

The main weight of the attack was to be developed by 8 and 30 Corps on a narrow front. 30 Corps was to wheel South-West, initially to the line Villers Bocage—Aunay-sur-Odon, while 8 Corps, in a wider sweep on its right, swung down to Bénv Bocage and on the Vire—Tinchebray—Condé triangle.

The attack started on 30 Corps front at 0600 hours 30th July.

The initial attack was supported by heavy and medium bombers which carried out their attacks in spite of low cloud and bad weather.

Progress on the 8 Corps flank proved easier than on 30 Corps front. By 31st July 8 Corps had secured crossings over the River Soulevre and 30 Corps had cleared Cahagnes. Heavy fighting continued though progress was slow in both 8 and 30 Corps owing to enemy counter attacks and the great difficulty of the country. During the first days of August 2 Canadian Corps mounted three attacks, east of the Orne as part of the general programme of maintaining pressure in that area.

By 6th August the area Laval-Mayenne-Domfront had been reached by the Americans. On the following day First Canadian Army, which had now extended its front to include the Caen sector, was to begin a series of major attacks astride the Caen-Falaise road, which had so long been the fundamental aim of our policy on the Eastern flank.

I was still not clear what the enemy intended to do. I did not know if the enemy would stand and be defeated between the Seine and the Loire, or whether he would endeavour to withdraw his forces behind the Seine. There was no evidence to show on what line he was intending to reform his front; it was evident from the British and Canadian troops in close contact with the Germans east, south-east and south of Caen, that he was definitely holding his ground in this sector; he was evidently trying to pivot on the Caen area.

On 6th August I issued orders for the advance to the Seine.

I instructed First Canadian Army to make every effort to reach Falaise itself in the forthcoming attack; in the subsequent advance to the Seine the main Canadian axis was to be the road Lisieux-Rouen. On its right I intended Second British Army to advance with its right directed on Argentan and Laigle, whence it was to reach the Seine below Nantes. Twelfth United States Army Group was to approach the Seine on a wide front with its main weight on the right flank, which was to swing up towards Paris.

Between 7th and 11th August it became clear that the enemy had decided to fight the battle of France on our side of the Seine. On the 7th a major counter attack, employing up to six armoured divisions, was launched on Hitler's orders against the American forces in the area of Mortain. The brunt of it fell on 30 United States Infantry Division which held the onslaught sufficiently long to enable two American divisions who were moving south between Avranches and Mortain to be switched to the danger area. The counter attack was designed to cut off the forces operating south of Avranches by a drive to the sea. In the face of this counter-attack the Americans, assisted by the full weight of the tactical air forces, stood firm.

I ordered the right flank of the Twelfth U.S. Army Group to swing North towards Argentan, and intensified the British and Canadian thrusts southwards to the capture of Falaise.

First Canadian Army was ready to launch its thrust southwards in the direction of Falaise on the night of 7th August. The object was to break the enemy defences astride the Caen-Falaise road, and to exploit as far as Falaise.

The attack was to take place under cover of darkness after a preliminary action by heavy bombers; the infantry was to be transported through the enemy's zone of defensive fire and forward defended localities in heavy armoured carriers. At first light on 8 August the infantry debussed in their correct areas after a four miles drive within the enemy lines, and proceeded to deal with their immediate objective. The first phase of the operation had been successful.

While VII United States Corps and 8 British Corps were held up in their respective sectors, the right wing of Twelfth United States Army Group proceeded with its planned operations. On 7th August XV Corps continued to make progress and on the following day entered Le Mans.

In Brittany, Third United States Army units were engaged in heavy fighting at the approaches to St. Malo, Brest and Lorient.

My plan was to make a wide enveloping movement from the southern American flank up to the Seine about Paris, and at the same time to drive the centre and northern sectors of the Allied line straight for the river. In view of the Mortain counter attack, I decided to attempt concurrently a shorter envelopment with the object of bottling up the bulk of the German forces deployed between Falaise and Mortain. It was obvious that if it was possible to bring off both these movements the enemy in Normandy would be virtually annihilated.

On 8th August I ordered Twelfth United States Army Group to swing its right flank due north on Alençon at full strength and with all speed. At the same time I urged all possible speed on First Canadian and Second British Armies in the movements which were converging on Falaise.

By 12th August, on Second Army Front heavy fighting was in progress on the high ground three miles south-east of Vire, and at the same time leading troops were only a few miles short of Condé. East of the River Orne the bridgehead was extended to the south-east, and also to the north-east to link up with elements of 2 Canadian Division who had crossed the River Laize.

After four days' fighting, on 12th August reconnaissance reports clearly showed a general trend of enemy movement to the east from the Mortain area through the corridor between Falaise and Argentan and on towards the Seine ferries.

The Allied Air Forces were pounding the enemy in the pocket but the problem of completing the encirclement was no easy one; the Germans realised that their existence depended on holding open the corridor, and bitter fighting ensued as a result of our attempts to frustrate them. On the north side of the corridor it must be recalled that the enemy had long been in possession of the vital ground north of