troops on high ground about five miles north of Rennes were being shelled by mortars and artillery in such volume that they expected a counterattack. With the division strung out along the fifty-mile stretch between Avranches and Rennes and short of gasoline, ammunition, and rations, Wood decided that he needed additional supplies and a seasoned infantry regimental combat team to help him take Rennes. "Want them now," he radioed Middleton, "repeat now."<sup>4</sup>

General Wood also wanted two more air support parties. He had not received any air support until late afternoon of 1 August, and he requested "constant air cover," specifically "dawn to dusk fighter bomber support." General Middleton promised to do his best to supply 4th Armored Division needs and ordered Wood to secure all roads leading into Rennes after he captured the city. Wood said he would do so as soon as supplies, services, and reinforcements arrived. "These urgently needed now—repeat now. Must have infantry combat team if town is to be taken."<sup>5</sup>

The logical support was Maj. Gen. Donald A. Stroh's 8th Division, which had followed the 4th Armored Division in the Cotentin. Ordered to be ready to reinforce the armor when necessary and relieve it from the task of eliminating major strongpoints and occupying

<sup>4</sup> Msg, Wood to Middleton, 0955, 2 Aug.

<sup>3</sup> MS # B-731 (Fahrmbacher); Zimmerman Telecon, 1925, 1 Aug, OB WEST KTB, Anlage 1010.

<sup>5</sup> Msgs, Wood to Middleton, 1525, 1 Aug, and 1100 and 1115, 2 Aug; Msgs, Middleton to Wood, 2 and 3 Aug; VIII Corps G-3 Jnl, 1-3 Aug.

critical terrain, the 8th Division was to act as a clearing force in order to prevent the 4th Armored Division from getting unnecessarily involved in action that would neutralize its mobility and striking power. On 2 August General Middleton reattached to the armored division the 13th Infantry, which had been attached to General Wood's command in Avranches but which had since reverted to parental control. To move the infantry, the corps commander also made available four Quartermaster truck companies he had secured from Third Army. Early that evening the regiment began advancing toward Rennes.<sup>6</sup>

Meanwhile, after the 6th Armored Division passed through Avranches and Pontaubault for its drive toward Brest, the remainder of the 4th Armored Division had moved south of Pontaubault on 2 August and assembled north of Rennes. There the whole division awaited supplies, services, and reinforcement. To keep the Germans off balance, Wood launched a series of small infantry attacks during the day.

Learning on the evening of 2 August that the 13th Infantry was en route to Rennes, General Wood conceived a spectacular idea. It already seemed evident to him that the main action in western Europe would take place not in Brittany but in central France. Few enemy forces remained in Brittany, so why proceed westward to the Atlantic ocean and a dead end? Securing Rennes was important. Blocking the base of the Brittany peninsula south of Rennes was important too. If these missions could be combined with a

maneuver that would place the 4th Armored Division in position to drive eastward rather than westward, the division would be able to make a more vital contribution to victory. Instead of being relegated to a subsidiary role in Brittany, which might become the backwash of the war, the division would join the main Allied force for the kill. The proper direction, General Wood believed, was eastward to Chartres.<sup>7</sup>

How best to do this was the question.

Since part of the 8th Division was coming forward from Avranches to assault Rennes, General Wood decided the 4th Armored Division should bypass the city. The armor could not bypass Rennes on the east without overstepping the corps boundary, so Wood ordered it to make a wide arc around the western edge of the city, an arc wide enough to avoid the Rennes defenses. The division would arrive south of Rennes with the heads of its columns facing eastward. Châteaubriant, thirty miles southeast of Rennes, would be the next logical objective, and forty miles east of Châteaubriant the city of Angers on the Loire River would come within armored range.

It seemed to General Wood that this maneuver still would accomplish the important parts of his mission. The initial drive would encircle Rennes and isolate it on three sides. At the end of the movement, the division would be half way between Rennes and Nantes and thus constitute a blocking force along the base of the Brittany peninsula. If the maneuver were carried through to its logical conclusion and the 4th Armored Division went to Angers, the

<sup>6</sup> 8th Div AAR, 8 Jul-4 Aug, and Msg, 2200, 2 Aug; VIII Corps Msg to Officer in Charge of Truck Co's Furnished by Third Army, 2 Aug.

<sup>7</sup> Ltr, Wood to OCMH, 24 Mar 54.



Brittany peninsula would be blocked at its base, not along a line from Rennes southwestward to Quiberon Bay but along a line from Rennes southeastward to Angers. This seemed to be only a slight modification of current plans even though the scheme ignored Quiberon Bay.

General Wood sent General Middleton his proposal on the morning of 3 August in the form of a hastily sketched overlay showing the planned routes of advance and a message stating that Wood "strongly" recommended that the 4th Armored Division be permitted to "push on to Angers." Anticipating no objections to his plan, Wood ordered the plan executed.<sup>8</sup>

General Wood's proposal, sent by messenger to General Middleton, left the division command post just before the arrival of a routine field order that VIII Corps had issued the previous evening. The corps order reiterated General Wood's mission clearly. The 4th Armored Division was to capture Rennes and establish positions from Rennes southwestward to Quiberon in order to block the movement of hostile forces into or out of Brittany. Receipt of the corps order left General Wood no alternative but to rescind his own. In a new division order he acknowledged his mission as being exactly that stated by corps. Apparently as an afterthought, he alerted the division to prepare for an advance on Châteaubriant, southeast of Rennes.<sup>9</sup> The afterthought was in reality the significant point, for the division had

already embarked on the wide sweep westward around Rennes.

Early on the morning of 3 August, two columns had started to outflank Rennes. CCA moved along an inner arc between fifteen and thirty miles from the center of the city. CCB swept along an outer arc. By late afternoon the heads of the columns had arrived at Bain-de-Bretagne and Derval, thirty and forty miles south of Rennes, respectively. The armor had covered somewhere between sixty and a hundred miles against almost no opposition. Tankers had dashed through small roadblocks and dispersed fragmentary enemy units. Together, the combat commands had cut seven of the ten main roads centering on Rennes. Half way between Rennes and Nantes, the columns represented a rather effective blocking force at the base of the Brittany peninsula.<sup>10</sup>

Even before Wood's maneuver became a *fait accompli*, Middleton accepted it, perhaps on the basis that the encirclement would cut the roads leading out of Rennes. He acknowledged the maneuver by reporting it and thereby implying approval. But the implicit approval went only so far as the first part of Wood's plan. That afternoon, Middleton instructed Wood to "Secure Rennes before you continue"—presumably before continuing toward the east.<sup>11</sup>

Meanwhile, Wood was reporting his progress during the afternoon of 3 August with unabating optimism. When he expected to reach Bain-de-Bretagne

<sup>8</sup> 4th Armd Div Plan of Attack and Routes of Advance, 3 Aug, with penciled note, and FO 5, 3 Aug; Ltr, Wood to OCMH, 24 Mar 54.

<sup>9</sup> VIII Corps FO 10, 2 Aug; 4th Armd Div FO 6, 0730, 3 Aug.

<sup>10</sup> The Armored School, *Armor in the Exploitation*, p. 26.

<sup>11</sup> VIII Corps Msg, 1000, 3 Aug; Msg, Col John P. Evans to Gen Wood, 1430, 3 Aug.

and Derval in a matter of hours, he notified Middleton that he was planning to push one column to Châteaubriant. Three hours later he reported with some exaggeration that Rennes was entirely surrounded, that the city was apparently in the process of being demolished by the Germans, and that his columns were ready to move on Châteaubriant that night. Requesting orders, he recommended Angers as his next objective. Half an hour later, he informed Middleton that he was starting to move toward Châteaubriant and might even take Angers. Suddenly, however, he acknowledged receipt of "a new mission: . . . blocking enemy retreat from Rennes."<sup>12</sup>

Whether receipt of Middleton's instruction to secure Rennes prompted Wood's sudden acknowledgment or not, the fact was that Wood needed Rennes before he could proceed eastward—not only to eliminate a threat to his potential left rear but also to open a supply route for his division. He therefore halted his columns and directed them to turn northeastward to block the escape routes southeast of Rennes while the attached 13th Infantry attacked the city from the north. Pushing a dozen miles or so east and northeast of Bain-de-Bretagne and Derval, the heads of the combat commands on 4 August cut the main roads southeast of Rennes and captured and destroyed some of the German units squeezed out of the city by pressure from the north.<sup>13</sup>

Hurrying toward Rennes during the night of 2 August, the 13th Infantry

could not be in position to assault the city from the north the next day. The regimental commander therefore requested a postponement until the morning of 4 August so that he could plan and execute a co-ordinated attack together with armored elements still north of Rennes. Impatient to capture Rennes, General Wood insisted that the infantry attack on the afternoon of 3 August. In compliance, the leading infantry battalion launched the attack from route column march formation. In the face of small arms, automatic weapons, and antiaircraft fire, the battalion forced an entrance into the northeastern outskirts of Rennes.<sup>14</sup>

Their defensive positions penetrated, their casualties at 60 dead and 130 wounded, and the city almost encircled by U.S. armored units, the Germans prepared to depart Rennes. Hausser, the *Seventh Army* commander, gave permission at 2300 for withdrawal during the night. After burning supplies and installations, the garrison of about 2,000 Germans left at 0300, 4 August. In two march groups, both with motorized and foot troops, they moved along small roads and cross-country, reaching St. Nazaire five days later. They encountered practically no Americans because American troops were racing along the main highways.<sup>15</sup>

The 13th Infantry marched into Rennes on the morning of 4 August and accepted the kisses and wines of the liberated inhabitants. On the heels of the regiment came the remainder of the 8th Division, which earlier had expected to follow the 6th Armored Division to

<sup>12</sup> Msgs, Wood to Middleton, 1315, 1555, 1630, 1821, 3 Aug.

<sup>13</sup> The Armored School, *Armor in the Exploitation*, pp. 26-27.

<sup>14</sup> 13th Inf AAR, Aug.

<sup>15</sup> MS # B-731 (Fahrmbacher).