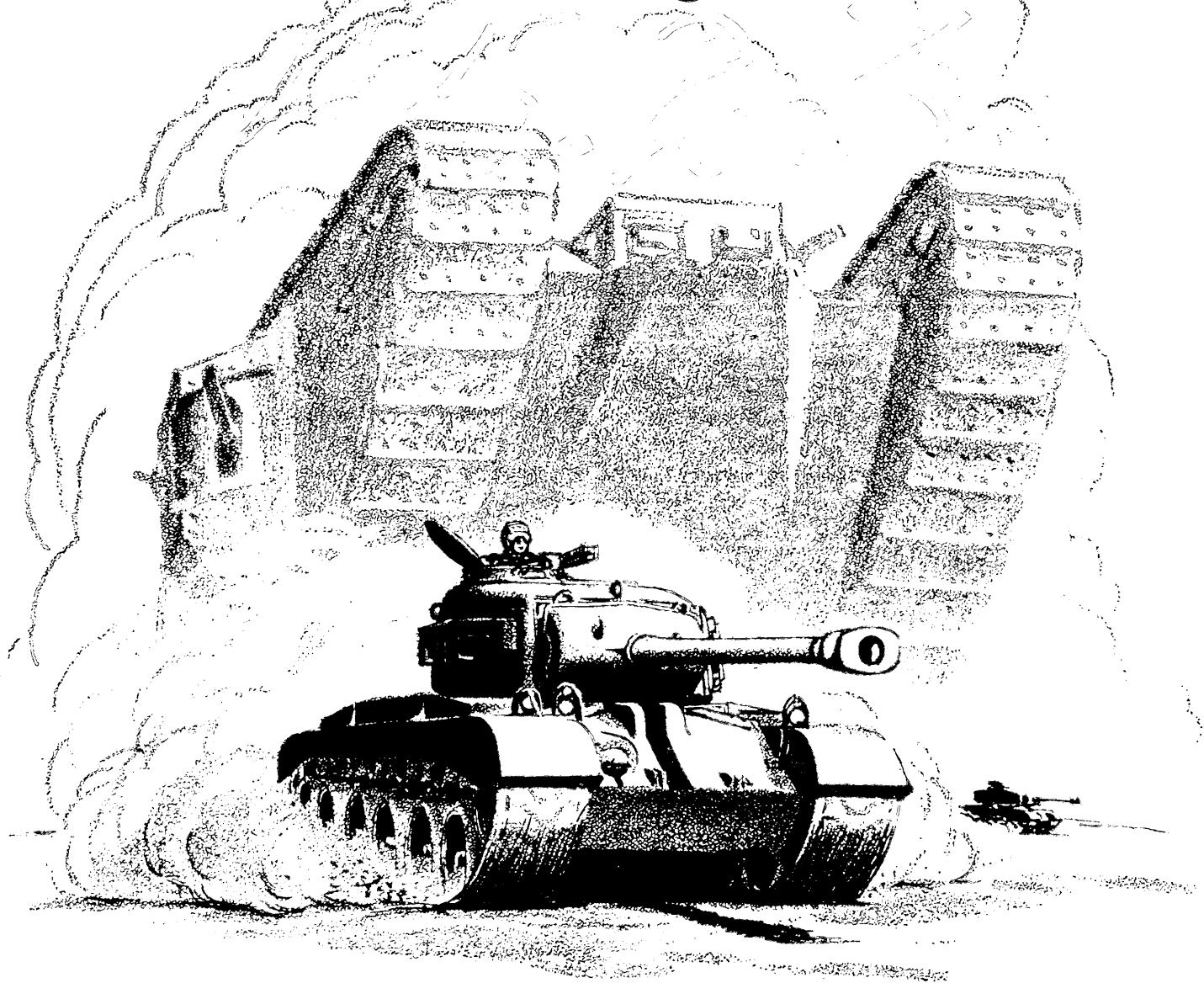


45.2-3

# Employment of 2d Armd Div in **OPERATION COBRA**

**25 Jul-1 Aug 44**



**A RESEARCH REPORT**

Prepared at  
**THE ARMORED SCHOOL**

Fort Knox Kentucky

1949 - 1950

EMPLOYMENT OF 2d ARMORED DIVISION IN

OPERATION COBRA 25 JULY-1 AUG 44

A RESEARCH REPORT PREPARED

BY

COMMITTEE 3, OFFICERS' ADVANCED COURSE

THE ARMORED SCHOOL

1949 - 1950

LIEUTENANT COLONEL GLENN T. PILLSBURY

MAJOR PETER T. RUSSELL

MAJOR JOHN P. ARMTZ

MAJOR WORTH M. CURTISS

MAJOR ROY E. DANIEL, JR

MAJOR ROBERT J. BIRD

CAPTAIN EARL L. HARPER

CAPTAIN JACK L. TREADWELL

CAPTAIN JOHN K. BRIER

45.2-3

FORT KNOX, KENTUCKY

MAY 1950

...Although the process had taken somewhat longer than we had anticipated, we had undeniably won the first and second rounds. In the first round we had gained our footing in France; in the second we had retained the initiative while expanding and consolidating our lodgement area and building up our strength in men and materials in readiness for the decisive blow to follow...

...By the third week in July, our forces were in position to launch the all out attack, which, was to break through and destroy the enemy divisions... By throwing all our weight into an offensive at this stage, I felt confident that we should not only achieve our objective but that, in the long run, the cost of our victory would be less... He [the enemy] had no major reserves immediately available, and we did not fear any serious counter-offensive.

Dwight D. Eisenhower  
Supreme Commander,  
Allied Expeditionary Force  
13 July 1945

## PREFACE

The purpose of this report is to study and to record armor's role in Operation Cobra with particular attention to the lessons and conclusions that may be drawn.

The period covered by this report is restricted to 25 July 44 - 1 August 44. The small quantity of documents that are readily available to the committee and the time allotted for this research necessarily prohibits the study of all armored units participating in Operation Cobra, chief of which were the 2d, 3d, 4th and 6th Armored Divisions. Therefore, the 2d Armored Division was selected for detailed study. The reasons for this selection are the type of missions assigned the division, the problems of security of supporting troops, and the problems of command and communications that confronted the Division. Note that the 2d Armored Division was still organized as a heavy division during Operation Cobra.

The Committee is indebted to Lieutenant Colonel F. M. Muller, Lieutenant Colonel W. R. Ring Jr, Lieutenant Colonel H. A. Schendel Jr, Major J. F. Smith, Captain D. E. Eastlake, Captain W. S. Parkins, and Lieutenant J. H. Cleveland for their assistance in furnishing information and background material for this report which was not obtainable from other sources.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
1 INTRODUCTION . . . . .	1
2 PREPARATIONS . . . . .	7
3 CONDUCT OF CCA ATTACK . . . . .	15
4 COMBAT COMMAND B. . . . .	47
5 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION. . . . .	67

APPRENDICES

I. Enemy Situation. . . . .	71
II. Terrain Study . . . . .	77
III. Operations Overlay. . . . .	79
IV. Logistics . . . . .	80
V. Casualties in Operation COBRA . . . . .	85

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

This research report on Operation Cobra is limited to the period 25 July 44 - 1 August 44 and specifically to the action of the 2d Armored Division. Necessary Army and Corps missions are included in order that the reader may fully understand and evaluate the action of the 2d Armored Division.

Although Cobra was of short duration, it was none the less significant because its successful execution set the stage and opened the gate for the battle of Northern France. This operation should be of special significance to Armored officers because it was the first typical Armored mission in the ETO.

The 2d Armored Division was selected for detailed study, for two reasons: first, because of the principles employed in the solution of the problems that confronted the Division; second because Combat Command B made the major stroke of the Corps operation.

To better understand the actions of the 2d Armored Division it is necessary to review the situation at the beginning of Operation Cobra.

By the 18th of July 1944, the NORMANDY beachhead had been extended to a line running from CAEN on the northeast thru CAUMONT and ST LO to LESSAY on the west. The conditions which enabled the Allies to reach this line and which set the stage for a breakthrough are described by General Eisenhower as follows:

"continuing failure by the enemy to form an armored reserve constitutes the outstanding feature of the campaign during June and July: to it we owed the successful establishment of our lodgment area..."

continued Allied jabs compelled the enemy to maintain his expensive policy of frantically "plugging" the holes to avert breakthrough".

German defenses were weakest at the western extremity of the line ST LO-LESSAY. On 18 July, ST LO fell to the 29th Division, the 9th and 30th Infantry Divisions west of ST LO, had reached the high ground across the VIRE river. Conditions were now ripe for a breakthrough to the south. This breakthrough was necessary to open up the much needed ports in the BRITTANY peninsula, create an open flank, and, concurrently, to isolate and destroy the enemy forces between ST LO and the coast.<sup>1</sup> The First United States Army plan, Operation Cobra, was designed to exploit this situation.

Cobra was a plan to pierce the enemy line with great power on a narrow front.<sup>2</sup> To accomplish this, the First United States Army was to attack south along its entire front and effect a breakthrough. This attack envisioned three phases: (1) Air and artillery bombardment and penetration; (2) Exploitation of the breakthrough; (3) Consolidation. The plan of the First Army attack was that, following a heavy air bombardment of the enemy positions, the advance was to be made on a three divisional front west of ST LO, with the general line MARIGNY-ST GILLES as the primary objective.

The Army scheme of maneuver was to have four corps attack abreast with the VII Corps making the main effort. Corps were arranged from left to right V, XIX, VII, and VIII. V Corps and XIX Corps were to attack in their zones to pin down enemy reserves east of the VIRE River. VII Corps was to attack and make a quick breakthrough between MARIGNY and ST GILLES, and seize and hold the line COUTANCES, MARIGNY so as to cut off enemy



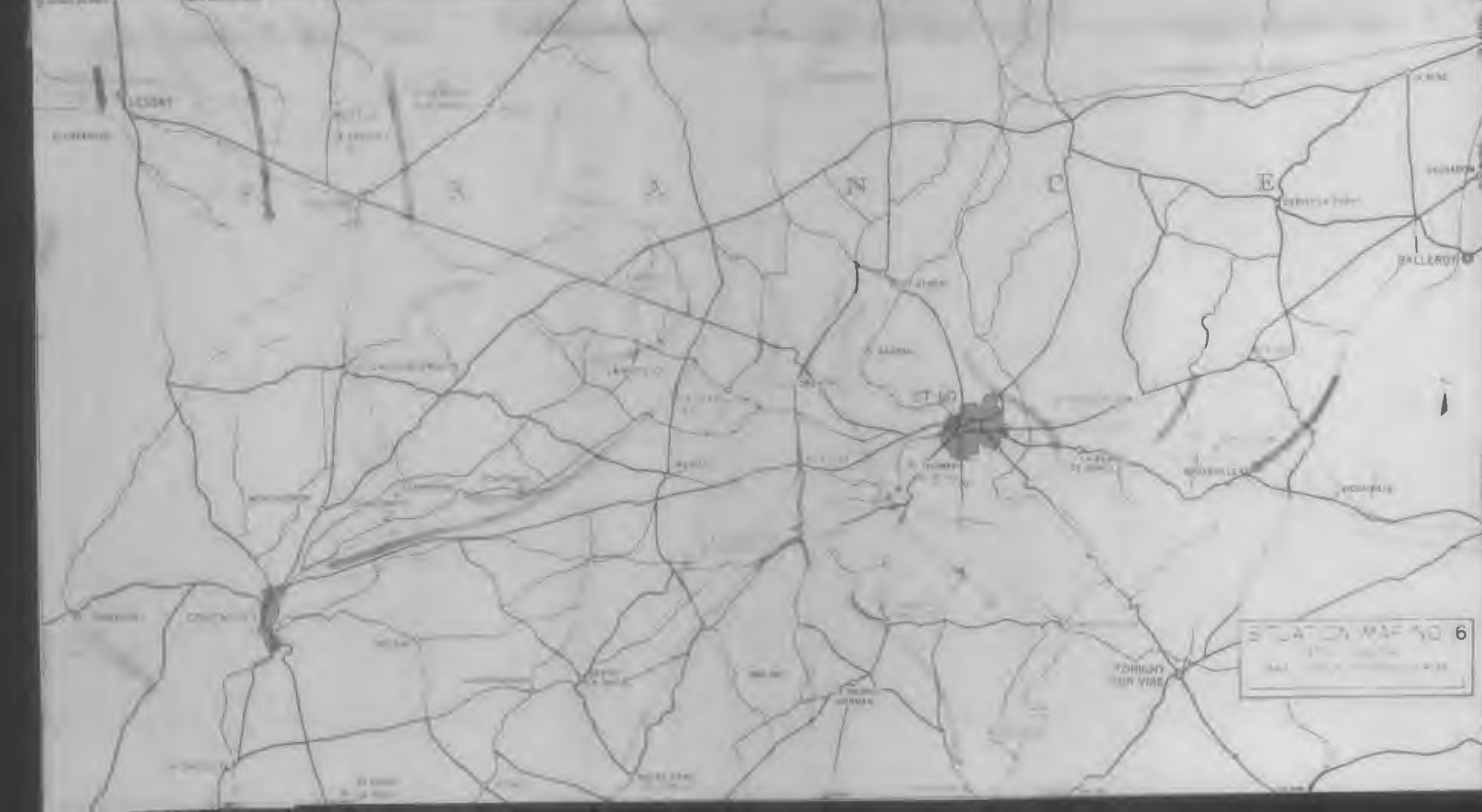
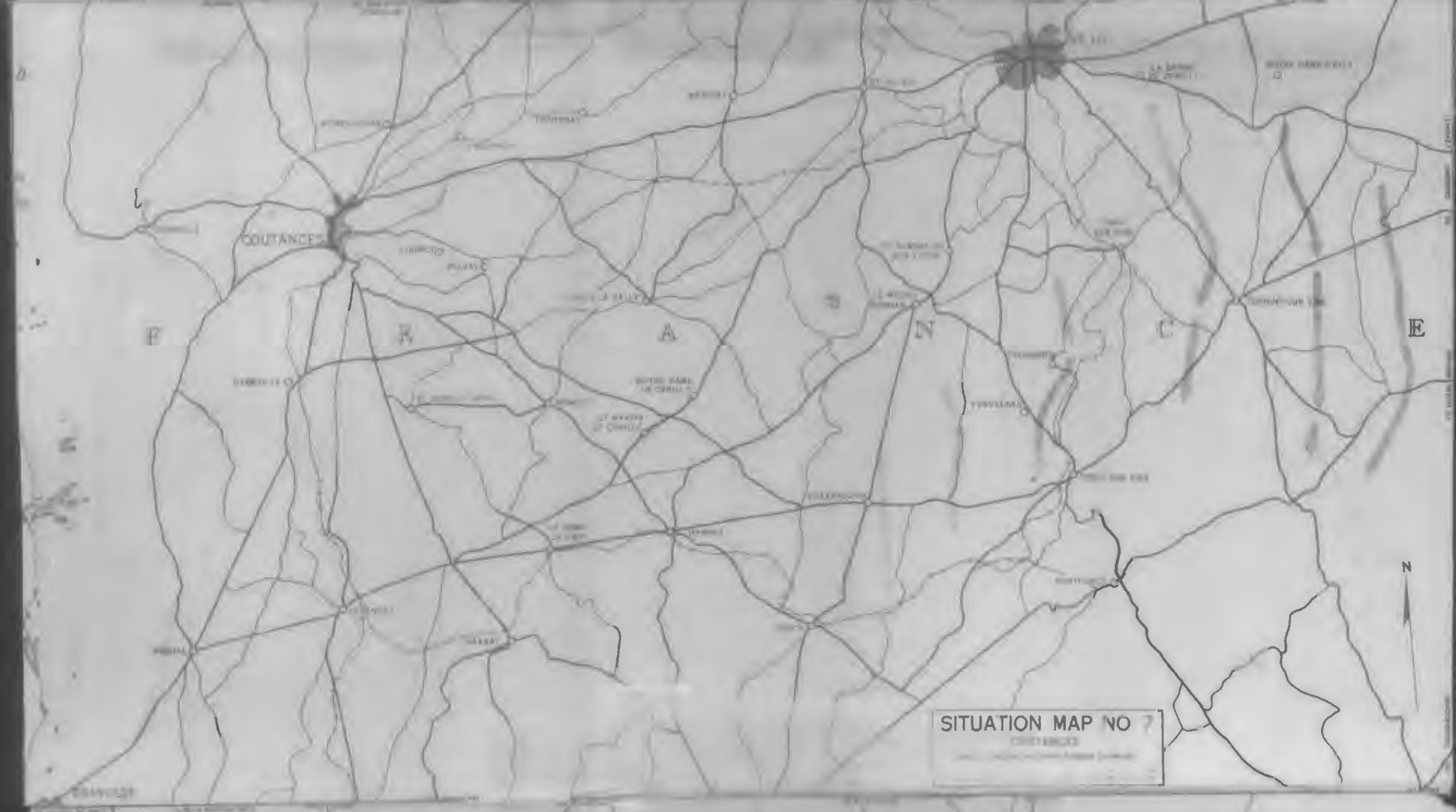
forces facing VIII Corps and assist VIII Corps in destruction of these forces. It was also to block along the line CERENCÉS-TESSY SUR VIRE-ST LO and to pivot and drive west to the sea between COUTANCES and BREHALL. VIII Corps, on the right of the Army sector along the sea, was to attack with objectives north of the line GEOFFOSSES-ST SAVEUR LENDELIN-LA CARDONNAIRE.<sup>3</sup>

The 2d and 3d Armored Divisions were assigned to VII Corps and the 4th and 6th Armored Divisions were assigned to VIII Corps for Cobra. In addition 12 separate tank battalions operated with the infantry divisions in the First Army sector. See Figure 1, Armored Division Axes.

The VII Corps Commander, General Collins, was confronted with a vague and confused enemy situation.<sup>4</sup> All intelligence indicated that the enemy forces had been badly cut up and disorganized. Although a large number of major units were identified prior to and during the attack, they were found to exist chiefly as remnants of the major units, and many of them had been reorganized as Kampf Gruppen (battle groups)(Appendix I).

The extremely effective operations of the allied air arm had badly demoralized the German forces and had seriously strained the German supply and replacement situation.<sup>5</sup> Since D Day the Germans had lost 160,000 men, 11 Generals, 400 tanks, and 2500 other vehicles. Moreover, the attempt on Hitler's life resulted in tightened political control and a consequent lack of freedom for decision by commanders even in Corps, Army, and OB West.

The terrain in the Corps sector, and the 2d Armored Division sector in particular, was distinguished by numerous hedgroves. The terrain



was rolling with numerous streams and few important hill masses. (Appendix 2)

VII Corps plan of maneuver was to penetrate with the 4th, 9th, and 30th Infantry Divisions, and exploit with the 1st Infantry Division and the 2d and 3d Armored Divisions. CCB, 3d Armored Division, attached to the 1st Infantry Division, was organized as the cutting force of the Corps.

The 2d Armored Division, Major General Edward H. Brooks, Commanding, was assigned the mission of moving.<sup>6</sup>

"rapidly the Division (less 1 Combat Command) through the gap cleared by the 30th Infantry Division to seize initially the area LE MESNIL HERMAN-ST SAMSON DE BON FOSSE-HILL 183 in order to cover the movement of the 1st Infantry Division and the 3d Armored Division through the MARGNY-ST GILLES gap; will push one Combat Command to the southwest via PONT HEBERT-ST GILLES-CANISY road prepared on orders of the Commanding General VII Corps to move as follows: to seize objectives within zone CERENCES and ST DENIS LE GAST and prevent enemy reinforcements moving to the north through this area, to move on COU-TANCES to reenforce the 3d Armored Division, to move to the southeast to reenforce the remainder of the 2d Armored Division."

---

#### NOTES FOR CHAPTER I

<sup>1</sup>Report by The Supreme Commander to the Combined Chiefs of Staff on the Operations in Europe of the Allied Expeditionary Force, 6 June 1944 to 8 May 1945 prepared by General of the Army Dwight D. Eisenhower (Washington; Government Printing Office, 1946).

<sup>2</sup>First U. S. Army Report of Operations, 20 Oct 1943 to 1 August 1944, p 96.

<sup>3</sup>FO #6, VII Corps-July 44.

<sup>4</sup>Annex #4 (intel) to FO #6.

<sup>5</sup>APIU (Ninth AF Adv) 63/1945, Enemy Intelligence Summaries Docu-  
ments Section, TAS, Ft. Knox. passim.

<sup>6</sup>  
Op cit, FO#6.

## CHAPTER 2

### PREPARATIONS

"... seize objectives ST GILLES - CERISY -  
LE MESNIL HERMAN - TESSY SUR VIRE - west to CERENCES<sup>1</sup>..."

Following the original 6 June invasion of Normandy by two days, leading elements of the 2d Armored Division, veteran of the Algerian-French Moroccan and Sicilian Campaign, landed on OMAHA BEACH. They were immediately committed in support of the 29th Infantry Division in seizing a bridgehead over the VIRE River. On 12 June, and for the next four days, Combat Command A supported the 101st Airborne Division in the critical CARENTAN area. Upon relief, the 66th Armored Regiment remained with the 101st Airborne until the end of June to provide armor protection.

During the fortnight following the relief of Combat Command A, the 2d Armored Division remained in an assembly area conducting intensive training and engaging in active patrolling. On 2 July, elements of the division took over defensive positions of the British 7th Armored Division.<sup>2</sup>

After more than two weeks of holding under trying conditions in close contact with the enemy, the 2d Armored Division was relieved on 17 July by the British 8th Armored Brigade<sup>3</sup> and returned to assembly areas north of CERISY FOREST. Here the men were given a long rest in preparation for the forthcoming operations. Special attention was paid to maintenance of vehicles and physical fitness; and for the first time in Normandy, officers and men were given special service programs, and showers were set up by the 17th Armored Engineer Battalion.<sup>4</sup>

During the period 18 - 25 July, the 2d Armored Division refitted, received attached units, trained, and maintained its equipment, while the staff prepared detailed plans for the coming attack.<sup>5</sup>

Units attached to the 2d Armored Division in the CERISY FOREST area were:

22d Regimental Combat Team (Motorized), 4th Infantry Division.  
24th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron (less Troop B).  
702d Tank Destroyer Battalion, Self Propelled, (plus Batteries C and D, 129th Anti-aircraft Gun Battalion).  
195th Anti-aircraft Automatic Weapons Battalion.  
62d Armored Field Artillery Battalion.  
65th Armored Field Artillery Battalion.  
In support: 238th Engineer Combat Battalion.<sup>6</sup>

For the few remaining days before the attack the 2d Armored Division practiced tank-infantry teamwork and demonstrations. Each battalion engaged in a limited objective attack in typical hedgerow country,<sup>7</sup> demonstrating how and at what tanks fire, how to use hedgerow cutters, how infantry rode on and helped tanks, and how infantry used the external tank telephones.<sup>8</sup> This training was highly successful and was later credited by the division commander with being the key to the 2d Armored Division's success in the operation.<sup>9</sup>

At this point it is well to look into the logistical planning for the operation. Concurrently with the training period, all vehicles and equipment were placed in the best mechanical condition. Some medium tanks, mounting the 75-mm gun, were replaced with medium tanks, mounting the 76-mm gun. Approximately 75 percent of the tanks were equipped with special hedgerow cutters (a device known as the "Rhinceros" which was originated by Sgt Curtis G. Culin, 102d Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron, and which was kept secret until it was used in operation CQBRA).

A mobile supply truckhead was organized and held in an alert status.

This truckhead operated under division control and consisted primarily of 84 trucks, loaded as follows: one truck each of diesel fuel and 50 weight oil, 25 trucks of gasoline, and 57 trucks of ammunition. All ammunition trucks of the truckhead carried balanced loads, consisting mainly of artillery ammunition. Key supply personnel and certain special supply and control vehicles were also included in the truckhead.

Each tank carried a three-day supply of rations for its crew and accompanying infantrymen. This consisted of a two-day supply of C type and a one-day supply of K type rations. In addition to the rations carried by the tanks, the division carried one and two-thirds days' supply of B type and 3,000 5-in-1 type rations. Each tank carried extra ammunition and gasoline sufficient for 200 miles of operation.<sup>10</sup>

At the beginning of the period, the division was approximately 15% overstrength in personnel, figured on the combat strength of the division. This overage was common in most units in the theater during this period. It arose from the fact that during the planning phase the casualties for the assault landing had been overestimated and replacements had been requisitioned on this basis. A further "overstrength" not enjoyed by other units arose from a peculiarity of the 1942 T/O & E under which both the 2d and 3d Armored Divisions were still organized. (The T/O & E for all other armored divisions was changed in 1943). As a "self-contained" replacement feature of the earlier T/O, six men instead of five were allowed for each tank crew. The T/E went along by allowing the maintenance company of each armored regiment 12 tanks for replacement purposes. Only one man, the driver, was allocated as crew for these replacement vehicles. Consequently,

the extra men and the extra vehicles were combined to make nearly a complete extra tank company in each armored regiment. No division policy in regard to these extra men and vehicles has been determined; however, it is assumed that each regiment handled the problem individually.

It is well to keep these overages in mind when the division casualties are being considered. If this is done, it is readily apparent that although the division casualties were moderately high, they in no way impaired the operating efficiency of the division.<sup>11</sup>

Having received his mission and developed his plan of maneuver, the division commander organized the 2d Armored Division for combat as follows:<sup>12</sup>

Combat Command A

66th Armored Regiment  
22d Regimental Combat Team  
702d Tank Destroyer Battalion  
(minus Company B)  
14th Armored Field Artillery Battalion  
Attachments of engineer, anti-aircraft,  
medical, and maintenance units

Combat Command B

67th Armored Regiment (minus 3d Battalion)  
1st and 3d Battalions, 41st Armored  
Infantry Regiment  
78th Armored Field Artillery Battalion  
Attachments of engineer, tank destroyer,  
medical, and maintenance units.

Division Reserve

41st Armored Infantry Regiment  
(minus 1st and 3d Battalions)  
3d Battalion, 67th Armored Regiment

Division Artillery

62d Armored Field Artillery Battalion  
65th Armored Field Artillery Battalion  
92d Armored Field Artillery Battalion  
Battery C, 195th Anti-aircraft Automatic  
Weapons Battalion



Batteries C and D, 129th Anti-aircraft Gun  
Battalion

Division Troops

Headquarters and Headquarters Company,  
2d Armored Division (plus 1 company,  
41st Armored Infantry Regiment, plus  
3 anti-aircraft sections, 195th Anti-  
aircraft Automatic Weapons Battalion)  
82d Armored Reconnaissance Battalion  
(plus Company D, 17th Armored Engineer  
Battalion)  
24th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron  
(minus Troop B)  
142d Armored Signal Company  
Headquarters and Headquarters Battery,  
195th Anti-aircraft Automatic Weapons  
Battalion.

After the operation commenced, the 24th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron was attached to Combat Command A, and the 62d Armored Field Artillery Battalion was placed in general support of Combat Command B, reinforcing the fires of the 78th Armored Field Artillery Battalion. The remainder of the division's artillery followed Combat Command B in general support of it and of Division Reserve.<sup>13</sup>

Thus the 2d Armored Division prepared itself for the breakthrough effort. The division was rested, refitted, and furnished with specialized equipment; it received attachments and trained in combined arms operations. Problems of supply were ironed out, and a 15% overstrength was provided to insure prompt and adequate replacement. Plans were drawn up and disseminated, and task organizations were decided. All that remained was the H-hour signal.

On the morning of 25 July an area five miles long and one mile wide to the west of ST LO was blasted by 1,883 bombers dropping over 4,700 tons of bombs. At the same time, medium bombers attacked troops

and gun concentrations southeast of CAEN, and fighter-bombers with bombs and rockets, attacked targets behind the assault area. The air blow did not cause a large number of casualties to the enemy sheltered in their dug-in positions, but it did produce great confusion. Communications broke down and supplies from the rear were cut off.

The battle began with the advance of VII Corps at midday on 25 July. The 9th Division was on the right flank, the 4th Division in the center, and the 30th Division on the left flank, the 1st Division and the 2d and 3d Armored Division were in reserve. At the same time the VII, XIX, and V Corps maintained pressure along the remainder of the First Army front to prevent the shifting of enemy troops.

The advance was met with intense artillery fire from positions not neutralized on the left flank, while on the right German parachutists resisted fiercely with heavy automatic weapons fire. However, the ordinary infantry opposition, provided by elements of three infantry divisions and one panzer division was not so severe.<sup>14</sup>

The advance made slow progress at first, but by midnight VII Corps elements had crossed the PERIERS - ST LO road. Although the initial objectives of the penetrating forces had not been secured, General Collins committed most of his exploiting force the next day, 26 July. He said, "We had broken through the principal defences of the Germans. I felt that the added punch of the armored divisions would be sufficient to make a clean break-away."<sup>15</sup>

Slightly before midnight on the night of 25 - 26 July the 2d Armored Division began its move to a forward assembly area; approximately three

hours later it began moving to a second, and at 0945 hours 26 July the Division crossed the line of departure in a column of combat Commands with Combat Command A leading.<sup>16</sup>

In this attack the two combat commands fought independently of each other because of the two-fold unrelated missions given the 2d Armored Division by VII Corps' operations order:<sup>17</sup>

(1)"... move rapidly the Div (less 1 combat command) through the gap... in order to cover the movement of the 1st Div and 3d Armd Div..."

(2)"... push one combat command to the southwest prepared:

(a) To... prevent enemy reinforcements moving to the north....

(b) To move on COUTANCES to reinforce the 3d Armd Div.

(c) To move to the southeast to reinforce the remainder of the 2d Armd Div....

For this reason, to preserve continuity, the operations of the two combat commands are treated separately in the following chapters.

---

#### NOTES FOR CHAPTER 2

<sup>1</sup>Field Order No. 3, Headquarters 2d Armored Division, 19 July 1944.

<sup>2</sup>Unit History of the Second Armored Division, edited by Lt Col E. A. Trahan, (Albert Love Enterprises: Atlanta, Ga), passim.

<sup>3</sup>Lt Col Hawkins, Letter Headquarters Combat Command A, 2d Armored Division, "Operation Report for Period 1 - 31 June inclusive."

<sup>4</sup>Op cit, Unit History, passim.

<sup>5</sup>Letter Headquarters 14th Armored Field Artillery Battalion, 31 July 1944, "Opus Annex."

<sup>6</sup>VII Corps Field Order No. 6 (Revised), par 3f, 20 July 1944.

- <sup>7</sup>VII Corps Report of Action, (Micro Film 330).
- <sup>8</sup>Capt D. E. Eastlake, (then 1st Lt, 2d Plat, Co A, 66th Armd Regt).
- <sup>9</sup>Op cit, Unit History, Chapter V, p 23.
- <sup>10</sup>Lt Col F. M. Muller, (then Maj, Asst G-4, 2d Armd Div).
- <sup>11</sup>Maj J. F. Smith (then Exec O, 2d Bn, 67th Armd Regt)
- <sup>12</sup>2d Armd Div Field Order No. 3, 19 July 1944.
- <sup>13</sup>Lt Col H. M. Exton, "Operation 'COBRA,'" The Military Review, XXVII, No. 5 (August 1947), p 11
- <sup>14</sup>Report by the Supreme Commander to the Combined Chiefs of Staff on the Operations in Europe of the Allied Expeditionary Force, 6 June 1944 to 8 May 1945, a report prepared by General of the Army Dwight D. Eisenhower (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1946) p 35.
- <sup>15</sup>The War in Western Europe, Part I, Dept of Military Art and Engineering, USMA, (West Point: Government Printing Office, 1949) passim.
- <sup>16</sup>Op cit, Unit History, Chapter V, p 27.
- <sup>17</sup>Op cit, VII Corps Field Order, par 3f.

## CHAPTER 3

### CONDUCT OF CCA ATTACK

"... seize LE MESNIL HERMAN, ST SAMSON DE BON FOSSE, hill 183..." 1

Preparations for Cobra - 17 - 25 July (Refer to Overlay No. 3)

On 17 July 1944 at 2015 Brig. Gen. Maurice Rose's CCA was relieved of its sector by the 8th (British) Armored Brigade and commenced its move to an assembly area near LA CATHERINERIE. The move was made in two groups - the 66th Armored Regiment, Battery D 195th Anti-Aircraft Battalion, one Company of the 17th Engineer Battalion, Company A 48th Medical Battalion, and the Rear CP of CCA in the first group; 2d and 3d Battalions of the 41st Armored Infantry Regiment, 14th Armored Field Artillery Battalion, and the Reconnaissance Company of the 66th Armored Regiment in the second group. At 0525 the last element had completed the move and the two Infantry Battalions reverted to control of Headquarters, 41st Armored Infantry Regiment.

During the period 18 - 25 July the Combat Command received new units, trained and maintained its equipment while the staffs prepared detailed plans for the coming attack as discussed in Chapter 2.

At noon on the 19th, the 22d Regimental Combat Team, commanded by Col C. T. Lanham, was attached to the Combat Command and by 2200 had assembled at (T79-94). Also attached during this period were: 702d Tank Destroyer Battalion (-B Company), Company C 17th Engineer Battalion, Company A of the Maintenance Battalion, 2d Armored Division, 24th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron (Mechanized) (-Troop B), and an

air support party from 9th Tactical Air Force (consisting of 1 officer and 4 enlisted men with 1 medium tank).

For a few days platoons of infantry from the 22d Regimental Combat Team practiced tank-infantry teamwork with the platoon of tankers from the 66th Armored Regiment; later they were to fight together. For instance, Company A of the 66th Armored Regiment, which was with 2d Battalion, 66th Armored Regiment, throughout COBRA, worked with Company A, 22d Infantry. Tank and infantry commanders from company commanders on down used the same tank and the same communications - normally tank radios. Each battalion put on a limited objective mock attack in typical hedgerow country. Its purpose was to demonstrate how and at what tanks fire, how to use the hedgerow cutters (with which the 66th was about 75% equipped), how infantry rode on and helped tanks, and the use of external tank telephones.

On 20 July plans for the operation were completed and Field Order No. 4 Headquarters CCA, was drawn up, based on Field Order No. 3, Headquarters 2d Armored Division, 19 July 1944. This combat command field order listed CCA's mission as:

"....move upon order of Commanding General 2d Armored Division on 2 routes to seize initially the area LE MESNIL HERMAN, ST SAMSON DE BON FOSSE, Hill 183, and to cover the movement of the 1st Infantry Division and the 3d Armored Division through the MARIGNY-ST GILLES Gap, prepared to attack enemy forces approaching from east and south between CONDE SUR VIRE and HAMBYE."

Reconnaissance units were to overrun any light enemy resistance encountered, outpostting objectives until relieved by advance guard.

For this move the 82d Reconnaissance Battalion and the 24th Cavalry Squadron were to move under CCA control.

From the 22d to late on the 25th of July, the Combat Command was prepared to move on short notice. Early on the 22d, it was alerted for a move on two-hour notice. At 1800 on the 25th the Combat Command was alerted for movement to an assembly area south of PONT HEBERT.

The Jump Off-26 July (Refer to Overlay No. 3)

Daily Summary. On the 26th of July the Command moved astride the PONT HEBERT-ST GILLES-CANISY road in what was essentially one broad column, crossing the line of departure about 0945 near HEBECREVN. Upon reaching ST GILLES late that day the Command split into two separate columns and advanced on CANISY from two directions. From CANISY the Command, at about 1900, again moved in two columns; one towards ST SAMSON DE BON FOSSE, and one towards LE MESNIL HERMAN. Midnight of the 26th found the Combat Command on the move in two columns along the general line south of ST SAMSON DE BON FOSSE-ST MARTIN DE BON FOSSE.

Detailed Narrative. At 2330 on the 25th of July the Combat Command began its secretive move in one column to the new assembly area. The 14th Armored Field Artillery Battalion left its position near LA MINE at 2330 and moved near PONT HEBERT and prepared to support CCA. At 0200 hours on the 26th CCA began closing in the assembly area near PONT HEBERT, which was to be the IP that day. Unit commanders were assembled at the Combat Command CP and verbal orders for the attack were issued.

The plan as outlined in Field Order No. 4 was changed as a result of information received from front line units. The plan now called for an advance astride the PONT HEBERT-ST GILLES road. The 2d Battalion, 66th Armored Regiment with the 2d Battalion, 22d Regimental Combat Team was to move on the west of the road under the command of Commanding Officer 2d Battalion, 66th Armored Regiment. To the east of the road would be the 3d Battalion, 66th Armored Regiment plus 1st Battalion, 22d Regimental Combat Team under the Commanding Officer 3d Battalion, 66th Armored Regiment.

Movement to a new assembly area north of ST LO-PERIERS road (in the vicinity of RAULINE) was begun at 0308. From here movement carried the combat command to the line of departure. Enroute to the line of departure, the column was forced to leave the road temporarily when it encountered a mine field north of ST GILLES.<sup>2</sup>

The line of departure, located near HEBECREVON, was held by the 120th Infantry Regiment, 30th Infantry Division. The 24th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron (-) acted as covering force for the Combat Command.

At 0945 the Combat Command crossed the line of departure in deployed formation with the 2d Battalion of the 66th Armored Regiment on the west and the 3d Battalion, 66th Armored Regiment on the east. (For organization of columns see Overlay No. 3). Each of the battalions of the 66th carried two infantry companies on its tanks - eight men per medium tank and four men per light tank. The remaining rifle companies (motorized) followed the 1st Battalion of the 66th Armored



Regiment. Six battalions of field artillery, including the 188th and 258th Field Artillery Battalions, were in support of Combat Command A's entire operation. Initial positions were located in the vicinity of RUMPAN and ST JEAN de DAYE. Parts of 702d Tank Destroyer Battalion were included in each column.

Initially only scattered resistance was encountered. However, the advance was slow due to many hedgerows and to the bomb craters left by the air attacks of the 25th. Col Lanham, Commanding Officer 22d Regimental Combat Team, states the rate of advance was only one mile an hour at the maximum.

Between the line of departure and ST GILLES, the advance of both columns was subject to constant light artillery and mortar fire which hurt the infantry but not the tanks.

First contact was made with the enemy 400 yards south of the line of departure when a medium tank was lost to an anti-tank gun. From this point on to ST GILLES only small arms and sporadic bazooka fire was encountered. By 1035 the lead battalions had broken through the German lines one and one-half miles north of ST GILLES and had taken its first prisoners.

Later in the day the combat command ran into hastily organized enemy strong points. These strong points were unprotected by obstacles<sup>3</sup> and therefore did not require major attacks to dislodge them. The technique of attack was to advance until resistance was met. Then the infantry would dismount, go ahead of the tanks and return with information of German positions. Then an attack would be launched or

the positions outflanked. The German practice of keeping their tank engines running assisted the infantry's reconnaissance.

At 1500, advance elements of the 2d Battalion, 66th Armored Regiment (west of the road) encountered a road block 800 yards north of ST GILLES. An air strike reduced this force of tanks and infantry. Shortly thereafter (1510 hours) the 2d Battalion tanks flanked mine fields and entered ST GILLES from the northwest after a brisk fire fight. In this fire fight four Mark IV tanks and a self-propelled gun fought the Battalion. The Battalion knocked out two tanks and the self-propelled gun while an air strike (P-47's) knocked out the other two tanks.

After taking ST GILLES the momentum of the attack was regained and the Combat Command split into two columns as originally planned. One column stayed on the main road to LE MESNIL HERMAN and the other (the 3d Battalion, 66th Armored Regiment) went southwest toward ST SAMSON DE BON FOSSE.

The enemy attempted to interdict the advance south from ST GILLES by artillery fire and by firing anti-tank guns on the CANISY road. (Capt Donald E. Eastlake, then a platoon leader in the 66th Armored Regiment, states that the best success in knocking out anti-tank guns was gained by moving our tanks off the road to flank the enemy weapons.) Failing in this, the enemy then tried to utilize the stream which crossed the road above CANISY as a defensive line, but was flanked from the east by the 2d Battalion, 66th Armored Regiment. The artillery activity of the Germans increased as Combat Command A

took the high ground 1400 yards north of CANISY. During this advance Combat Command A burned a fuel dump, destroyed two enemy tanks, and took 80 prisoners.

As the attack progressed, the 14th Armored Field Artillery Battalion moved, at 1515 hours, to positions near DURAND (44-67). In this move they became the first field artillery battalion to go through the gap created by the 30th Division on the 25th. By this time the Battalion had fired 2790 rounds in support of Combat Command A.

The force soon learned that the railroad overpass north of CANISY was bombed out and was being used as a roadblock. At about 1900, as Company D, 66th Armored Regiment, overwatched from the high ground, Company A, 66th Armored Regiment, flanked and entered CANISY from the east. In CANISY, when the 2d Battalion, 66th Armored Regiment moved through the town it was dive bombed by an allied aircraft (P-47) and one tank was lost. This occurred in spite of identification panels on the American tanks. (In this period our forces also used yellow smoke grenades to identify themselves to aircraft--the enemy used orange.)<sup>4</sup>

From CANISY the Combat Command moved again in two columns on the routes CANISY-ST SAMSON DE BON FOSSE for the 2d Battalion, and CANISY-LE MESNIL HERMAN for the 3d Battalion. CANISY was burning on the west side due to bombing.

As the Combat Command advanced it was apparent that the enemy was disorganized.<sup>5</sup> For instance, Lt. J. H. Cleveland, who was with the division at the time, recalled that just north of CANISY a Mark IV

tank joined a column of quartermaster trucks carrying infantry from the 22d Regimental Combat Team. The German tankers, realizing their error, disabled the column to escape. They were successful and, in escaping, ran their tank over a one-quarter ton truck and killed its driver.

The advance continued on into darkness on the orders of General Rose and by 2100 the head of the west column, in spite of anti-tank guns and dug in tanks, was near ST MARTIN DE BON FOSSE. The east column had neared ST SAMSON DE BON FOSSE. At 2300 the latter captured ST SAMSON DE BON FOSSE without a fight. At this point elements of the 66th Armored Regiment, which had been under command of their regimental commander, came directly under the command of the Commanding General Combat Command A.

At 2330, as the Combat Command continued its advance, the 14th Armored Field Artillery's gun batteries and part of the fire direction center moved forward to a point near ST GILLES.

During the first day's advance the Combat Command had progressed seven miles with the small loss of three medium tanks, one-half ton truck and one-quarter ton truck.

#### Reaching the First Objective-27 July (Refer to Overlay No. 3)

Daily Summary. Midnight of the night of 26-27 July found the Combat Command on the move in two columns with lead elements south of the general line ST MARTIN DE BON FOSSE-ST SAMSON DE BON FOSSE. By 0200 the 2d Battalion, 66th Armored Regiment, had seized and secured the cross road northeast of LE MESNIL HERMAN.

By 1500 on the 27th the Combat Command initial objective in LE MESNIL HERMAN-ST SAMSON DE BON FOSSE-Hill 183 had been taken. The command then sent two reconnaissance forces to the south, one towards VILLEBAUDON and one towards TESSY SUR VIRE. These advance elements reached the general line LE MESNIL OPAC-LA DENISIERE by the end of the day.

Detailed Narrative. When the unit commanders reported to the Combat Command Command Post, the 2d Battalion, 66th Armored Regiment, was ordered to take and secure LE MESNIL HERMAN. The rest of the Combat Command's tanks and infantry were ordered into an assembly area in the northern part of the objective.

Local security was established and all units were resupplied and prepared for further action. The local security included holding the 702d Tank Destroyer Battalion in reserve in column formation. This battalion conducted no actual operations against the enemy while on this mission. Local security in the 1st Battalion, 66th Armored Regiment followed an SOP of one man per light tank awake at all times and a two man outpost per platoon.

At first light the 2d Battalion, 66th Armored Regiment, at the cross road north-east of LE MESNIL HERMAN, was undergoing strong artillery and mortar fire and small infantry attacks. About the same time, at 0600, the 14th Armored Field Artillery Battalion began leap-frogging its gun batteries and fire direction center to keep up with the attack. At 0800 the 14th Armored Field Artillery Battalion was in position south of CANISY.

At 0700, the 24th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron, Mechanized (-Troop B) reconnoitered to the south through the area previously bombed by the Air Corps. By 0930 the Squadron Command Post was in the vicinity ST MARTIN DE BON FOSSE.

From 0900 until noon Company D, 66th Armored Regiment, was engaged with enemy tanks and anti-tank guns while taking and securing LE MESNIL HERMAN. This action cost them three tanks.

During this action the remainder of the Combat Command further secured the objective. The 702d Tank Destroyer Battalion was ordered to set up road blocks in the vicinity of Hill 183. The 22d Regimental Combat Team received orders to "beat the bushes" on the objective for enemy snipers while outposts were sent out by the Reconnaissance Company, 66th Armored Regiment.

The 14th Armored Field Artillery, in addition to furnishing fire support, took three prisoners from the 901st Panzer Grenadier Regiment. About noon they found three undamaged anti-tank guns left by the Germans.

The enemy air activity was very heavy at night, but light in the day time throughout this operation. As a result of German indiscriminate bombing and strafing (which generally did little damage) our forces were awake most of each night.

Early morning reports that Hill 183 had been taken were found to be erroneous. In the darkness, the terrain near the Hill but not the Hill itself had been secured. Therefore at 1100 the 2d Battalion, 66th Armored Regiment, was ordered to attack Hill 183. It took

until 1500 to get the job done. Company A, 66th Armored Regiment, part of the 2d Battalion Task Force, was then relieved of its position on the Hill by infantry units and the task force returned to its bivouac area.

At 1445 hours, since its move to DURAND, the 14th Armored Field Artillery had expended 1367 rounds of ammunition. At this time it took more prisoners simultaneously with its arrival in new gun positions at (43-56).

Having secured Hill 183, General Rose ordered a reconnaissance in force to be made of the area from the objective to the vicinity of TESSY SUR VIRE and VILLEBAUDON. To accomplish this two task forces were formed. The East Task Force, commanded by Lt. Col. Parker commander of the 1st Battalion, 66th Armored Regiment, consisted of elements of the 1st Bn 66th, Troop A, 24th Cavalry, 3d Platoon, Troop F, 24th Cavalry, and an engineer detachment. It was to move toward TESSY SUR VIRE. The West Task Force from the 3d Battalion, 66th Armored Regiment, included a company of the 22d Infantry and the 24th Cavalry (-) and was to move on VILLEBAUDON.<sup>6</sup>

The East Task Force, which left LA LANDE at 1600, reached a hill at (48-51) at about 2000 hours. It encountered strong anti-tank resistance and fought German infantry's delaying action in this move. Enemy infantry infiltrated on this column's flanks, fired, and retired before effective fire could be placed upon them. However, the enemy also took a beating, as 23 prisoners were taken by the 1st Battalion when it took the high ground in the vicinity of LE MESNIL OPAC. These

prisoners included three officers from the Ground Luftwaffe Army. Elements of the 24th Cavalry Squadron took over this high ground at 2200 and the Task Force reassembled to the northwest.

In the meantime the West Task Force encountered moderate to heavy resistance in the form of delaying action. When resistance was met the infantry dismounted from the tanks and deployed to fire on targets of opportunity. By 2100 the West Task Force lead element was at (44-50). At 2200 hours this force was reassembled at (44-54).

Both Task Forces pulled into a perimeter defense on the night of 27-28 July with dismounted patrols maintaining contact with the enemy. Intermittent shelling was received by both forces during the night and at dawn the next day both forces repulsed enemy attacks without loss of ground.

Unit commanders were assembled at the Combat Command Command Post to receive orders for the 28th. The two task forces previously designated were to move at 0630 the next morning over the same routes used late on the 27th to organize and secure ground.

Casualties were light for the two day operation. The 22d Infantry estimated leading infantry companies lost 10 to 15 men. The 66th Armored Regiment lost 17 killed and 118 wounded.

Stiff Resistance is Met-28 July (Refer to Overlay No. 3)

Daily Summary. The majority of the Combat Command had collected on the objective between LE MESNIL HERMAN and ST SAMSON DE BON FOSSE when the 27th passed on to the 28th. This new day, saw the launching



of first, a two and later a three pronged drive to the south, despite enemy interference in rear of part of the command, in the vicinity of LA DENISIERE. At noon the Command came under XIX Corps and was ordered to seize the general area - PERCY, high ground South of LE CHEFRESNE, ST MARIE, and VILLEBAUDON. The eastern and center forces were held by the enemy along the MARCRON RIVER while the west force reached a point just south of VILLEBAUDON.

Detailed Narrative. At 0200 the Combat Command was notified of the attachment of the 113th Cavalry Group, commanded by Col. Wm. S. Biddle. It consisted of Group Headquarters, the 113th Reconnaissance Squadron and the 125th Reconnaissance Squadron. The Red Horsemen went through ST LO and moved toward PERCY to join Brigadier General Maurice Rose and his Combat Command A near LE MESNIL HERMAN.<sup>7</sup> The 125th Squadron was deployed to (43-57). This squadron was given the tentative mission of protecting Combat Command A's right flank. However the mission was withdrawn. The squadron was not committed and was attached to the 28th Infantry Division on the 29th.<sup>8</sup> At VILLEBAUDON, later, the Group Headquarters and Troop "B" 113th Reconnaissance Squadron, with part of Combat Command A, were cut off for two days when Hitler's 116th Panzer Division counterattacked toward LE MESNIL HERMAN.<sup>9</sup>

A prisoner taken by Combat Command A was found, upon interrogation, to be from the Reconnaissance Battalion, 2d Panzer Division. From him it was learned that this unit was bivouaced 800 yards south of the East Task Force, near LE MESNIL OPAC.

The two reconnaissance forces sent toward VILLEBAUDON and TESSY SUR VIRE were forced to skirt the main roads which were blocked by burning enemy vehicles. German planes strafed the columns but were driven off by friendly fighter-bombers in support of Combat Command A which shot down one enemy aircraft. The fighters remained to strafe and destroy enemy tanks and troop carriers.

On 28 July both Combat Commands were confronted by strong enemy resistance. Large German forces sought to escape southward from the First Army trap. The enemy from the north encountered elements of Combat Command B; enemy armor and infantry approaching from the southwest were met by Combat Command A, now attached to XIX Corps. This same morning the East Task Force was ordered to attack south and secure MOYEN.

One company of medium tanks with a company of infantry on the decks was given the mission of reconnaissance in force in VILLEBAUDON.

After sharp action this force from the 3d Battalion, 66th Armored Regiment, took the town about noon, knocking out six enemy reconnaissance cars, a Mark IV tank, and 50 of the enemy troops. In comparison, the American loss was the tank company commander and three medium tanks.

At 1200 hours 28 July, Combat Command A and the attached 22d Regimental Combat Team were detached from the 2d Armored Division, and VII Corps, and attached to XIX Corps. The Combat Command was given the mission of securing the Corps objective, which was the town of PERCY, the high ground south of LE CHEFRESNE, ST MARIE, and VILLEBAUDON. The latter, of course, had previously been taken.<sup>10</sup>

To accomplish this mission, General Rose regrouped Combat Command A into three task forces (fig-2). Also, for this action the 24th Cavalry Squadron was attached to the 113th Cavalry Group.

The 14th Armored Field Artillery Battalion was now to see close combat and to do a great deal of firing. At 1300 it moved to (44-54) to support the coming attack of PERCY. From here it displaced to a position midway between VILLEBAUDON and LA DENISIERE. Soon after arrival at this last position it was firing both north and south simultaneously. Two batteries were firing south to support the attack while the other battery fired north using charge one at three enemy tanks at the cross road at LA DENISIERE. The enemy had artillery too and, using interdiction fire, controlled the LA DENISIERE cross road and cut off the 14th from its base of supply until the 29th.

#### LEFT COLUMN (EAST)

Battalion Executive Officer 1st Battalion 66th  
Armored Regiment Commanding  
Company F 22d Regimental Combat Team  
1 Company Medium Tanks  
1 Platoon Light Tanks (24th Cavalry)(1st Platoon,  
Troop F)  
1 Assault Gun Platoon  
1 Platoon Company C 17th Engineers  
Maintenance Detachment, 66th Armored Regiment  
Medical Detachment, 1st Battalion, 66th Armored Regiment  
Forward Observer, 14th Armored Field Artillery Battalion  
1 Platoon Reconnaissance Company 66th Armored Regiment

#### RIGHT COLUMN (WEST)

Commanding Officer, 3d Battalion, 66th Armored  
Regiment, Commanding  
Headquarters 3d Battalion 66th Armored Regiment (-)  
1 Company Medium Tanks

Company K 22d Regimental Combat Team  
 1 Light Tank Platoon (24th Cavalry)(3d Platoon,  
 Troop F)  
 1 Assault Gun Platoon, 3d Battalion, 66th Armored  
 Regiment  
 1 Platoon Company A 17th Engineers  
 Maintenance Detachment 3d Battalion 66th Armored  
 Regiment  
 Medical Detachment 3d Battalion 66th Armored  
 Regiment  
 Forward Observer, 14th Armored Field Artillery  
 Battalion  
 Air Observer  
 1 Platoon Reconnaissance Company, 66th Armored  
 Regiment  
 702d Tank Destroyer Battalion (-Company C)

MIDDLE COLUMN

Commanding Officer 2d Battalion, 66th Armored  
 Regiment, Commanding  
 Company C 22d Regimental Combat Team  
 1 Light Tank Company (A)  
 2 Companies Medium Tanks (D & E)  
 1 Light Tank Platoon (24th Cavalry)(2d Platoon,  
 Troop F)  
 1 Assault Gun Platoon  
 1 Platoon Company A 17th Engineers  
 Maintenance Detachment, 66th Armored Regiment  
 Medical Detachment, 2d Battalion, 66th Armored  
 Regiment  
 Forward Observer, 14th Armored Field Artillery  
 Battalion  
 1 Platoon Reconnaissance Company, 66th Armored  
 Regiment

Figure-2 Combat Command A organization, 28-30 July, 1944

XIX Corps ordered the Combat Command attack delayed until 1500  
 hours. Then while the 1st and 2d Battalions of the 22d Regimental  
 Combat Team were being held up on the stream south of MOYEN, the three  
 tank forces moved out. Then a further delay occurred when vehicles  
 from other forces got on the VILLEBAUDON road and jammed traffic. But,

in general, the attack made steady progress.

The Middle Force attacked south along the LE MESNIL HERMAN-CHEVRY road with the mission of seizing BEAUCOUDRAY and cutting the VILLEBAUDON-TESSY SUR VIRE road. At first it received only light ground resistance, but was dive bombed by five ME 109's. Advance elements of the column entered the town of MOYEN against fierce enemy resistance, but the main body reached only to the high ground north of the town. This slow progress was due to terrain and resistance of a force later identified as eight companies of Panzer Grenadiers and some Mark V tanks from the 116th Panzer Division. Two Panzer divisions had established themselves on the high ground south of the MARCRON River, which in turn is just south of MOYEN. From this position they commanded the town and the road running east and west through it. Casualties on both sides were heavy as the result of the fight for MOYEN and the Middle Force was unable to take the town. Therefore the Middle Force was ordered to hold and defend the high ground north of MOYEN. This it did until relieved by elements of the 29th Infantry Division on the 29th of July. Upon relief, they returned to the bivouac area of the 2d Battalion, 66th Armored Regiment, at (45-52).<sup>11</sup>

The tank force, under the Executive Officer, 1st Battalion 66th Armored Regiment (Left Column) advanced through the high ground being secured by the 24th Cavalry Squadron on south edge of LE MESNIL OPAC. Here enemy dual purpose anti-aircraft/anti-tank guns and enemy tanks were encountered. The guns and tanks were successfully taken

under fire by both tanks and infantry and succeeded in destroying five Mark IV tanks and four German anti-tank guns with no losses to the Left Column. The advance was continued to the south to LES HAIES and then to (48-51) under constant artillery and mortar fire. At 2100, the force informed General Rose that enemy resistance at this furthest point of advance (48-51) was too heavy for the task force to penetrate. Consequently a battalion of infantry was sent forward to outpost the area and the Left Column ordered to return to (46-51). On the way to its assembly area, the force was cut by infiltrating enemy infantry and roving tanks. Fortunately, it was possible to bypass this resistance after it was localized at a cross roads where it was later reduced. At 2200 the force was assembled in bivouac; its losses for the day were twelve men and one tank.

The enemy in the vicinity of LE MESNIL OPAC had been gaining strength all day. At 1600, Troop A and the 3d Platoon of Troop F, 24th Cavalry, which were still on the high ground south of LE MESNIL OPAC, were again successful in repelling a counterattack of a superior enemy force.

The Right Column, under the commander of the 3d Battalion, 66th Armored Regiment, met little resistance and marched on to secure the town of VILLEBAUDON. This town had been taken earlier by a reconnaissance in force from the 3d Battalion of the 66th Armored Regiment.<sup>12</sup>

In the closing operation of the day the 113th Cavalry Group conducted reconnaissance to the south, east, and west of the Corp objective.

Their mission was to contact the enemy and to protect the east and west flanks of the Combat Command. This mission was handled by assigning squadron zones of action. Squadrons in turn established road blocks. Contact was light.

Late this same day the 1st and 2d Battalions, 22d Regimental Combat Team were disengaged from their positions on the stream near MOYEN, moved west to the LE MESNIL HERMAN-PERCY axis. The 22d Regimental Combat Team then moved south as a unit.

In the Thick of Battle-29 July (Refer to Overlay No. 4)

Daily Summary. The three task forces set up on the 28th continued on the 29th to attempt movement to the south. The west task force took PERCY and the ground beyond it in a move from the vicinity of VILLEBAUDON. This advance was made with the support of Combat Command A's 14th Armored Field Artillery Battalion, firing from point (43-47) and 44th Field Artillery Battalion. But the other two forces remained stalemated, as they had been late on the 28th, along the MARCRON River.

The advanced command post of Combat Command A was located in VILLEBAUDON while the Combat Command's reserve was spread out between VILLEBAUDON and a point two miles north of the town. A study of the operation by task forces follows.

Detailed Narrative. The artillery support was given under rather strained conditions for the enemy still interdicted the cross road at LA DENISIERE by fire. Therefore, all ammunition and supply vehicles for the 14th Armored Field Artillery Battalion had to make a dash

across this cross road. Part of the ammunition and supply sections bringing up the supplies would dismount near the cross road and engage the enemy while the supply vehicles made a run across the fire swept area. The attempts of half-tracks and  $2\frac{1}{2}$  ton trucks to get through this area were not always successful and a number of vehicles were damaged. However all damaged vehicles were eventually repaired by the 14th Armored Field Artillery Battalion maintenance unit.<sup>13</sup>

The Left Force (east) under the Executive Officer, 1st Battalion, 66th Armored Regiment was doing its best to cause the fall of the enemy positions in and around MOYEN. It moved out of the vicinity of LE MESNIL HERMAN, where it had spent the night with its parent battalion, at 0800 hours to attack and secure PONTFAROY. Almost immediately resistance was met in the form of small arms fire at (48-52), but this hinderance was quickly reduced. The advance then pushed rapidly to a stream at (47-51). A crossing here was impossible, due to strong resistance; so the force swung southeast parallel to the stream and fought its way to a crossing at (48-50). On the way to this crossing heavy small arms fire, enemy tanks, and mortar fire were encountered at (48-51). Here three enemy tanks were destroyed. Enemy artillery and mortar fire fell on the force throughout most of its move. At 1800 the force was ordered to disengage and withdraw to an assembly area in the vicinity of (47-53).

In the morning of the same day, the center force attempted to enter MOYEN again but was stopped by overwhelming enemy superiority. It was then forced to hold the high ground north of MOYEN until 2030



hours at which time it was relieved by follow-up infantry of the 29th Infantry Division. The task force, once relieved, returned to its parent unit, the 2d Battalion 66th Armored Regiment, at (45-52).

The Right Column, under Commanding Officer 3d Battalion, 66th Armored Regiment, covered more ground on the 29th than the other two forces. At 0730 this force left (43-44), below VILLEBAUDON, and advanced on PERCY. The force was cut off from the remainder of the Combat Command by the 116th Panzer Division. Throughout the day enemy artillery fire and anti-tank fire were received on VILLEBAUDON and the road from VILLEBAUDON to PERCY. At the same time, the enemy was infiltrating across this road from east to west and also set up hasty road blocks on the VILLEBAUDON-PERCY road. The 702d Tank Destroyer Battalion took under fire a number of enemy tanks which were harassing the column on the flanks. In spite of this harassment to its rear, the force took PERCY at 1530 and continued south east of the town for a mile. Here at 1830 it stopped its advance, assembled, and waited for the 175th Infantry Regiment of the 29th Infantry Division to relieve it.<sup>14</sup>

Another force from Combat Command A dissipated what appeared to be a counterattack force of enemy tanks, armored cars, and infantry forming northeast of PERCY at (43-42).

At 0915 the 24th Cavalry's command post was shelled and five persons wounded. During the remainder of the day Troops A and C worked lateral reconnaissance to the east; Troop E was held in squadron reserve. This squadron took 13 prisoners on the 29th.<sup>15</sup>

The German Counterattacks in Vicinity of Villebaudon-30 July

(Refer to Overlay No. 4)

Daily Summary. On the 30th the Right Column held its ground around and below PERCY. The Left Column spent most of the day near the northern bank of the MARCRON River, the Middle Column left this river line and swung west through LA DENISIERE and VILLEBAUDON.

This force turned east from VILLEBAUDON to out flank the enemy on the MARCRON River while striking for TESSY SUR VIRE. But enemy counterattacks against VILLEBAUDON and the artillery north of VILLEBAUDON interrupted this move. The 2d Battalion, 66th Armored Regiment, which was the heart of the Middle Column, beat off the enemy to secure VILLEBAUDON. At the same time the artillery north of VILLEBAUDON conducted its own close defense. When the day ended the command held PERCY, VILLEBAUDON and the MARCRON River.

Detailed Narrative. On the 28th of July the 14th Armored Field Artillery Battalion was located just north of VILLEBAUDON. At 0600 on the 30th the 14th Armored Field Artillery Battalion formed, on orders to move with the attack toward PERCY, in march column with the head of battery columns at the main road. At 0700, while the Battalion was in march column, the enemy launched an attack from southeast of PERCY. This attack later was to reach the 14th Armored Field Artillery area.

In line with the general scheme to bypass and contain the enemy, the Commanding General Combat Command A, at 0800, ordered the Middle Column to advance on TESSY SUR VIRE, with the mission of out flanking

the enemy forces on the high ground south of MOYEN. To accomplish this, the column moved out along the route LE DENISIERE-VILLEBAUDON. For this job the Middle Column was reconstituted and now included the entire 2d Battalion 66th Armored Regiment, Company "A" 66th Armored Regiment, the 1st Battalion 22d Regimental Combat Team, one platoon of Company A 17th Engineer Battalion, and a platoon from the Reconnaissance Company, 66th Armored Regiment.

This encircling movement of the Middle Column met enemy anti-tank guns and infantry south of VILLEBAUDON and received heavy artillery on the town. Then it was interrupted by an enemy attack that came from the east along the TESSY SUR VIRE-VILLEBAUDON road.

At 1130, while the 14th Armored Field Artillery Battalion was still formed up with heads of battery columns on the main road, the enemy launched a third attack--this one in the immediate vicinity of the 14th's area. In order to deliver fire immediately, the Battalion went into position on the spot under constant artillery and mortar fire. They stayed in position until 1415, all of the time under artillery and mortar fire. Soon friendly infantry of the 28th Infantry Division was being driven back through the artillery positions and ammunition was exploding in the battery areas. In the last hour, (from 1315 until 1415) the enemy closed in and kept the Battalion under small arms fire. All available men in the 14th manned small arms and defended the Battalion position from hedgerows. At 1400, the battalion fired red smoke to mark the direction and location of enemy attacks, thus enabling P-47's to break up the enemy attacks. Just before

evacuating the position the battalion was firing both east and west at enemy tanks at ranges of less than 2000 yards. Though ordered to evacuate the position, the battalion stayed on long enough to fire two urgent missions. After making arrangements to turn its fire requests over to the 44th Field Artillery Battalion, the 14th Armored Field Artillery Battalion finally moved to new positions to the northwest (41-49).<sup>16</sup>

While the 14th Armored Field Artillery Battalion was heavily engaged, the Middle Column and its reinforcements were fighting in the vicinity of the cross roads at VILLEBAUDON. This force had moved south through VILLEBAUDON to the east enroute to TESSY SUR VIRE when it met the enemy. This fight lasted 13 hours and involved 40 tanks as well as anti-tank guns and infantry. Meanwhile heavy German artillery fire was put on VILLEBAUDON in which the Combat Command A headquarters was located.

The 1st Battalion, 66th Armored Regiment was kept on a 30 minute alert until 1530, ready to move to VILLEBAUDON if needed. Then it was moved to assembly area northeast of VILLEBAUDON at (44-48) and was not committed against the German attacks.

Late in the day the enemy counterattacks were beaten off. At 2100 the infantry (1st Battalion 22d Regimental Combat Team) of the Middle Column secured VILLEBAUDON while the tanks of the force withdrew and assembled in a position northwest of VILLEBAUDON.

During the day General Rose received permission to concentrate his efforts on the capture of TESSY SUR VIRE rather than support the

PERCY forces as he felt that he might get his whole Combat Command cut off in the PERCY area.

Though cut off by the 116th Panzer Division on the north, the Right Column held the ground previously taken. As the infantry secured PERCY the remainder of the Right Column commenced withdrawing to an assembly area at (42-43).

By the end of the day the 14th Armored Field Artillery had fired 1191 rounds in 24 hours. In addition, after moving from the scene of its close combat, the battalion had had the 18th and 65th Field Artillery Battalions attached for supporting fires. Therefore the 14th's Fire Direction Center was at times controlling four battalions of 105 howitzers and making requests on corps artillery as well. To assist them XIX Corps Artillery sent a liaison officer to the battalion to aid with corps support.

During the day, the 24th Cavalry performed security for the units of Combat Command A, but made no contact with the enemy other than taking three prisoners of war. An enemy air attack north of LE MESNIL HERMAN wounded three personnel in the Squadron and its rear echelon.

Late on the 30th, Combat Command A was attached to the 29th Infantry Division with the mission of supporting the infantry now engaged in securing the left flanks of corps. The 29th Infantry Division mission was to attack east toward TESSY SUR VIRE and seize the high ground about one and one-half miles west of TESSY SUR VIRE at (49-46).

The German Start to Withdraw to the East-31 July

(Refer to Overlay No. 5)

Daily Summary. On the 31st the elements of the Combat Command near PERCY continued to hold its ground. Troops from other units took over the MARCRON River line. Then Combat Command A attacked from the vicinity of VILLEBAUDON towards TESSY SUR VIRE driving as far as BEAUCOUDRAY.

Detailed Narrative. By 0430 the 3d Battalion force reached its assembly area north of PERCY. There it remained on one-half hour alert throughout the day, prepared to attack.

The 2d Battalion, 66th Armored Regiment remained in Combat Command A reserve at LE PESRON, where it had assembled on the 30th after securing the cross roads at VILLEBAUDON.

The 14th Armored Field Artillery Battalion gave support from its previous day's position west of LA DENISIERE. One of its main missions on the 31st was firing a "serenade" (all available corps artillery firing T.O.T. on one target) on enemy infantry and tanks on the ridge just north of MONTABOT.

The 1st Battalion, 66th Armored Regiment, which was uncommitted on the 30th, was ordered from its position south of LA DENISIERE at 0545 and moved to an area southwest of VILLEBAUDON. The 24th Cavalry provided flank security on the left (north). At 0945 the 1st Battalion received orders from the Commanding General Combat Command A to attack and secure the high ground around DUMONT. For this operation Company B, 702d Tank Destroyer Battalion was placed in positions

north of BEAUCOUDRAY to protect the flank of Combat Command A.<sup>17</sup> The assault wave passed through the line held by the 29th Infantry Division. Paralleling the VILLEBAUDON-TESSY SUR VIRE highway, the battalion reached (45-45) at 1400 hours. Here several enemy tanks were located in a wooded area on the far side of an 80 foot deep ravine. The enemy tanks were engaged and four destroyed while a reconnaissance was made around the right flank of the ravine to find a suitable crossing. Artillery fire in the support of these enemy tanks was intense. At 2100, unable to find a suitable crossing, the 1st Battalion 66th<sup>18</sup> Armored Regiment force was ordered to secure the ground gained.

An interesting account of the 24th Cavalry's conduct of flank security in this action is included here to illustrate a reconnaissance unit's actions:

"On the 31st the squadron stood by alerted for immediate movement. At approximately 1300, Combat Command A received mission of moving E through the area bounded by the roads joining DENISERE, TESSY SUR VIRE and VILLEBAUDON and destroying all enemy in the area with TESSY SUR VIRE as an objective. At 1530 the squadron received the mission of moving E through a sector approximately one kilometer wide which was situated just N of and parallel to the highway running E from VILLEBAUDON to TESSY SUR VIRE, to destroy enemy snipers in the area, pass through the infantry lines, and contact and protect the north flank of the 66th Armored Regiment. Troop F reverted to squadron control at 1530. The squadron less Troop F moved dismounted to an assembly area approximately  $\frac{1}{2}$  km. NW of VILLEBAUDON. Troop C crossed the highway, which was the LD, at 1700 and Moved E in line of skirmishers, followed at 200 yds by Troop A. Troop E was held dismounted in squadron reserve and Troop F assembled mounted just E of the highway on our N flank. Meanwhile the enemy 2d Panzer Division had launched a determined counterattack accompanied by an extremely heavy artillery barrage which caused the 66th AR and the infantry to withdraw to the SE. This change of direction left a gap between the right flank of Troop C and the left flank of the 66th AR. The Squadron Commander immediately sent Troop E dismounted and one platoon of Troop F moved

to the SE to establish contact. When this was accomplished Troop C followed by Troop A swung S and made contact with Troop E. At 2200 the 66th AR was on the high ground S of the highway and SE of VILLEBAUDON. Troop E and 1 platoon of Troop F were on the north flank of the armor with their left flank S of the highway and at the cross road due E of and approximately 3 kms from VILLEBAUDON. Troop C was disposed on the ridge which continued N from Troop E's position, and Troop A was on the forward slope of the ridge and north of Troop C.

Squadron HQ and the remainder of TRP F were at 442467. Heavy artillery concentrations were delivered by both sides throughout the night."<sup>19</sup>

On the night of 31 July - 1 August the Germans started to withdraw to the east of the VIRE River, but left strong delaying forces behind.

The next day Combat Command A with its attachments took TESSY SUR VIRE.

TESSY SUR VIRE Falls to Combat Command A-1 August

(Refer to Overlay No. 5)

Daily Summary. On the 1st of August, from the vicinity of BEAUCOURAY, the Command, less elements near PERCY, drove on across the VIRE into and beyond TESSY SUR VIRE.

Detailed Narrative. Initially on this day the 1st Battalion continued its attack on TESSY SUR VIRE on the south side of the road from VILLEBAUDON, with the 3d Battalion, 66th Armored Regiment doing the same on the north. The 3d Battalion attack pushed to the outskirts of the town. Three tanks entered the town, but were practically useless due to malfunction, and a superior number of German tanks drove the small force off. The 3d Battalion, 66th Armored Regiment was then relieved by the 2d Battalion of its mission of taking TESSY SUR VIRE, as the 2d Battalion held the high ground on the outskirts of town.<sup>20</sup>



At 1500 the 1st and 2d Battalions, 66th Armored Regiment with infantry from the 22d Regimental Combat Team, attacked astride on the VILLEBAUDON-TESSY SUR VIRE road through the wooded area with the mission of taking TESSY SUR VIRE. They encountered strong enemy artillery and tank resistance as the enemy attempted to keep crossings over the VIRE River open. The method of attack was to place a medium tank on either side of and off the road with a light tank 50-100 yards behind them but on the road. Echeloned behind the light tank and off the road were two tank destroyers. The tank destroyers would knock out the German tanks (whose actions were uncoordinated) that the American tanks flushed out. For safety from HE, no infantry rode the lead tanks. This type of attack proved successful and soon the 3d Battalion, 22d Regimental Combat Team, with accompanying armor, seized TESSY SUR VIRE and outposted the high ground beyond.<sup>21</sup>

By 1700 the 1st Battalion, 66th Armored Regiment had attacked to within one mile of TESSY SUR VIRE. Nightfall found the 2d Battalion, 66th Armored Regiment one mile west of TESSY SUR VIRE.

The mission of Combat Command A was to stop enemy reinforcements from the CAEN area. By taking TESSY SUR VIRE and forcing the enemy east of the VIRE River the Combat Command prevented the enemy from interfering with operations in BRITTANY.

### SUMMARY

On the morning of 26th July from the vicinity of HEBECREVON (west of ST LO) Brigadier General Maurice Rose's Combat Command "A", with Colonel (later Brigadier General) C. T. Lanham's 22d Regimental Combat Team attached, drove south in one broad column through the German lines to ST SAMSON DE BON FOSSE - ST MARTIN DE BON FOSSE. Pushing on through the night the Combat Command was able to seize the initial objective (LE MESNIL HERMAN - HILL 183) by 1500 on the 27th. It also had reconnaissance forces as far as LE MESNIL OPAC and LA DENISIERE. Two of the three forces set up on the 28th were stopped by the enemy on the MARCON RIVER while the same day one Combat Command "A" force reached VILLEBAUDON. On the 29th, two forces were still held along the MARCON RIVER while the third force reached PERCY, which was part of the new objective. Attempts to outflank the enemy on the MARCON River by moves through VILLEBAUDON were delayed by enemy counterattacks on the 30th. But on the 31st of July and 1st of August the Combat Command drove for and finally reached TESSY SUR VIRE, thus seizing the final objective six days after "H" hour.

---

### NOTES FOR CHAPTER 3

<sup>1</sup>Lt Col Wilson M. Hawkins, "Operations Report for period 1-31 July inclusive" (APO 252, letter Headquarters Combat Command A, 2d Armored Division, dated 24 September 1944), passim.

<sup>2</sup>1st Lt John H. Cleveland, formerly Traffic Control Officer, Combat Command B, 2d Armored Division, an interview 1950.

<sup>3</sup>Capt William S. Parkins, Jr., formerly with the 41st Armored Infantry Regiment, an interview 1950.

<sup>4</sup>Capt Donald E. Eastlake, formerly with Company A, 66th Armored Regiment, an interview 1950.

<sup>5</sup>Brig Gen C. T. Lanham, The Negro Infantryman (Washington, Infantry Journal, 1950) passim.

<sup>6</sup>Col William F. Stokes, "Operations Period 1-31 July 1944" (APO 252, letter Headquarters 66th Armored Regiment, dated 11 August 1944), passim.

<sup>7</sup>Lt Col Harry A. Schendel, Jr., formerly with the 125th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron, an interview 1950.

<sup>8</sup>S-3 Periodic Report #10" (France, Headquarters 125th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron, 1944), passim.

<sup>9</sup>Chaplian Ben L. Rose, The Saga of the Red Horse (Nijmegen, Holland, N.V. Drukkerij, 1945), p 13.

<sup>10</sup>Maj Gen Edward H. Brooks, "After action report" (APO 252, letter Headquarters 2d Armored Division, Office of the Division Commander, 21 September 1944), passim.

<sup>11</sup>"The History of VII Corps, United States Army" (APO 307, Headquarters VII Corps, 6 August 1944, passim.

<sup>12</sup>Op cit, Col William F. Stokes, "Operations Period 1-31 July", passim.

<sup>13</sup>"Operations Annex" (APO 252, letter Headquarters letter Headquarters 14th Armored Field Artillery Battalion, 31 July 1944), passim.

<sup>14</sup>Extracts from "Operations History 2d Armored Division", a report prepared by Capt Donald K. Kelly, Part III, Operation Cobra, 26-31 July, passim.

<sup>15</sup>Lt Col F. H. Gaston, "History of 24th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron, Mechanized" (France, Headquarters 24th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron, Mechanized, 1944), passim.

<sup>16</sup>Op cit, "Operations Annex" (14th Armored Field Artillery Battalion), passim.

<sup>17</sup>Lt Col John A. Beal, "After Action Report for July 1944" (APO 230, Headquarters 702d Tank Destroyer Battalion, 9 August 1944), passim.

<sup>18</sup>Op cit, Maj Gen Edward H. Brooks, "After Action Report", passim.

<sup>19</sup>Op cit, "History of 24th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron, Mechanized, passim.

<sup>20</sup>Maj H. S. Long, Jr, "Tank Battalion in Operation Cobra" a student monograph (Fort Knox, The Armored School, 1949), passim.

<sup>21</sup>History 4th Infantry Division (Baton Rouge, Louisiana, Army and Navy Publishing Company, 1946), p 85.

CHAPTER 4  
COMBAT COMMAND B (27-31 JULY)

"...Securing a line between CERENCES and  
ST DENIS LE GAST<sup>1</sup>..."

Field Order No. 3, 19 July 1944, Headquarters, 2d Armored Division, stated that Combat Command B was to be prepared to execute any one of the three following missions:

(1) To seize and secure objective within its zone of action between CERENCES and ST DENIS LE GAST, and prevent enemy reinforcements moving to the north through this area.

(2) To move to COUTANCES to reinforce the 3d Armored Division.

(3) To move southeast to reinforce remainder of 2d Armored Division in its mission of securing LE MESNIL HERMAN and to push out to the south and east therefrom.<sup>2</sup>

Field Order No. 6, 20 July 1944, ordered Combat Command B, with Division Reserve, to seize and hold strongly all roads to the southeast between NOTRE DAME LE CENILLY and LENGRONNE.<sup>3</sup>

Field Order No. 4, Headquarters, Combat Command B, 20 July 1944, ordered the Combat Command to move to the southwest of CANISY in two columns. The four principle objectives of the attack were: First objective, vicinity of the high ground at coordinates (38.9-54.0); Second objective, NOTRE DAME LE CENILLY Third objective, vicinity of LENGRONNE; Fourth objective, CAMBERNON. The ultimate objective of Combat Command B was the securing of a line between CERENCES and ST DENIS LE GAST.<sup>4</sup> (Throughout

this chapter, refer to overlay No. 6).

Combat Command B entered into Operation COBRA 48 hours after H-Hour, and within three days had accomplished the major stroke of the entire operation of the VII Corps.

Combat Command B, commanded by Brigadier General I. D. White, consisted of: 67th Armored Regiment less the 3d Battalion; 1st and 3d Battalions; 41st Armored Infantry Regiment; 78th Armored Field Artillery Battalion; Company B, 17th Armored Engineer Battalion; Company C, 702d Tank Destroyer Battalion (S. P.). Additional support consisted of anti-aircraft, medical and ordnance maintenance units. The 62d Armored Field Artillery Battalion was in general support. The Combat Command was further organized into a Right Column and a Left Column. The Right Column consisted of the 1st Battalion, 67th Armored Regiment and the 1st Battalion, 41st Armored Infantry Regiment. The Left Column was composed of the 2d Battalion, 67th Armored Regiment and the 3d Battalion, 41st Armored Infantry Regiment. (For detailed organization see Figure 1).

Under Division order, the Combat Command was ordered to be prepared to move to CANISY at first light on the 27th of July, or when the roads were clear to the front.

Orders were issued on 26 July by the Commanding General, CCB, for movement of the Command to CANISY in one column and deployment into its Right and Left Columns immediately upon passing CANISY. The order of march to CANISY was: Reconnaissance Company, 67th Armored Regiment; Advance Guard of the Right Column; Advance Guard of the Left Column; Main Body of the Right Column; Main Body of the Left Column; Combat Trains.<sup>5</sup>

The Division Reserve, commanded by Colonel S. R. Hinds, followed CCB. It consisted of the 41st Armored Infantry Regiment (less 1st and 3d Battalions) and the 3d Battalion, 67th Armored Regiment. Headquarters of the 41st Armored Infantry Regiment formed the Headquarters of Division Reserve.<sup>6</sup>

The remainder of the division artillery followed Combat Command B in general support of it and of the Division Reserve.<sup>7</sup>

#### Attack of Combat Command B

27 July 1944

The attack of CCB was initially delayed by heavy traffic on the roads and by waiting for Combat Command A to clear. CCB began its operations at 1100B 27 July 1944, when it moved south from the vicinity of PONT HEBERT to CANISY in the wake of CCA. Reaching CANISY, the Command struck southwest on the road to DANGY, PONT BROCARD and NOTRE DAME LE CENILLY.

Reconnaissance and the Advance Guard of CCB made initial contact with the enemy at a point one mile southwest of CANISY. At this point, elements of the 82d Armored Reconnaissance Battalion were held up by superior enemy forces. The enemy was holding positions astride the road in the general vicinity of LAISNEY and QUIBOU. Heavy hostile small arms, mortar and artillery fire were received. The Advance Guard Battery, Battery A, 78th Armored Field Artillery Battalion, took positions on the right side of the highway, about one-half mile distance from the engagement, and opened fire on hostile self-propelled artillery and mortar positions.<sup>8</sup> Resistance was eliminated by the envelopment of the enemy's left flank.

RIGHT COLUMN

Recn Co.

Advance Guard:

1st Bn, 67 AR (-)  
Co A, 1st Bn, 41st AIR  
One Btry, 78th AFA Bn  
1 Plt, Co B, 17th AE Bn

Main Body

I & R Plt, 41st AIR  
Hq, CCB  
78th AFA Bn (-)  
Co B, 17th AE Bn (-)  
1st Bn, 41st AIR (✓)  
One Inf Co, 3d Bn, 41st  
Co C, 702d TD Bn (-)  
Arty Ammo Section  
M. P. Detachment

Trains

Right Column Trains  
1 Plat AAA (195th)

LEFT COLUMN

Advance Guard

Cmd Gp, 2d Bn, 67th AR  
Co, E, 67th AR  
Co I, 41st AIR  
1 Plt, Co C, 238th AE Bn  
Mortar Plt., Hq, 2d Bn  
Med. Det. 2d Bn, 67th

Main Body

Recn Plt, Hq, 67th AR  
1 Plt, Co B, 67 AR  
Cmd Gp & Hq Co, 67th AR  
3d Plt, Co C, 702d TD Bn  
Co C, 238th Engr Bn (-)  
Hq Co, 3d Bn, 41st AIR

Trains

"A" Trains, 62d FA Bn  
"A" Trains, 67th AR (-)  
"A" Trains, 3d Bn, 41st AIR  
Med Det, 67th AR  
Det, Co B, 48th Med Bn  
Det, Maint Co, 67th AR

Rear Guard

Lt Tk Sect, Maint Co, 67th AR  
Med Tk Plat, Maint Co,  
67th AR

Figure 1. Task organization of Combat Command B.

The essential ammunition, fuel and lubricant vehicles constituted the Combat Command Trains. All others reverted to Division Control.<sup>9</sup>



Following this action, the column returned to the highway and continued its advance toward DANGY.

After advance elements had cleared the town of LAISNEY, the ridge to the northwest was still held by the enemy, which endangered forward movement of the Advance Guard. A light tank platoon was left in this area to cover the flank of the Advance Guard in its movement to DANGY. This small force was also to cover the left column which swung off to the left, leaving the main highway and right column at this point.

The entire action received effective close support from fighter-bomber aviation, (P-47's).<sup>10</sup> Their action eliminated the hostile position on the ridge to the northwest of LAISNEY and permitted the Advance Guard of the right column to capture DANGY from a weakened enemy. DANGY was secured at approximately 1900B.

An interesting sidelight on this advance came after the war. General Fritz Bayerlein, erstwhile Commander of the 130th Panzer "Lehr" Division, stated that he had been having a staff meeting in DANGY at 1730, 27 July, when American tanks approached the town. He and his staff had hidden in one of the houses while the tanks passed through the town. When they had gone, he made good his escape. He found a mobile radio station and notified his corps commander that "nothing remained of the division".<sup>11</sup>

During the Advance Guard action in the vicinity of LAISNEY and DANGY, the main body of the Right Column was deployed off the road in the area north of CANISY to shorten the column. The 1st Battalion, 41st Armored Infantry Regiment, preceded by Company D, 67th Armored Regiment, was moved through CANISY to assist the Advance Guard action southwest of DANGY.

The Advance Guard of the Left Column, which had been following, turned on- to its route at DANGY.

The 82d Armored Reconnaissance Battalion (Division Reconnaissance) was attached to CCB at 1800B and placed in combat command reserve about one mile southwest of CANISY. This unit had the additional mission of maintaining contact with the 3d Armored Division.<sup>12</sup>

On departure from DANGY, the 1st Battalion, 41st Armored Infantry Regiment, was reinforced with Company D, 67th Armored Regiment. This force was moved to a position in the column directly in rear of the tank and infantry elements of the Advance Guard. The Advance Guard was placed under the control of the Commanding Officer, 1st Battalion, 41st Armored Infantry Regiment.

Advance on PONT BROCARD was continued by the Right Column in the face of small arms fire, mobile anti-tank guns, and tanks operating from the flanks. At approximately 1900B, PONT BROCARD, first objective, was reached after a sharp advance guard action with hostile armored cars. The advance was temporarily halted on the northern outskirts of PONT BROCARD by hostile anti-tank and small arms fire. This forced the deployment of the Advance Guard, which attacked and seized the town and defensive positions 2000 yards to the southwest. The town was secured at 2100B.<sup>13</sup>

Infantry and tank elements were disposed to organize the defensive position secured by the Advance Guard. The 78th Armored Field Artillery Battalion took positions just north of PONT BROCARD. The balance of the right column continued the march and moved into assembly areas south and north of NOTRE DAME LE CENILLY. Battery C, 129th Armored Anti-Aircraft

Battalion, was attached and joined the column enroute. The right column closed in the NOTRE DAME LE CENILLY area at 0200B 28 July 1944. Trains were moved to the vicinity of CANISY.

When the Right Column cleared the Road Junction at (42.5-58.5), the Main Body of the Left Column turned onto its route, moving over secondary roads on the first objective, to the high ground vicinity of (40-54). The Advance Guard of the Left Column gained the objective about 2000B 27 July 1944, in the face of small arms and artillery fire (horse-drawn artillery). Roads were extremely poor and muddy, slowing down advance of the Main Body of the Left Column, forcing them to divert to the axis of movement of the right column.

The Advance Guard, Left Column, began the advance to its second objective southeast of NOTRE DAME LE CENILLY at 280030B, July 1944, actually constituting a left flank guard for the combat command. This force reached its objective at 1000B 28 July 1944. The Main Body, Left Column, moved to the same area via NOTRE DAME LE CENILLY, and organized its sector of the second objective for defense.<sup>14</sup>

#### 28 July 1944

Combat Command B resumed the advance to secure its final objectives; Objective Three, the high ground in the vicinity of LENGRONNE, and Objective Four, vicinity of CAMBERNON. The attached 82d Armored Reconnaissance Battalion moved to secure crossings over the SIENNE River.

To accomplish this, the right column moved to secure the general line, Road Junctions at (34.2-47.5) and (34.5-46.8)

The left column of the command took the road junction at (35.3-45.7),

three kilometers due south of ST MARTIN DE CENILLY to protect the left flank. Lieutenant Colonel Richard Nelson, commanding the 1st Battalion, 67th Armored Regiment, was killed at this point when his tank was hit by German anti-tank fire.<sup>15</sup>

The right flank guard of the Right Column, commanded by Major William P. Ring, Jr., consisted of Company H, 67th Armored Regiment (less one platoon), Company G, 41st Armored Infantry Regiment, one platoon, Company B, 17th Armored Engineer Battalion, a small medical detachment - including a doctor, and a tactical air control party. This unit was given the mission of securing the crossroads at CAMBERNON. Upon arrival, its mission was to protect the movement of the Right Column to the fourth objective, CAMBERNON, and to prevent enemy movement southward. This column crossed the outpost line at 0900B and moved southwest down the main road to a point one mile north of ST DENIS LE GAST. From here, they turned northwest to their objective, which was secured by 1600B. Scattered light resistance was encountered all along the route. An estimated six enemy tanks caused delay just north of ST DENIS LE GAST. One anti-aircraft gun and an ammunition dump were located at the crossroads near CAMBERNON, the objective. The enemy destroyed these upon the approach of the column.

This force remained on its objective until 31 July 1944. More than 24 hours passed before it could be reinforced. Air support was utilized to assist it during its isolation. This small task force lost no vehicles, had few casualties, yet captured hundreds of prisoners.<sup>16</sup>

Movement of the Right Column was delayed by a strong hostile counter-attack of infantry and tanks, from the general direction of CERISY LA SALLE, directed at PONT BROCARD and NOTRE DAME LE CENILLY. The attack was stopped by artillery, tanks, infantry, and tank destroyers of the Right Column, assisted by an attack of Division Reserve elements as follows: Company F, 41st Armored Infantry Regiment, attacked southwest from PONT BROCARD, Company I, 67th Armored Infantry, moved to the vicinity of NOTRE DAME LE CENILLY and attacked north.

One Platoon of the Reconnaissance Company, 67th Armored Regiment, at 153OB was sent to PONT BROCARD to assist the 183d Field Artillery Battalion (VII Corps Artillery) which had been overrun by the enemy.

Due to the engagement of the elements of the Right Column in resisting the German counter-attack and the likelihood of its continuance, the 1st Battalion, 41st Armored Infantry Regiment, reinforced, was ordered to hold its positions and to protect movement of elements of the Left Column. The Left Column was to secure and block crossroads in the vicinity of ST DENIS LE GAST and LENGRONNE. Detachments of the Left Column were to block the movement of enemy forces from the north. These detachments reached their objectives during the night.

During the night of 28-29 July, advance elements of the 4th Infantry Division moved into the NOTRE DAME LE CENILLY area; liaison was effected and arrangements were made to relieve Combat Command B of this sector. At the same time, Division Reserve defended the sector NOTRE DAME LE CENILLY - PONT BROCARD.

29 July 1944

At 0400B, 29 July, the enemy attacked the Command's Left Column with infantry and tanks, supported by heavy mortar fire, in the vicinity of the crossroads southwest of ST MARTIN DE CENILLY. The enemy column was led by a self-propelled 88mm gun which overran the infantry outposts and raised havoc until a sergeant shot both driver and gunner. The gun was loaded and the motor still running when the action ended. The German infantry attacked the crossroads, wildly yelling "Heil Hitler". Stopped at the crossroads, the Germans attempted to outflank the defenders, but were again thrown back. The fighting continued until daybreak, when the Germans withdrew, leaving behind 17 dead and over 150 wounded.<sup>17</sup>

At 0900, an enemy column consisting of about 15 tanks and several hundred enemy infantry, struck at the crossroads at LA PENETIERE, overrunning newly arrived infantry from another division which had outposted the road junction. This left the defense of the crossroads to the 78th Armored Field Artillery Battalion, supported by four M-10's from the 702d Tank Destroyer Battalion. Batteries B and C fired direct fire and Battery A fired indirect fire on the approaching column. For 30 minutes of bitter action, the crossroads were held. Then elements of the 41st Armored Infantry Regiment passed through the artillery and reestablished the outpost line. Seven Mark IV tanks were knocked out within 1000 yards of the crossroads and two more near MAURIEL. A count of German dead numbered 126.

The main body of the Left Column, having participated in beating off the attacks of that morning, advanced at 1200B to reinforce the

blocking detachments of ST DENIS LE GAST and LENGRONNE which had been sent out the previous night. The column moved southwest to intersect the HAMBYE-ST DENIS Road at a point just west of HAMBYE. In doing so, it had to overcome stiff resistance from the high ground in the vicinity of (34-47). Upon reaching the road, a patrol was sent into HAMBYE and found the town clear of the enemy. The column then proceeded west through ST DENIS to LENGRONNE at 1530B.

The 62d Armored Field Artillery Battalion captured 169 prisoners in its bivouac area near LENGRONNE on the night of the 29th.

The Division Reserve moved to ST DENIS LE GAST, reaching that point at approximately 2200B 29 July.

At 2300B 29 July, the general situation was as follows: The 3d Armored Division and the 1st Infantry Division were to the north of the 2d Armored Division. Combat Command B of the 2d Armored, had just completed its southwest drive to the SIENNE River.

As the SIENNE generally runs from the southeast to northwest, it provided a barrier to the enemy on the west. This caused the Germans to retreat south into the small end of the funnel formed by these lines. The town of GAVRAY and its bridge across the SIENNE, strongly held by the enemy, constituted the mouth of this funnel and the logical escape gap for the Germans. The existence of this situation was confirmed by the report of enemy movements and by prisoner of war information. For example, at 1400B, air reconnaissance reported secondary roads from RONCEY to ST DENIS LE GAST choked by enemy vehicles.

The 3d Armored Division's advance on COUTANCES had been slowed

by the enemy to the extent that its operations could no longer be considered as the cutting force designed to close the trap on the enemy retreating before the VIII Corps. The whole success of the entrapment, therefore, depended on the 2d Armored's ability to hold the ST DENIS LE GAST-SIENNE River escape gap.

30 July 1944

Shortly before midnight, 29 July, a German column, estimated to consist of a company of infantry with supporting elements, drove from the southeast into the outposts of the Division Reserve south of ST DENIS. The enemy employed rocket fire and used flares extensively to guide its heavy gunfire.

Confused fighting had been going on in this sector for almost an hour, when two columns of the enemy attempted to break through the outpost line north of ST DENIS and escape to the south. The enemy force consisted of approximately 600 men of the 2d and 17th SS Panzer Divisions, and was supported by the bulk of the armor of a Panzer Battalion, about 90 vehicles. The enemy broke through the outpost line at (31.3-45.5) into the bivouac area and CP of the 3d Battalion, 67th Armored Regiment. They also threatened to engulf the CP of the Reserve which was 300 yards away. A great deal of damage was caused by a Mark V tank which 'poked its gun' across the hedgerow next to the 3d Battalion, 67th Armored Regiment's CP and destroyed the command half-track by its fire. The light of this burning vehicle aided the enemy's attack on the area, which finally had to be abandoned by the 67th's personnel. A heterogenous group of specialist personnel, including clerks, draftsmen, intelligence



personnel, radio operators, messengers, interpreters, and orderlies, organized a defensive position and was largely responsible for the protection of the CP of the Division Reserve.

The enemy column was stopped with hand-to-hand fighting and direct heavy gun fire, though one group of German vehicles and personnel broke through and took the town of ST DENIS LE GAST. Lieutenant Colonel Wilson D. Coleman, commanding the 2d Battalion, 41st Armored Infantry Regiment, who personally knocked out one German tank with a bazooka during the early stages of the engagement, was killed later in the action.

During that night and the following morning, in the area just north of ST DENIS, about 130 enemy dead and 124 enemy wounded were collected. Prisoners numbering 534 were taken and at least 26 vehicles, including seven tanks, were destroyed or captured. The Division Reserve's losses amounted to 77, officers and men, and 13 vehicles.

During this action, Division Reserve lost radio contact with the infantry company that held the area south of ST DENIS LE GAST. Colonel S. R. Hinds, commanding the Division Reserve, and his Executive Officer, Lieutenant Colonel Galloway, took a half-track and tried to reestablish contact with this unit. However, they encountered an enemy armored car and had to fight their way out. In so doing, they killed one of the enemy and wounded another.<sup>18</sup>

It was later discovered that night, that part of the enemy column which had forced its way into ST DENIS, turned west toward LENGRONNE at about 0200B and proceeded toward the bivouac area of the 78th Armored Field Artillery Battalion.<sup>19</sup>

At approximately 0030B, 30 July, German infantry attempted to infiltrate the bivouac area of Battery B, 78th Armored Field Artillery Battalion, located two miles west of ST DENIS in the direction of LENGRONNE. Outpost guards engaged the enemy and the attack was beaten off. During this action, 40 of the enemy were killed. Shortly thereafter, at approximately 0215B, an officer in an armored reconnaissance car, stopped on the edge of the battery area and reported the loss of ST DENIS LE GAST. At about the same time, a tank destroyer also pulled into the edge of the bivouac area to repair some damage suffered in a previous engagement. In a few minutes, an armored column was heard approaching on the road (the German column from ST DENIS) but fire was not opened as the tank destroyer crew and the regularly posted security AT gun crew, located on the road, failed to challenge the column. When the column stopped in the road between Battery B and the Battalion CP, two officers went to the road and challenged it in German. As the reply was "Was ist?", fire on prearranged signal was opened at point blank range from both sides of the road.

The fire from .50 caliber machine guns and 105mm howitzers at a range from 50 to 175 yards was extremely effective. An enemy personnel carrier blew up and its burning silhouetted the remainder of the German column, which was now under fire from all sides. The tank destroyer was also participating, firing into the rear of the enemy column. With vehicles destroyed at both head and rear of the column, escape was impossible except into the bivouac area of the Battalion on both sides of the road. Fleeing Germans, silhouetted in the light of burning vehicles,

Figure 21: Camp vehicles destroyed  
by 76th APA Bn, 30 July 1964.





were mowed down by machine gun fire. Ninety of the enemy were killed and 205 prisoners were taken. Prisoners taken were from the 2d SS Panzer Division, "Das Reich", the 5th Parachute Division and miscellaneous infantry divisions. The remains of eleven vehicles were found in the road as well as a number of 20mm, 47mm, 75mm, and 105mm guns.<sup>20</sup> (fig 2)

On this same eventful morning, at about 0100B, a force of about 2500 enemy troops, consisting of elements of the 2d SS Panzer Division, "Das Reich", Paratroops, Luftwaffe, Wehrmacht infantry, and Wehrmacht artillery attempted a break through south of CAMBRY. They were opposed by the 2d Battalion, 67th Armored Regiment, reinforced. This unit consisting of tanks, infantry and engineers, had just moved into position and was preparing its defensive outposts at the time of the attack. The enemy drove in a tank outpost but was stopped when an infantry squad leader mounted an M-5 tank and directed it to a position from which it broke up the enemy's attack.<sup>21</sup>

The ensuing battle, which lasted for six hours, was extremely bloody, and was replete with innumerable instances of individual heroism.<sup>22</sup> Hand-to-hand fighting with grenades, bayonets and small arms around the tanks in the light of burning vehicles characterized much of this action. Each friendly vehicle became a strong point and each was defended bitterly in the face of a four-to-one enemy numerical superiority. At about 0330B, the situation caused Captain Johnson, the Commanding Officer of the armored infantry company, to call for artillery fire from the 62d and the 78th Armored Field Artillery Battalions.



Figure 3: Campsite destroyed  
by 2nd Co 27th Inf, 26 July 1964.



It took about an hour to receive the fire, which was no surprise to the officer who had called for it. He had overheard the 78th's order 'Baker Battery fire direct' when he first called -- indicating that they were fighting in their immediate area. At approximately 0430B, the two Field Artillery Battalions placed fire directly on the enemy vehicles and decimated the column.<sup>23</sup> Fire for effect was fired from map data without benefit of registration.<sup>24</sup> Though cognizant of the danger, the Field Artillery forward observer, 1st Lieutenant Bennet, who directed the fire, courageously took the chance because of the critical situation. In this six hour night engagement, 450 of the enemy were killed, about 1000 surrendered and 90 enemy vehicles were destroyed. (fig 3) Most of the enemy dead and wounded were found with at least two wounds; many with four or more.<sup>25</sup> The following account of the action of Sergeant Hulon B. Whittington exemplifies the nature of the fighting on this night:

On the night of 29 July 1944, near GRIMESNIL, France, during an enemy armored attack, Sergeant Whittington, a squad leader, assumed command of his platoon when the platoon leader and platoon sergeant became missing in action. He reorganized his defense and, under fire, courageously crawled between gun position to check the action of his men. The advancing enemy attempted to penetrate a road block. Sergeant Whittington, completely disregarding intense enemy action, mounted a tank and by shouting through the turret, directed it into position to fire point-blank at the leading Mark V German tank. The destruction of this vehicle blocked all movement of the remaining enemy column consisting of over 100 vehicles of a Panzer unit. The blocked vehicles were then destroyed by hand grenades, bazooka, tank, and artillery fire. Large numbers of enemy personnel were wiped out by a bold and resolute bayonet charge inspired by Sergeant Whittington. When the medical aid man had become a casualty, Sergeant Whittington personally administered first aid to his wounded men.



Sergeant Whittington was awarded the Medal of Honor for this action.<sup>26</sup>

On the morning of 30 July, the 82d Armored Reconnaissance Battalion combed the area north of the scene of battle and captured 250 more prisoners and killed approximately 100. At 1145B, the 82d Armored Reconnaissance Battalion reported that the situation was breaking up and that 100 troops from the 2d SS Panzer Division, "Das Reich", had 'just walked in' and given themselves up.<sup>27</sup>

Combat Command B was alerted to move from the vicinity of LENGRONNE to NOTRE DAME LE CENILLY at 0700B, 31 July 1944.

31 July 1944

Due to the movement toward the front of other troops, who had priority, the Combat Command was unable to move until 1030B. All units were closed in their new assembly area in the vicinity of NOTRE DAME LE CENILLY by 1630B. Immediately, re-servicing was initiated and the command prepared for further action.

#### SUMMARY

The last two break-out attempts of the Germans on the morning of 30 July, represented the final coordinated gasps for freedom of the trapped enemy forces to the north. Combat Command B had aggressively forced its rolling mass of armor from CANISY, southwest to the SIENNE River, securing its final objective. This action prevented the enemy from reaching the strongly held escape gap at GAVRAY.

In the short period of three days, Combat Command B, with the aid of the Division Reserve, had driven approximately 20 miles against

strong enemy opposition to complete successfully the major blow of operation COBRA.<sup>28</sup>

The Ninth Tactical Air Force supported Combat Command B throughout the operation. Tactical Air Control Parties were successful in getting missions flown promptly and accurately. During daylight hours, friendly aircraft prohibited enemy use of main roads. Timely warning was given CCB of approaching enemy columns. Due to the sporadic disposition of units, vehicles displayed red fluorescent panels for identification by friendly aircraft. Throughout the 3-day engagement, air supremacy was maintained to the extent that enemy planes were rarely observed.<sup>29</sup>

For details of personnel and vehicular casualties see Appendix 4 and 5.

---

#### NOTES FOR CHAPTER 4

<sup>1</sup>Microfilm, 2d Armored Division (Operation COBRA), passim.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., passim.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., passim.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., passim.

<sup>5</sup>S-3 Report, 1-31 July 1944, Headquarters, Combat Command B, 2 August 1944, (extract), p 4.

<sup>6</sup>After Action Report, 1-31 July 1944, Headquarters, 41st Armored Infantry Regiment, 1 August 1944, p 93.

<sup>7</sup>Military Review, August, 1947, The 2d Armored Division in Operation COBRA, Lt. Col. H. M. Exton, p 14.

- <sup>8</sup>Op cit, S-3 Report, CCB, p 7.
- <sup>9</sup>Op cit, S-3 Report CCB, p 6.
- <sup>10</sup>Op cit, Military Review, p 17.
- <sup>11</sup>Enemy Intelligence Summary, 29 May 1945, Air M.I.S., Report on General-Leutiant Fritz Bayerlein (P.W.), p 4.
- <sup>12</sup>After Action Report, 82d Armored Reconnaissance Battalion, p 183.
- <sup>13</sup>Op cit, S-3 Report, CCB, p 7.
- <sup>14</sup>Op cit, S-3 Report, CCB, p 7.
- <sup>15</sup>Op cit, S-3 Report, CCB, p 7.
- <sup>16</sup>Interview - Lt. Col. William P. Ring Jr., 67th Armored Regiment, p 1.
- <sup>17</sup>Extracts from Operational History, 2d Armored Division, Phase 1, Operation COBRA, 26 July - 31 July 1944, p 6.
- <sup>18</sup>Ibid, p 8.
- <sup>19</sup>Op cit, After Action Report, 41st AIR, p 94.
- <sup>20</sup>After Action Report, 290900B - 300730B July 1944, Hq, 78th Armored Field Artillery Battalion, 31 July 1944, p 117.
- <sup>21</sup>Op cit, Extracts from oper. History 2d Armd., Div., p 10.
- <sup>22</sup>Interview - Major Jerome F. Smith, 67th Armored Regiment, p 1.
- <sup>23</sup>Op cit, Extracts from Oper. History 2d Armd. Div., p 10.
- <sup>24</sup>Op cit, Interview, Maj. Smith, p 1.
- <sup>25</sup>Op cit, Extracts from Oper. History, 2d Armd. Div., p 10.
- <sup>26</sup>The Medal of Honor of the United States Army, p 292.
- <sup>27</sup>Monthly S-3 Periodic Report, 002200 July to 302400 July 1944, Headquarters, 82d Armored Reconnaissance Battalion, 1 August 1944, p 184.

<sup>28</sup> Op cit, Microfilm, passim.

<sup>29</sup> After Action Report, 67th Armored Regiment, 2d Armored Division, 6 June 1944 to May 1945, p 203..

## CHAPTER 5

### Summary and Conclusions

"By evening of the 28th July the enemy's Front ... had been penetrated to a depth of some eighteen miles on a twenty mile front ..."<sup>1</sup>

#### SECTION I

##### Summary

Before evaluating the action of the 2d Armored Division, it is necessary to review the seven day period 26 July - 1 August. The 2d Armored Division, 22d Regimental Combat Team attached, had been employed as an exploiting force through an infantry division penetration. The mission assigned required divergent attacks by two combat commands; the divergent action developed to the extent that combat Commands were assigned to separate corps. However, the Division retained the responsibility for the administrative support of the entire Division.

This report has been devoted primarily to the operational phase of COBRA. Only such logistical and administrative material has been included as was necessary for a complete operational picture. There remain, however, certain comments that should be made to summarize the affects of logistical functioning on the operation.

The logistical situation was neither abnormal nor unfavorable. Although ammunition expenditure was limited by First Army, rapidity of movement resulted in a low expenditure rate, and no ammunition shortage was felt.<sup>2</sup>

Supply personnel carried out their duties while under enemy fire. Supply vehicles supplying combat elements frequently had to run a gauntlet of small arms and artillery fire. The Division supply personnel and installations were subjected to bombing attacks on several occasions. Despite these hazards, adequate supplies moved forward day and night.<sup>3</sup>

Medical support and evacuation were frequently accomplished under fire. Aid stations were often filled beyond capacity, not only with Division wounded but also those of the enemy. To alleviate this situation, captured German medical personnel were pressed into service.<sup>4</sup>

The personnel situation was good, due to the 15% overstrength and self contained replacement system provided by the TO/E. However extreme difficulty was experienced in replacing tank commanders, the category having the highest casualty rate.<sup>5</sup>

From a study of available material and from interviews with 2d Armored Division personnel, it is concluded that no administrative failure or shortage appeared which at any time affected the operation.

## SECTION II

### Conclusions

An evaluation of this report does not permit the expression of definite conclusions. Too many gaps exist in the available accounts of the action of the 2d Armored Division in COBRA to give a complete picture of the Division. For example: only a brief, incomplete account of the preoperational training could be found; information

regarding the liaison established with adjacent and higher units was unavailable. Although these matters are rather minor in themselves, their absence coupled with other sketchy, and sometimes conflicting operational accounts, dims the view of the situation which the unit commanders and staff must have had when planning for and executing COBRA.

In stating conclusions, this committee has made an effort to evaluate the action on the basis of authentic sources and to eliminate conclusions based on what "might have been."

Conclusions that are considered worthy of further study and analysis are:

that the 2d Armored Division demonstrated that the armored principles of retention of the initiative and flexibility can not be overemphasized;  
(These principles are conclusively supported by the entire action and in particular by the action of Combat Command A for 28th July.)

that in the exploitation, all units in an armored division service as well as combat, must be prepared to fight;

extended frontage increases the necessity of each unit being prepared to fight;  
(for examples of supporting units engaging in combat see action of Combat Command B for 29 and 30 July.)

that the course of action can be affected by the initiative of Combat Commanders;  
(See action of Combat Command A for 27th July.)

that the 2d Armored could not have attained success without detailed planning, tank-infantry training, special attention to communications, and centralized supply;

that meager reference to regimental headquarters tends to support the soundness of the separate battalion organization that now exists in the Armored Division in so far as the organization applies to tactical operations.

The outstanding feature of the COBRA operation was the failure

of the Germans to recognize the direction of the attack. This may be attributed to numerous causes, but the chief one appears to have been a lack of information and communication at the enemy's higher command level. As a result, enemy units were defeated in detail due to their piecemeal commitment.<sup>6</sup>

The key to the success of the 2d Armored Division in operation COBRA was the concentration on objectives; by passing resistance, where necessary, to attain them.

#### NOTES FOR CHAPTER 5

---

<sup>1</sup>VII Corps After Action Report - Microfilm 162, Documents Section, The Armored School, Fort Knox.

<sup>2</sup>First U. S. Army Report of Operations 20 October 43 - 1 August 44 Annexes 12-14 Library, The Armored School, Fort Knox.

<sup>3</sup>After Action Report 2d Armored Division, Library, The Armored School, Fort Knox, Passim.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Op. cit First U. S. Army Report, Book V, page 1.

<sup>6</sup>Report by the Supreme Allied Commander to the Combined Chiefs of Staff on Operations in Europe of the Allied Expeditionary Force, 6 June 1944 to 8 May 1945 prepared by General of the Army Dwight D. Eisenhower (Washington, Government Printing Office, 1946.)



APPENDIX I  
ENEMY SITUATION

The enemy situation was considered far from favorable. Since the Normandy landings he had lost an estimated 160,000 men, 11 generals, 400 tanks, and 2500 vehicles. The replacement and supply situation was strained. Odd units, such as "Marsch Battalions", separate regiments, "Kampfgruppen", continued to arrive, but piecemeal and not in sufficient strength to affect the impending battle.<sup>1</sup> (Fig 1 - Enemy order of battle.)

The enemy divisional organization as such, had almost disappeared on the VII Corps front. The exceptions were the 2d SS Panzer Division and the 17th SS Panzer Division, but even the 17th SS Panzer Division had been identified on the fronts of three U. S. Corps (VII, VIII, XIX). The remnants of the divisional units had been formed into "Kampfgruppen" (battle groups) named for their senior officers. The estimated strength of the enemy infantry opposing VII Corps was 10,000.

The enemy's losses in tanks far outstripped his available replacements. The estimate of enemy tank strength in the Corps Zone was as follows:

Mark IV---25

Mark V----20

Miscellaneous Mark III, Somme and Hotchkiss in GHQ Reserve--Unknown

Estimated artillery strength of the enemy in Corps zone:

105mm How---44

150mm Gun How---18

Assault Guns 6 Batteries (4 guns each) 24<sup>2</sup>

The transport problem was acute, compounded of a chronic fuel and lack of maintenance and replacement, which made his task

XXXXXX

O B WEST

XXXXX

ARMY GROUP 3

XXXX

SEVENTH ARMY

XXX  
Pz LVIII

XXX  
Pz XXXXVII

XXX  
? LXXXIV

XX 2 XX 1 SS XX 2 SS XX 10 SS XX 17 SS XX 130 Lehr

XX 116 XX 5 XX 84 XX 91 XX 243 XX 266

XX  
XX 275

XX  
XX 353

111 Battle  
Group  
Kentner

XX  
XX 2

11  
18

11  
2

Fig 1. Enemy order of battle

increasingly difficult. This transport shortage plus destruction of fuel and ammunition dumps by Allied air created a fuel and ammunition shortage and limited his artillery activity.

German morale was considerably lowered. Senior officers in particular had not completely recovered from the after-effects of the attempted putsch against Hitler. Troop morale suffered because of several factors: lack of support from the Luftwaffe; overwhelming superiority of Allied forces; and disillusionment because of the failure of the promised "super weapons".

Several times prior to 25 July the Germans loudly proclaimed through their propaganda channels that they were aware of Allied intentions to break out of the beachhead. On the other hand, however, they failed to react to the Allied build up for the attack. Three factors may account for this: losses and disorganization created in the establishment of the Normandy beachhead; successful Allied strategic deception; a desire to protect the V-1 launching sites in the PAS DE CALAIS. In spite of all the factors working against them, it was considered that the German units and individuals in the zone would continue to fight with determination and courage.<sup>3</sup>

#### ENEMY SITUATION AFTER THE BREAKTHROUGH

The 130th Panzer Lehr Division and the 5th Parachute Division were apparently quickly eliminated as effective fighting forces. General Fritz Bayerlein, Commanding General, Panzer Lehr Division, at 1730 27 July notified his Corps Commander that "nothing remained of his division".<sup>4</sup> Identification of units of the 5th Parachute Division ceased after the first two days of fighting. It was these two German

Divisions which bore the brunt of the Allied air bombardment and initial attack in the 2d Armored Divisions zone.

The enemy capabilities as seen by VII Corps G-2 were:<sup>5</sup>

- "(1) Defend on line South of Ay, Seves, Taute Rivers.
- (2) Delay and withdraw to high ground North of Coutances.
- (3) Combination of 1 & 2."

Insufficient information of the enemy's capabilities existed on which to base a conclusion as what course of action he would adopt.

EEL---(VII) Corps<sup>6</sup>

"Information of strength, disposition, and defensive organization:

- (a) South of AY, river and along GEFOSSEE-ST SAUVIER LENDELEN.
- (b) Early information of movement south toward high ground north of COUTANCES.
- (c) Information of any movement of enemy reenforcement into the area north of COUTANCES.
- (d) Detailed information of terrain obstacles and ground organization in the Corps zone".

Combat Command A . As the attack progressed to the south, major elements of two divisions-the 2d Panzer and 116th Panzer - were contacted. The strength, composition, and employment of these two divisions is tangled in confusion. Apparently the 116th Panzer Division came in from the south with its major strength in the vicinity of PERCY-VILLEBAUDON. One regiment of this division was located just southeast of VILLEBAUDON on 29 July. However, the 2d Panzer Division was also identified in this area, and both these divisions were identified in the vicinity of MOYEN, to the north. Elements of the 243d Infantry Division were also identified in this area, but apparently these were only remnants that had fallen back from the

vicinity of ST LO.

Combat Command B. The identification of units and their strength is even less certain in the CCB zone than in CCA. On 28 July CCB received a stiff attack at PONT BROCARD and NOTRE DAME LE CEN-ILLY which came from the vicinity of CERISY LA SALLE. The unit or units participating in this attack are not identified. The following day, however, elements of the 243d Infantry Division were identified at CERISY LA SALLE. The 2d SS "Das Reich" Panzer Division was identified near GREMESNIL on 28-29 July.

Summary of German Units Opposing in 2d Armored Division Zone.

Units in the greatest strength in the line of departure area were the 130th Panzer "Lehr" and 5th Parachute Divisions, which were located west and northwest of ST LO, generally in the area between ST GILLES and MARIGNY. The 5th Parachute Division was minus two battalions, which were located a short distance from LESSAY. Apparently the entire 130th Panzer "Lehr" Division was located in this area, but there is definite information on the location of only one regiment-the 902d at HEBECREVON. The 275th Infantry Division was next on the German left. Elements of the 266th Infantry were on the German right, in the vicinity west and south of ST LO. Each of the above units was positively identified through prisoners in the first two days of action. Elements of two other divisions also were believed to be in the ST LO area, the 352d and 353d Infantry Divisions: of these only the 353d was later identified, and that not until CCA had reached the VIRE River.

Other Units Capable of Affecting Operations

It was estimated that enemy reserves capable of reaching the battle zone in time to affect the attack included two panzer and three infantry divisions, and that it would be three or more days before any could reach the battle area. Of these forces, two panzer divisions - the 116th and 2d - did come in from the east and south and hit CCA in the area south of LE MESNIL HERMAN.

All other German units on the First Army front were considered capable of affecting operations of the 2d Armored Division. Major resistance met by CCB after passing FONT BROCARD, was from units retreating or withdrawing from in front of VIII Corps. To illustrate, elements of the German 243d Infantry Division contacted at CERISY LA SALLE, and possibly responsible for the attacks on CCB at FONT BROCARD and NOTRE DAME, had been located far to the west, between LESSAY and the sea.

---

NOTES FOR APPENDIX I

<sup>1</sup>First Army Report of Operations 20 Oct 43 - 1 Aug 44.

<sup>2</sup>Annex 1 (Intell) to FO #8 VII Corps (Microfilm).

<sup>3</sup>Op cit First Army Report.

<sup>4</sup>A.P.I.U. (Ninth AF Adv) 63/1945, Enemy Intelligence Summaries.

<sup>5</sup>Op cit Annex 1 to FO #8 VII Corps.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid

## APPENDIX II

### TERRAIN STUDY

#### Terrain in VII Corps Sector

The terrain from ST LO to PERIERS and south to the line ST GILLES-MARIGNY-ST SAUVIER LENDELEN is generally low and rolling with the slope running from north to south. The average elevation is approximately 50 meters but rises to 112 meters in the small hill mass just north of MARIGNY. This area is cut by numerous small streams, which run in a north-south direction. South of the line MARIGNY-ST GILLES, the ground continues to rise to an east west ridge line overlooking the SOULLE River, running from MONTPICHON (142 meters), to LE MESNIL HERMAN (150 meters). The crest of this ridge line is HILL 183 directly south of CANISY. West of MARIGNY the elevation also increases as far as COMPROND (177 meters); farther west the terrain continues hilly with little change in elevation for three miles. The western limit of this ridge is the high ground at MONTHUCHON (176 meters), north of COUTANCES. From here east, the terrain slopes gently to the ocean. South of the SOULLE River and north of the line VILLEBAUDON-LENGRONNE, are two ridges, one running from NICORPS (108 meters) south east to NOTRE DAME LE CENILLY. The highest ground in this area being the ridge (135) 2000 meters south east of NOTRE DAME LE CENILLY to the east of the SOULLE River. A ridge, beginning just north of ST SAMSON DE BON FOSSE (110), runs through VILLEBAUDON (176 meters) to the high ground north and east of PERCY (270 meters). As can be seen from the foregoing, the dominant terrain in the area

is the east west ridge line from MONTPICHON to LE MESNIL HERMAN and the high ground north east of PERCY.

The country is typical bocage with innumerable hedgerows and a liberal sprinkling of trees and orchards. The terrain will support armored operations with major obstacles to tank operations being the hedgerows.

The major streams west of the VIRE River are the LORZON, TERRETE and SOULLE Rivers. While these are small streams, they drain fairly good sized valleys.

#### Weather

Statements of personnel participating in Operation Cobra indicate that the weather for the period of this operation was dry, warm, and clear.<sup>1</sup> This statement is from memory and to a certain extent is contradicted by an extract of 14th Armored Field Artillery operations annex which states "26 July 0900-1200 rain and low ceiling poor visibility". However, it appears that the weather was generally as stated by the participants.

---

#### NOTES FOR APPENDIX II

<sup>1</sup>Statement 1st Lt JOHN H. CLEVELAND Headquarters CCB 2d Armored Division.

Inclosure  
Terrain Overlay



APPENDIX III

OPERATIONS OVERLAYS

Overlay

Operational History 2d Armored Division  
26-31 July

Overlay-3

Operations CCA 26-28 July

Overlay-4

Operations CCA 29-30 July

Overlay-5

Operations CCA 31 July - 1 Aug

Overlay-6

Operations CCB

APPENDIX IV

LOGISTICS

Petroleum Oil and Lubricants. During the period of Operation Cobra the division consumed the amount of gasoline, deisel fuel, and engine oil as shown in Table 1. These supplies were carried forward to the using units by trucks of the mobile supply truckhead. Re-supply of class III, from 1st Army (24-27 July) and VII Corps supply dumps (28-30 July), was accomplished by division. The trucks of the truckhead were used for this purpose.

TABLE 1

FUEL CONSUMPTION 2d ARMORED DIVISION<sup>a</sup>

Item	Consumption
Gasoline, V-80	292,145 gallons
Oil, all types	6,245 gallons
Diesel Fuel	4,345 gallons

a. Table is taken from personal files of Lt Col F. M. Muller, Assistant G-4 2d Armored Division.

AMMUNITION. Class V was a critical item of supply, it having been rationed by the Commanding General, First Army.<sup>b</sup> However, the division was never adversely affected by the rationing order. Ammunition expenditures for the period are shown in Table 2.

TABLE 2

AMMUNITION EXPENDITURES 2d ARMORED DIVISION<sup>c</sup>

Item	Consumption
Artillery Ammunition	11,159 Rounds
Other types	85 Tons

<sup>b</sup>First Army Report of Operations, 20 Oct 43-1 Aug 44.  
Annex 12-14.

<sup>c</sup>Op Cit, Lt Col F. M. Muller

Critical losses suffered by the division during the operation are shown in Table 3.

TABLE 3

CRITICAL LOSSES 2d ARMORED DIVISION<sup>d</sup>

Item	Number
<u>ORDNANCE</u>	
Small Arms (all types)	16
Gun, Mach., cal .30 and cal .50	13
Binocular, M3	1
Launcher, Rocket	30
Tank, Medium, M4A1	37
Tank, Light, M5	9
Carriage, Motor, 75mm How., M8	5
Car, Armored, Rcn., M8	4
Car, Half Track, M2	9
Carrier, Personnel, Half Track, M3	11
Car, Half Track, M4, 81mm Mortar	2
Truck, 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ ton, Cargo	5
Truck, $\frac{1}{4}$ ton, 4x4	15
Motorcycle, Solo	2
Gun, 37mm, Towed	5
Gun, 57mm, Towed	2
Mortar 60mm	5
Mortar 81mm	1

(Table 3 Cont'd)

Item	Number
<u>ENGINEER</u>	
Compass, Lensatic	12
Nets, Camouflage (all types)	13
<u>MEDICAL</u>	
Chest, Medical	2
Tent, Surgical Truck	1
Tent, Hospital Ward	1
<u>SIGNAL</u>	
Radio Sets (all types)	106
Switchboard, BD-71	1
Telephone, EE-8-A	16
Panel Set, AD-50-A	44
Detector, Mine, SCR-625	4

<sup>d</sup>Table is taken from personal files of Lt Col F. M. Muller.

Replacements for critical losses of Ordnance items were as shown in Table 4. It is interesting to note that, in almost every case, at least 90% replacement of major items had been made by the close of the operation.

TABLE 4

VEHICLES LOST AND REPLACED  
26-31 JULY 1944<sup>e</sup>

Item	Number
Tank, M4	37
Half Track, M2A1	6
Truck, $\frac{1}{4}$ ton 4x4	7
Carriage, Motor, 75mm Howitzer	4
Car, Armored, M8	2

(Table 4 Cont'd)

---

---

Item	Number
Truck, 2½ ton, Cargo	2
Car, Half Track, M3A1	4
Trailer, 1 ton, Cargo	5
Tank, Light, M5A1	8
Half Track, Ambulance	1
Half Track, M4	1
Motorcycle	1

---

Vehicles knocked out and repaired are not included.

<sup>e</sup>Table taken from certificate of Lt Col Charles C. Peterson  
A/C of Staff G-4 2d Armored Division, Microfilm 108 The Armored School.

TABLE 5  
CAPTURED MATERIAL<sup>f</sup>

---

---

Item	Number
<u>ORDNANCE</u>	
Armored Car (all types)	19
Truck, 2½ ton, Cargo	15
Truck, 4 ton	2
Gun, 57mm, AT, Towed	5
Gun, 88mm, AT, Towed	1
Gun, 37mm, AT, SF	2
Car, C&R	3
Sedan, Special Staff	7
Tanks, Mk IV	2
Truck, ¼ ton	2
Car, Command Artillery	2
Personnel Car	2
Truck ½ ton	1
150mm, SP, Ferdinand	1
105mm, Howitzer, Towed	2
Tank, Ludendorf	1

(Table 5 Cont'd)

Item	Number
<u>SIGNAL</u>	
Radio Sets (all types)	3

<sup>f</sup>Table taken from personal file Lt Col F. M. Muller.

TABLE 6  
ENEMY VEHICLES DESTROYED<sup>g</sup>

Item	Number
Tank, Mk IV	29
Tank, Mk V	33
Half Tracks and Armored Cars	136
Miscellaneous Tanks	2
Miscellaneous Vehicles	400 (Approx)

<sup>g</sup>Table taken from Microfilm 108 The Armored School.

A study of tables 3, 5 and 6 reveals that enemy vehicular losses were 600% greater than those suffered by the 2d Armored Division. No comparison of materiel losses, other than vehicular, can be made because no complete list of enemy losses was compiled for the operation.

APPENDIX V

CASUALTIES IN OPERATION COBRA

Though fairly heavy when considered alone, 2d Armored Division losses were light in comparison with the tremendous damage inflicted on the enemy. CCA reported an estimated 1200 enemy killed and 950 captured during the period 26-31 July. During the same period the Combat Command reported it's own casualties to be:

KIA		WIA		MIA	
Off	EM	Off	EM	OFF	EM
6	62	24	339	1	35

CCB estimated 1500 enemy killed and reported the capture of 3650 enemy enlisted men and 73 officers. This figure does not fit the division total but is probably the most accurate of the two. The following quotation from the CCB S-3 Periodic Report for the period will explain why, in many cases, the two sets of figures are in variance.

"...Prisoners of War were evacuated, this number includes 275 wounded and evacuated through Company B 48th Medical Battalion. Many other Prisoners of War were turned over to units in rear of the Combat Command for evacuation".

Casualties for CCB for the period were reported as follows:

KIA		WIA		MIA	
Off	EM	Off	EM	Off	EM
8	84	26	258	1	68

In reviewing the total casualty figures for the division we are again confronted with a variance between the combat command

figures and the total division figures. Again, it is believed that it is reasonable to assume that, as with the Prisoners of War, many casualties were evacuated through channels other than division, so that we are probably correct in assuming that both sets of figures are right considering the reports on which they are based.

The following are the division casualty figures for the period as compiled by Lieutenant Colonel Love, G-1, 2d Armored Division.

KIA		WIA		MIA	
Off	EM	Off	EM	Off	EM
11	81	45	423	0	40



9 JAN 1974

*Copy*

1. The first part of the report is devoted to a description of the

experimental apparatus and the method of data collection.

The second part of the report

contains a discussion of the

results of the experiment.

The third part of the report

contains a summary of the

conclusions.

.....

.....



# OVERLAY NO 3

## OPERATIONS CCA 26-27-28 JULY

MAP FRANCE GSGS 1/50000

- ① CCA lost a tank to an AT gun here on 26 July
- ② CCA took up two routes here on 26 July
- ③ Surrounding area road blocked by 702nd TD Bn on the morning of 27 July
- ④ 2nd Bn 66th AR fought for Hill 183 from 271100 until 271500; after objective was taken infantry secured the hill
- ⑤ 3rd Bn 66th AR reconnaissance forces furtherest point of advance as of 272100
- ⑥ Reconnaissance forces
- ⑦ High ground taken by 1st Bn 66th AR reconnaissance force at 272000; 24th Cavalry Squadron then secured the area for the night
- ⑧ CCA reached this cross road northeast of LE MESNIL HERMAN at 270200
- ⑨ Task Force (from the reinforced 3rd Bn 66th AR), consisting of one medium tank company and one infantry company, left the battalion assembly area on the morning of the 28th. The force went by way of LA DENISIERE (already secured) to capture VILLEBAUDON by 281200
- ⑩ 1st and 2nd Bn 22nd RCT held up here as 3 Task Forces of CCA jumped off on the morning of 28 July
- ⑪ Knocked out by 1st Bn 66th AR Task Force on 28 July
- ⑫ 1st Bn 66th AR Task Force held up here until 282100, then relieved an infantry battalion
- ⑬ Assembly area 2nd Bn 66th AR (-) 28 July
- ⑭ Assembly area Task Force 1st Bn 66th AR from 282200 to 29 July
- ⑮ One tank company (reinforced) from 1st Bn 66th AR moved out on the morning of 28 July with mission of seizing MOYEN

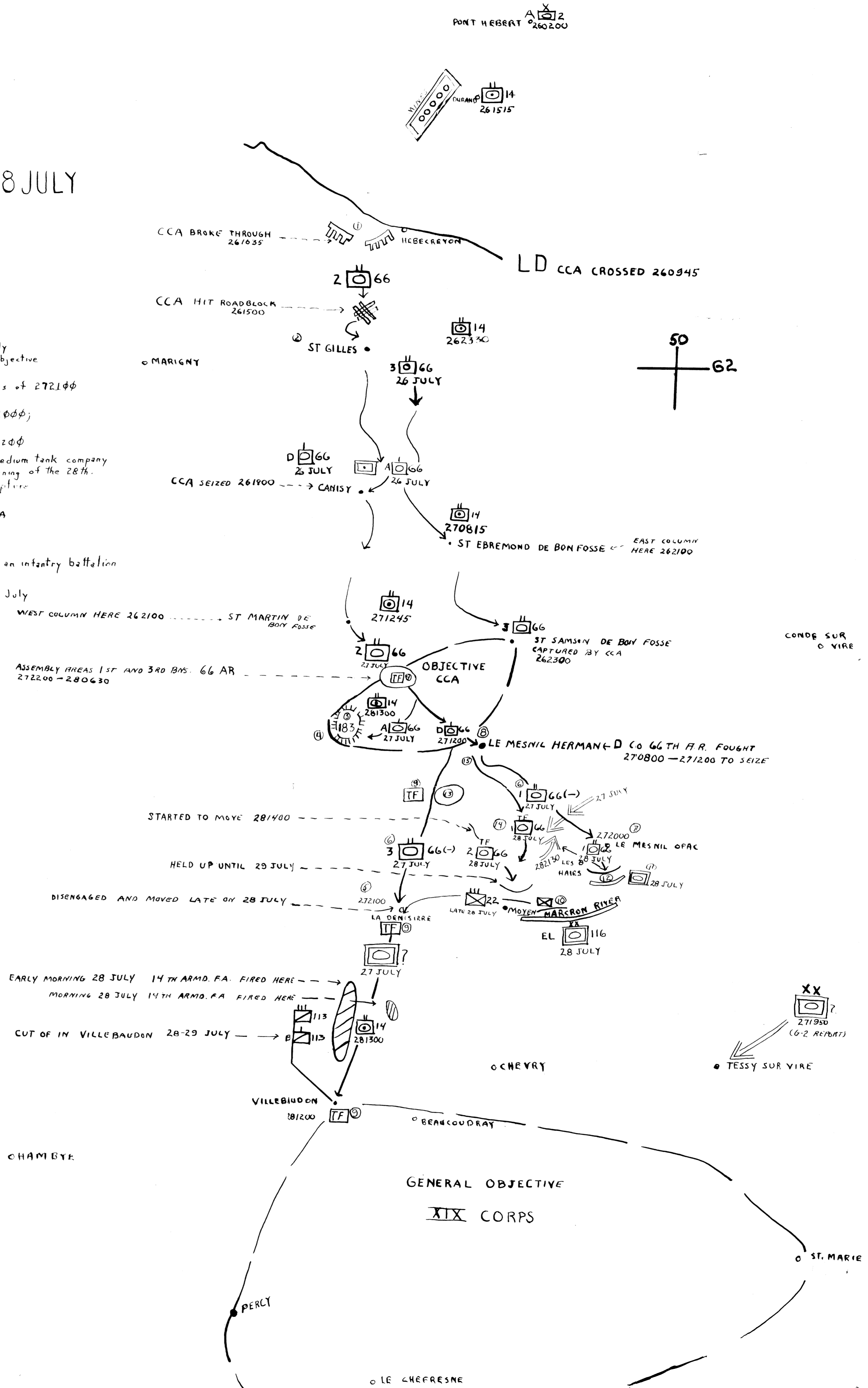
### INITIAL TASK ORGANIZATION

WEST COLUMN  
C.O. 2nd Bn, 66th AR

- 2 [66]
- 2 [22]
- RR [66]
- A [17]

EAST COLUMN  
C.O. 3rd Bn, 66th AR

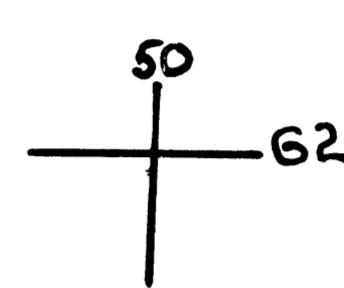
- 3 [66]
- 1 [22]
- RCN [66]
- A [17]



ST JEAN DE D'AY  
RAU LINE

POINT HEBRAT 260200

NEW BRIDGE 261515



CONDE SUR VIRE

XX [66] 271950 (G-2 Report)

TESSY SUR VIRE

GENERAL OBJECTIVE  
XIX CORPS

ST. MARIE

LE CHEFRESNE

CHAMBYE

VILLEBAUDON 281200

CHEVRY

BEAUCOURDRAY

PERCY

MARIGNY

CCA BROKE THROUGH 261035

CCA HIT ROADBLOCK 261500

CCA SEIZED 261900

WEST COLUMN HERE 262100

ASSEMBLY AREAS 1ST AND 3RD BNS. 66 AR 272200 - 280630

STARTED TO MOVE 281400

HELD UP UNTIL 29 JULY

DISENGAGED AND MOVED LATE BY 28 JULY

EARLY MORNING 28 JULY 14th ARM. FA FIRED HERE

MORNING 28 JULY 14th ARM. FA FIRED HERE

CUT OFF IN VILLEBAUDON 28-29 JULY

LD CCA CROSSED 260945

EAST COLUMN HERE 262100

ST SAMSON DE BON FOSSE CAPTURED BY CCA 262300

LE MESNIL HERMAN - D Co 66th AR FOUGHT 270800 - 271200 TO SEIZE

LE MESNIL OPAC 272000

MOYEN 281200

EL 116 28 JULY

113

113

14 281300

113

113

113

113

113

113

113

113

113

113

113

113

113

113

113

113

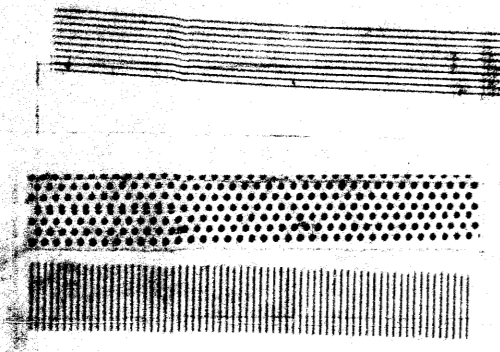
113

113

# NO. 2 TERRAIN OVERLAY

1 = 50000

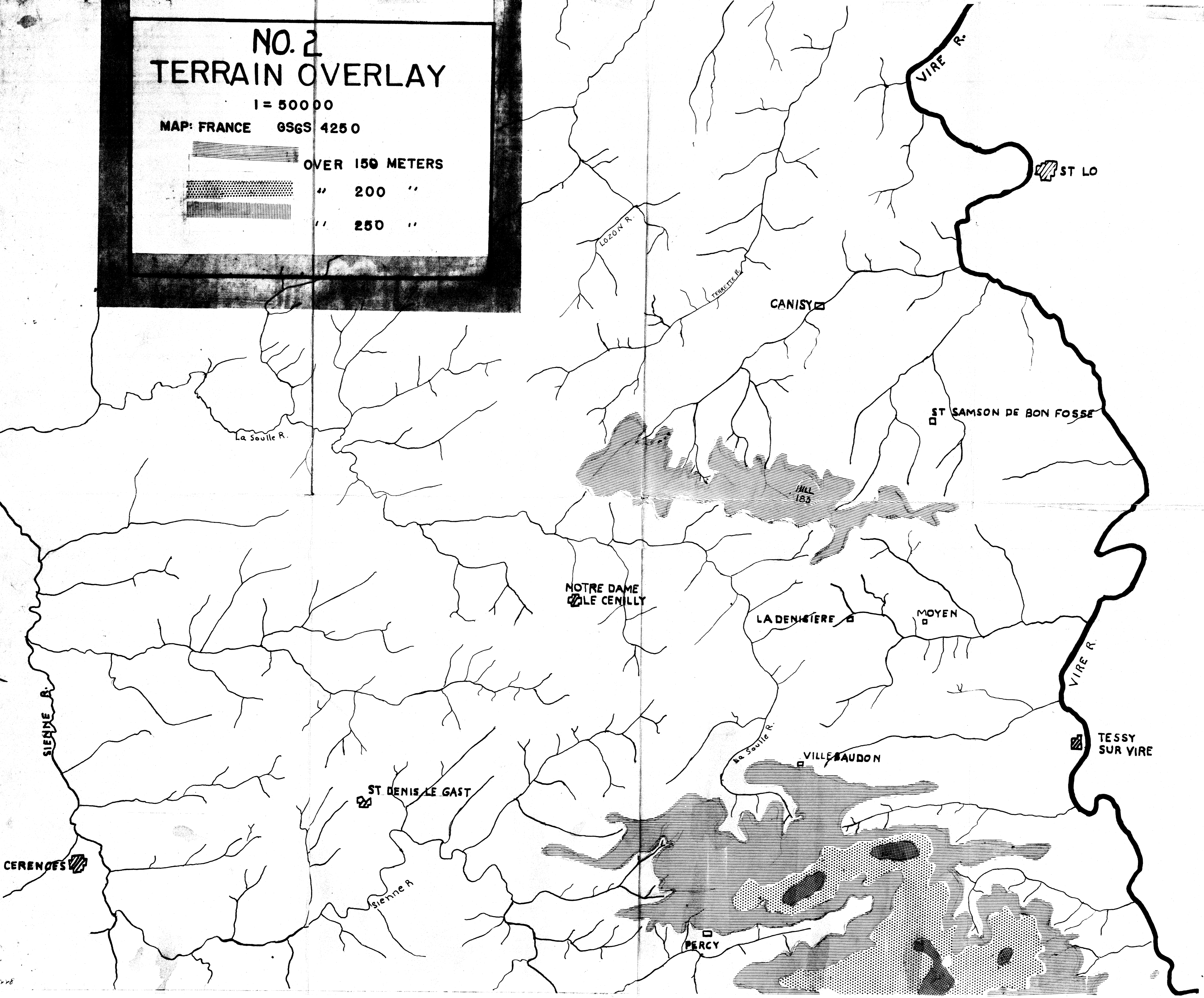
MAP: FRANCE GSGS 4250



OVER 150 METERS

" 200 "

" 250 "





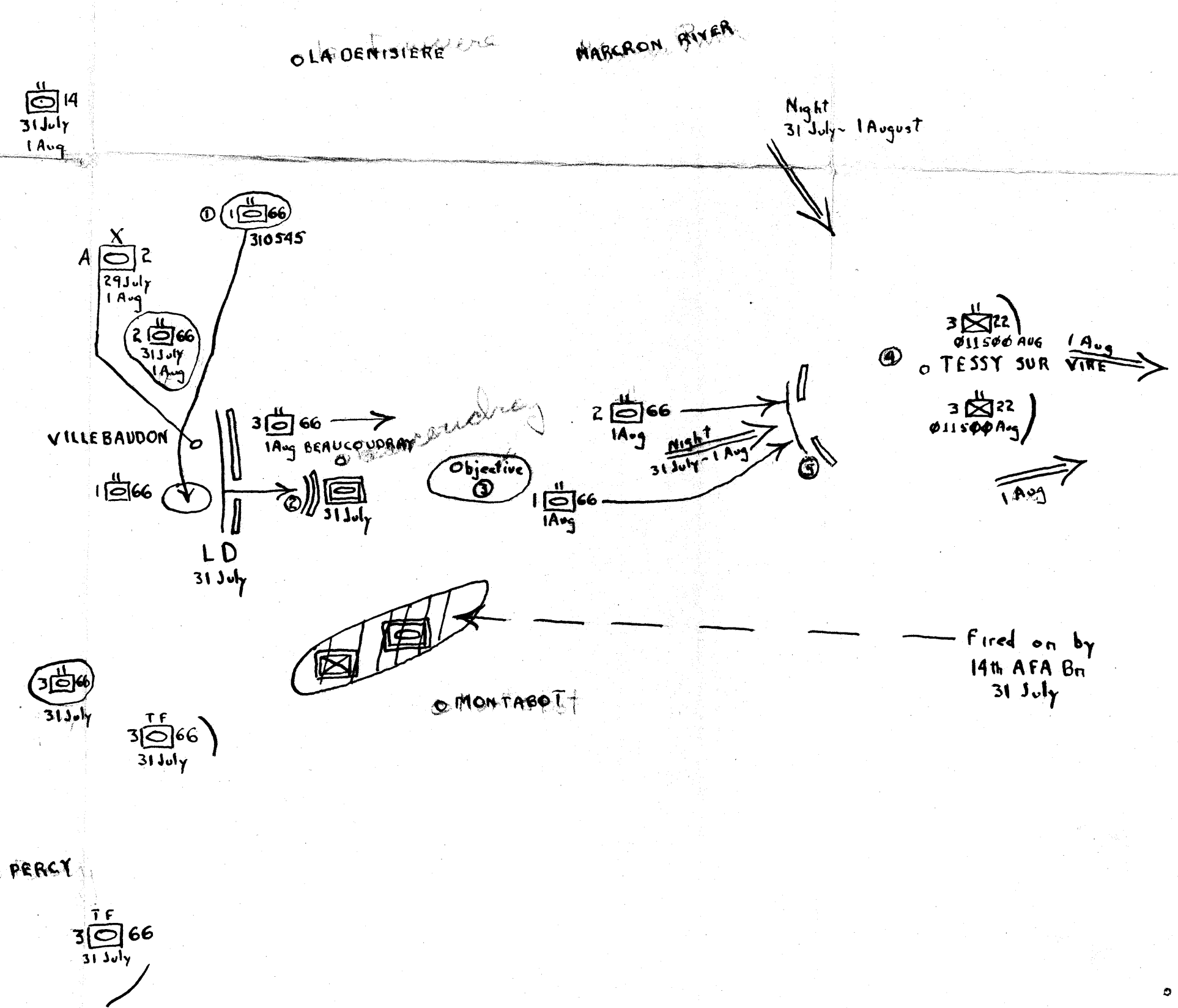
# OVERLAY NO 5

## OPERATIONS CCA 31 JULY - 1 AUGUST

MAP FRANCE GSGS 1/50000

- ① 1st Bn 66th AR moved south at 310545 to attack east from below VILLEBAUDON
- ② 1st Bn 66th AR reached here by 311400
- ③ Objective assigned at 310945 to 1st Bn 66th AR
- ④ Some elements of 3rd Bn 66th AR entered TESSY SUR VIRE prior to 011500 but were soon eliminated from action
- ⑤ 1st Bn (on the south) and 2nd Bn 66th AR reached here at 011700, while 3rd Bn 22nd RCT went through TESSY SUR VIRE and outposted the high ground to the east of town at 011500

50  
+  
62



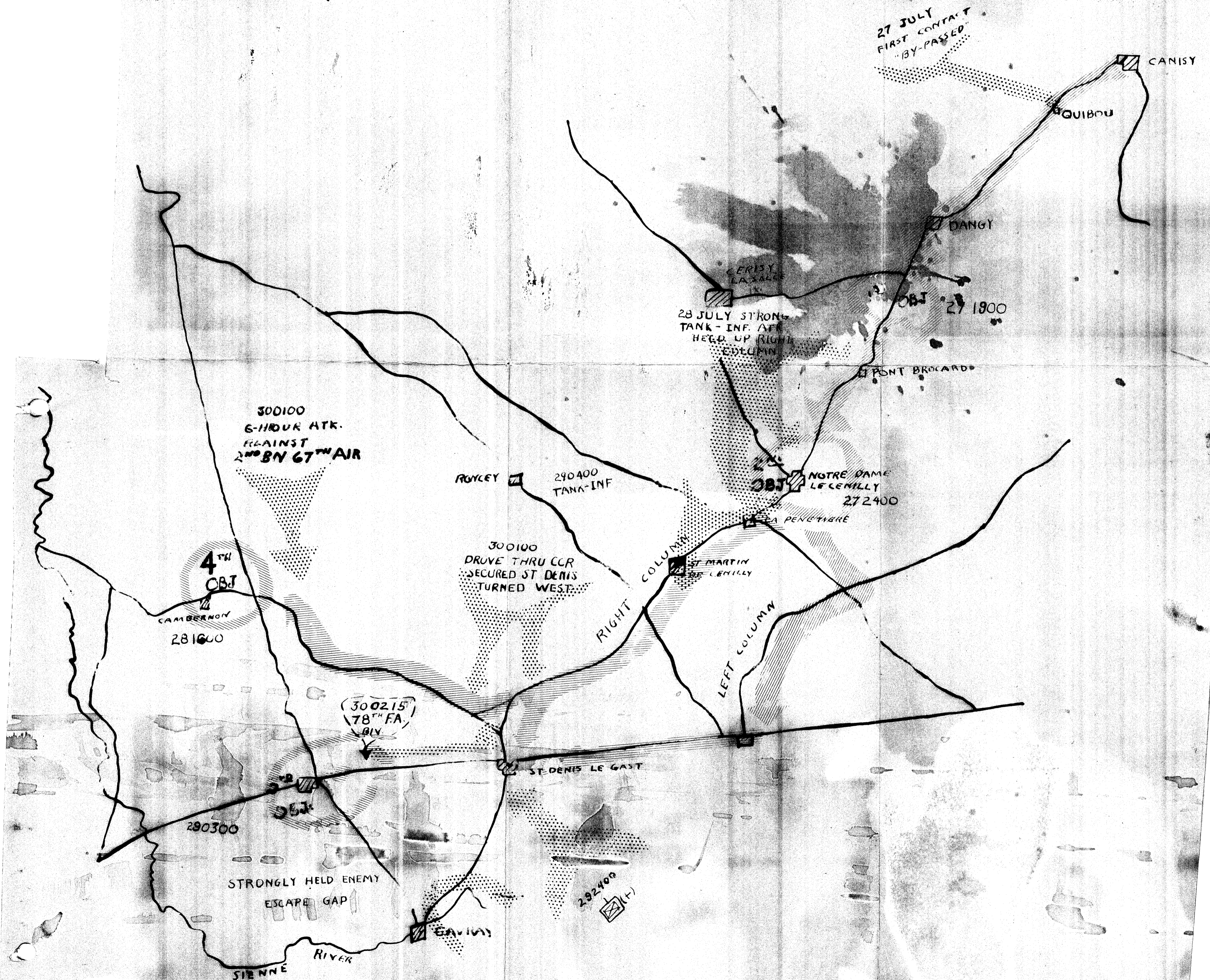
# OVERLAY NO. 6

## OPERATIONS CCB

MAP FRANCE GSGS 1/50000

▨ FRIENDLY ACTION

▤ ENEMY ACTION



PHASE I OPERATIONAL HISTORY  
 2D ARMORED DIVISION  
 26 JULY-31 JULY 1944  
 OVERLAY  
 1/50000  
 MAP:FRANCE 65GS4250

..... INDICATES CC'A'  
 - - - - - INDICATES CC'B'  
 ——— INDICATES ENEMY ACTIVITY

-RESTRICTED-

