

2230 hours 7th July, while the ground attack was to commence at 0420 hours on the following morning.

By nightfall, 8th July, 3 Canadian Division had secured Franqueville, while tanks and armoured cars closed in on the western outskirts of Caen. In the centre 59 Division cleared St. Contest and La Bijude, while 3 Division got into the north-east corner of Caen and directed 33 Armoured Brigade to the bridges.

On the morning of 9th July, 3 Division reached the dock area and met troops from 3 Canadian Division who had entered the town from the west. The bridges over the river in the city were either destroyed or completely blocked by rubble, and the enemy remained in occupation on the suburb of Faubourg-de-Vaucelles on the east bank.

My aim remained to launch the break-out operation on the Western flank as soon as possible, and meanwhile to hold the main enemy forces on my Eastern flank.

During the period 10th-18th July, Second Army delivered a series of thrusts, with the primary object to make progress Southwards towards Thury Harcourt: all operations were related to this task and to the maintenance of pressure on as broad a front as possible.

Meanwhile First United States Army continued its advance Southwards; by steady pressure and hard fighting it gradually overcame the difficulties of terrain and the increased enemy opposition.

On the right VIII Corps made good progress, and by 14th July had reached the general line of the north bank of the River Ay, with patrols west of Lessay.

In the centre sector VII Corps made ground west of the River Taute, and XIX Corps pushed on between the Taute and the Vire. On 16th July XIX Corps mounted a strong attack with two divisions against St. Lô and by the 19th July the town was captured. On the extreme left V Corps improved its positions in conjunction with the XIX Corps operation towards St. Lô.

Thus by 18th July First United States Army was in possession of St. Lô, and of the ground west of the River Vire which was required for mounting the major break-out assault operation to the south.

While 12 and 30 Corps operations were in progress west of the River Orne, preparations for a major thrust east of the river were completed with all possible speed. 2 Canadian, 8 and 1 Corps were employed in this operation.

As a result of these operations the situation on the eastern flank was now greatly improved, and the German armour had been drawn east of the Orne again and heavy losses caused to the enemy.

My orders on 21st July were for First Canadian Army and Second British Army to develop operations in order to secure the line along the River Dives from the sea to Bures, thence along the Muance to St. Sylvain, and on through Cauvicourt, Gouvix and Évreux to Noyers and Caumont.

Headquarters First Canadian Army (General Crerar) was to take the field on 23rd July, when it would assume responsibility for the extreme left flank sector, taking 1 Corps under command. 2 Canadian Corps was to remain under Second Army for the moment. On 24th July, Second Army was to take over the left

divisional sector of First United States Army, thus releasing American troops for operations elsewhere.

The Break-out.

On 25th July the weather conditions improved and the break-out operations began.

First United States Army plan was to deliver a break-in assault against the enemy defensive positions with VII United States Corps employing three infantry divisions. The American attack started in the sector between Périers and St. Lô. The Eighth U.S. Air Force was employed in the tactical role and dropped a carpet of bombs immediately in front of the leading troops, as a preliminary to their advance. Twenty-four hours after the VII Corps assault, VIII Corps in the coastal sector was to advance South. XIX United States Corps was also to launch attacks in the St. Lô sector, beginning simultaneously with VIII United States Corps.

On 27th July the decisive actions of the operation took place. The enemy began to withdraw along the entire front, and Lessay and Périers were occupied. In the central sector, mobile columns were sent within two miles of Coutances. On XIX Corps front the enemy was cleared out of the loop in the River Vire immediately South of St. Lô.

On the eastern flank, an attack by 2 Canadian Corps southwards along the Falaise road started at 0330 hours on 25th July. Steady progress was made but as the advance continued enemy opposition hardened and it was necessary to discontinue our thrust during the night 25/26th July.

While Second British Army was switching its main weight to the Caumont sector, the progress of the break-out operation proceeded apace. On 28th July, 4 and 6 U.S. Armoured Divisions passed through the infantry on the western sector and thrust South towards Coutances. The town was captured in the afternoon and firm contact was established there between VIII and VII Corps. To the South-East, troops of VII and XIX Corps had got to within five miles of the main Avranches—Caen road. All reports indicated that West of the River Vire to the coast the enemy was completely disorganised. Avranches was taken on 31st July.

VIII U.S. Corps, under command of Headquarters Third U.S. Army (General Patton), was then directed into the Brittany Peninsula. With the entry into the field of the Third U.S. Army, Headquarters Twelfth U.S. Army Group (General Omar Bradley) assumed command of both American armies. The Twelfth U.S. Army Group remained under my operational control.

The enemy was trying to recover his balance as the powerful American attack pushed back his left flank and began to swing South-East and East. He tried to stabilise a front on "hinges" at Caumont, on the Orne, and on the high ground between Caen and Falaise. One by one the hinges, or "key rivets," were successively knocked out by the British armies working from West to East as the attack of the American armies on the West flank gathered momentum.

Second Army regrouped with creditable speed, and it was found possible to commence the thrust southwards from the Caumont area on 30th July.