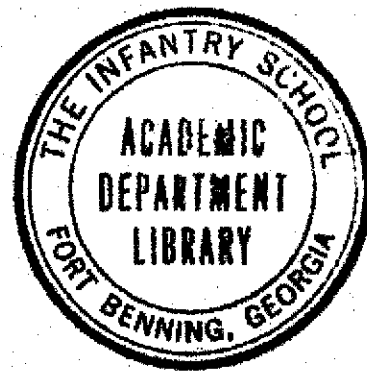


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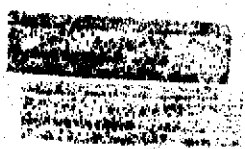


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REGIMENTAL UNIT STUDY

NUMBER 6

(THE CAPTURE OF STE MERE EGLISE)

An Action by 505th Infantry Regiment
of the
82d Airborne Division

Published by History Section
European Theater of Operations

This study is one
of a series purposed
to develop the Normandy
Operations of the 82d and
the 101st Airborne Divisions

THE CAPTURE OF STE MERE EGLISE

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ATTACK ON STE MERE EGLISE

The mission of 82d Airborne Division was radically changed about 15 May, 1944, as a result of intelligence reports indicating that fresh German forces—the 91st Infantry Division—had moved into the area well to the east of CARENTAN and south of the RIVER DOUVE in the general vicinity of ST SAUVEUR LE VICOMTE. Until the time when this additional strength was reported in the western part of the COTENTIN peninsula, the Division had been assigned to drop west of ST SAUVEUR LE VICOMTE and after assembling near that town, to move as a division in a southwest direction toward ST SAUVEUR DE PIERRE-PONT. The concept was simply this: In its support of the UTAH BEACH landings and of the 101st Airborne Division which was holding the causeways from the beach so that the seaborne forces could move swiftly inland, the 82d Division would block the passage of enemy reinforcements moving north from the LESSAY-LA HAYE DU PUITTS area to reinforce the CHERBOURG vicinity.

But when the fresh German division took up ground, this more effective concentration of enemy strength made it necessary that 82d Division be dropped farther to the eastward, so that the Division's strength would not be dissipated, so that on D Day the two airborne divisions—82d and 101st—would have a favorable chance of consolidating the sector extending from UTAH BEACH to westward of the MERDERET RIVER and so that the

seaborne forces—principally the 4th Infantry Division—arriving via UTAH BEACH could proceed inland against a minimum enemy resistance.

When it became necessary to modify the original plan, the assignments of the separate parachute regiments within 82d Division were established as follows:

Two of the Regiments—the 507 and 508—were to drop west of the MERDERET RIVER, the 507 assembling near the village of AMPREVILLE and the 508 assembling immediately to the northwest of the confluence of the DOUVE and MERDERET RIVERS. Their assemblies completed, these two regiments were to consolidate bridgeheads across the MERDERET, striking from the westward, so that the seaborne forces coming from the eastward would not be delayed at that barrier. At the time the plan was conceived, the MERDERET was thought to be a not-too-significant obstacle. It was a narrow and gently-moving stream and though its flood plain was a quarter mile or more in width, this expanse was not supposed to prove an insurmountable handicap, except for armor.

One parachute regiment, the 505, was assigned to drop and assemble east of the MERDERET RIVER and directly northwest of STE MERE EGLISE: it was to proceed immediately to the capture of that important communications center.

The missions thus outlined indicate the general purpose of

82d Division in OPERATION NEPTUNE. With the general mission of protecting the southwest flank of VII Corps, it was to accomplish this end by consolidating its own ground and by making contact with 101st Division at two points--BLOSVILLE to the east and CHEF DU PONT to the southwest. The northern limit of 82d Division's defensive zone was to be about on the line of NEUVILLE AU PLAIN-GOURBESVILLE while 101st was to set up its defensive line and road blocks in the area of FOUCARVILLE. Both divisions were to press with the right shoulder against this line while clearing the ground to the southward as far as the line of the RIVER DOUVE. However, from the beginning, the 82d Division was charged with taking the offensive to the westward in the direction of ST SAUVEUR LE VICOMTE and it was intended that 503, from its assembly in the area of PICAUVILLE, would move on and destroy the bridges across the DOUVE south of PONT L'ABBE and north of BEUZEVILLE LA BASTILLE. The glider infantry and glider artillery were to move in at the most practical hour following the drop and support these missions.

With the revision of the plan, the capture of STE MERE EGLISE in the early hours of operation became the very touchstone of success for the entire divisional undertaking. Without possession of this relatively small Norman town, the Division would have almost no chance to sustain offensive operations across the MERDERET River and to the westward. STE MERE EGLISE

was the most important communications center within the area which was to be consolidated by the American airborne forces. For these reasons, it had been made the district headquarters of the German Army; the trunk cables connecting CHERBOURG with CARENTAN and the coastal towns and villages of the southern end of the COTENTIN PENINSULA ran through it; it was the hub of a highway net, formed largely of metal surface roads, connecting with all parts of the peninsula; finally, the town itself was on relatively high ground; it was compactly built and its houses were strong-walled; the approaches to it could all be pretty well dominated from the ground of the town proper. These things, and the certainty that 82d Division would be operating on its own for at least 24 hours longer than 101st, pretty well fixed the strategy of the first critical hours.

If the Division was to proceed to its multifarious assignments and yet minimize the risk of total destruction in the event that the general plan went wrong and the link-up became long delayed, it had to secure a strong defensive base right at the beginning. STE MERE EGLISE was the place; the general mission of seizing and holding that town was given the 505 Regiment. The Drop Zone designated for 505's landing was just a little to the northwest of the target, about as close in to the community as it was practical to get it. It was probably a measure of how vital STE MERE EGLISE was reckoned in the whole

airborne undertaking that the Division Commander, MAJ GEN RIDGWAY, jumped at the same Drop Zone and was one of the first men ready on the ground. Thereafter, until the seaborne forces came through, he continued to give the capture and subsequently the defense of the town his most careful personal regard.

The Regimental plan initially assigned only one Battalion—the Third—to the task. First Battalion, after landing in the Same Zone, was to proceed west immediately on landing and seize the crossings of the MERDERET RIVER at LA FIERE and CHEF DU FONT; so doing, they would protect the base by blocking out any enemy coming from the west and southwest. The Second Battalion was given the mission of holding a general line running approximately east and west through BANDIENVILLE and NEUVILLE AU PLAIN and patrolling to the west thereof; that would put them in effect along the northern flank of VII Corps Area, in extension of the defensive line which 101st Division was to establish at FOUCARVILLE and in position to block out any enemy forces descending on STE MERE EGLISE from the north, out of MONTEBOURG or the CHERBOURG area. Covered thus on two sides by the other two Battalions, the Third Battalion, according to the plan, would first capture and mop-up the town in detail, then set up roadblocks to the east and south of it and proceed to defend the base against all enemy counter-attack until the arrival of the seaborne forces. The Regimental Drop Zone was divided into three sections so that each Battalion

could be dropped in that part of the Drop Zone which was nearest its assigned target.

On the whole, the Regimental jump went smoothly. The Pathfinders got to the Drop Zone 30 minutes prior to the first planes which brought the assault elements and each of the Battalion Pathfinder teams succeeded in at least a part of its mission. They had been favored doubly by fortune, for their own planes had given them a good drop and there were no enemy forces anywhere near the Drop Zone. With these advantages, they were able to set up separate markers in each of the Battalion sectors and they also got a number of road beacons established before the serials began coming over. There was thus a sufficient guide for the troop carrier command as it flew west looking for the Zone approximate to SITE MERE ECLISE and there was the further probability that after the men got to the ground, the problem of individual orientation would be eased.

These early successes were reflected in the Regimental assembly. The elements of the Regiment which succeeded in hitting the Drop Zone squarely comprised about 1000 out of 2200 men. Most of the remainder were distributed in the vicinity and to the north and east of these groups. They collected rapidly throughout D Day so that by nightfall 505 Regiment knew the whereabouts of nearly all of its strength. Other small groups which could not report during the initial stage because they

had dropped too far outside the Regimental sector engaged the enemy in combat wherever they met him, thereby aiding both the Regiment and 101st Division, which was along its eastern boundary. Sufficient of these strays came down north of NEUVILLE AU PLAIN to engage the enemy with such aggressiveness that the latter became convinced that the airborne drop was intended to embrace LE HAM and MONTEBOURG.*

LT COL EDWARD C. KRAUSE of Third Battalion came down in a triangular-shaped, hedgerow-bordered field directly south of the Drop Zone: in fact, he had come down on the exact spot which he had previously selected for his assembly CP. He had seen the green T's marking the jump field just before he had left the plane, and so he knew during his descent that he was hitting earth at about the right place.**

By the time he had made certain of his location, and checked the cone-shaped field according to the map, about 15 of his men had already rallied to him. He dispatched them at once, telling them to move out about 600 yards in all directions, collect whomever they could along the route, send them back to him by azimuth and then themselves return to the assembly point. Within 45 minutes, about 180 members of his own

*From the War Diary of the German Seventh Army.

**This is a brief of KRAUSE'S experience. As it contained nothing unusual, it is not reported here in detail. The full story is to be found in the KRAUSE interview within the manuscript: "505 Before and After Drop."

Battalion had assembled around him and his one-man patrols had also oriented scores of other men from other units, and got them moving to their assembly points. KRAUSE consolidated what he had into two companies, G and H, with elements of Headquarters Company forming up separately. He was now ready to go.*

One of the patrols had picked up a drunken Frenchman walking along the road. When brought before KRAUSE, he quickly sobered and he proved to be a gold mine of information. He verified the Battalion's location with respect to STE MERE EGLISE and he told KRAUSE that he knew of an almost unused trail which led into the town from the northwest. The town had been very well covered, he said, but the principle strength of the enemy was now distributed out along the roads leading into the community. Within the town proper there was about one Company of Germans, covering the motor park, Headquarters and other installations. Some tactical troops had been billeted in STE MERE EGLISE until recently, but because of the constant threat of air attack, they had moved out to bivouacs in the fields and

*This Battalion had previously spearheaded the Allied advance into NAPLES and had raised the first American flag above that town. About three hours before the take-off from England, KRAUSE had assembled his Battalion and had said these words to them: "We have here the flag that you raised over the city of NAPLES. I want it to be the first flag to fly over a liberated town in France. The mission is that we will put it up in STE MERE EGLISE before dawn. You have only one order--to come and fight with me wherever you land. When you get to STE MERE EGLISE, I will be there."

along the high ground south of the town.*

KRAUSE put the Frenchman in the point of his formation, under CAPT WALTER DE LONG of Company H, and headed for SIE MERE EGLISE with about one-quarter of his normal Battalion strength. The column guided on the trail to which they were directed by the Frenchman, the men moving forward along the hedgerow cover on both sides of it. There were heavy clouds above ST MERE EGLISE and the night was nearly pitch black; they saw no signs of the enemy and they received no fire. The older and more experienced men seemed perfectly willing to step out, realizing that surprise was their chief weapon, but KRAUSE could hear the older NCO's growling at the new men, most of whom were trying to move cautiously with their rifles at the on-guard position. In 30 minutes, they reached the outskirts of the town.**

COL KRAUSE had told his men not to fire until daylight and to use only grenades, knives and bayonets during the in-fighting. He kept pace with the first files until he reached the northernmost buildings along the main highway leading to MONTEBOURG. At that point he decided to send separate detachments flankward in both directions to set up road blocks and close

*All of this information proved to be substantially correct. The fact that these garrison troops had been moved south had not been known to the American planners and it had an important effect on subsequent developments within VII Corps.

**The description is from KRAUSE and is to be found in the interview material.

all avenues of approach to the town--in contrast to the original plan of blocking the roads to the east and south and depending on the forces at LA FIERE, CHEF DU FONT and NEUVILLE to block the approaches on the other two sides. The other men then proceeded southward along the main road, keeping within the shadow of the buildings, and bounding quietly and swiftly from doorway to doorway or to a covering wall. They had been instructed specifically not to search the buildings as KRAUSE did not want to risk the chance that any hand-to-hand skirmishing would jeopardize the chance to set up all of the roadblocks before dawn--this, he considered to be of prime importance. While he had been sending out the flanking groups, the point had moved right on down the main road to set up the roadblock to south of town. He could hear machine gun and rifle fire from that direction now and he concluded that some of his men were meeting the first of the enemy. The cable point was 400 yards farther south along the main road; KRAUSE had been accurately briefed on its location before he had left England. He went to it immediately and did the cutting job in person.

All of the roadblocks were set before dawn. There had been some skirmishing at three of the locations but the resistance was quickly overcome, KRAUSE'S men using only their grenades and cutting weapons. Every man in the Battalion had jumped with an M-1 anti-tank mine. Every man carried a gammon grenade,

which is a point detonating grenade.* In addition to these weapons, the blocks were supported by bazookas, a few covering riflemen, a machine gun and usually a BAR. The forces at the blocks were augmented steadily through the morning as additional men reported in.

By 0900 about 300 men had collected on the town. Meanwhile, clean-up squads had gone through the buildings and made the interior position secure. There was little house-to-house fighting. The few Germans in the town were taken almost wholly by surprise. Some were roused from their beds, about 30 surrendered, 10 were killed and the remainder took off toward the south. By 0930 the town was wholly in the Battalion's hands. At about 0500 KRAUSE had dispatched a runner to tell Regiment that he was in STE MERE EGLISE. Subsequently, he sent another runner with the message that he had secured the town. The first message did not get to the recipient for whom it was intended—COL WILLIAM E. EKMAN, the Regimental Commander. Wandering around the Drop Zone, the runner came first to GEN RIDGWAY, the Division Commander, and told him what he was supposed to tell to EKMAN but he did not explain that the message was for EKMAN. The latter continued in doubt.

In the meantime these things had happened elsewhere in the Regiment: By 0515, Second Battalion had collected enough men

*The grenade is made from Composition C, there being about two pounds of explosive in a small sock. The material is soft as plastic and two pounds is usually enough to cripple a tank.

that EKMAN told LT COL BENJAMIN H. VANDERVOORT, the Battalion Commander, to proceed to his objective—NEUVILLE AU PLAIN. VANDERVOORT had fractured one leg badly on the jump but his men had obtained a small farm cart and were wheeling him around in it and he was continuing to command. At 0614, the Second Battalion, then being on its way to NEUVILLE, was ordered to halt in place, though the reason was not given. At 0800 there came a radio message from EKMAN that he had heard nothing from Third Battalion. At 0810 Second Battalion was ordered to turn back and capture STE MERE EGLISE. At 0816 another message came through that Third Battalion had captured the town and Second Battalion was to proceed to NEUVILLE. At 0817 this order was countermanded and Second Battalion was ordered to move on STE MERE EGLISE. There was one more change in orders as COL EKMAN still tried to find out the precise situation of the two Battalions. Then VANDERVOORT ordered his men to move south.

But on his own initiative, VANDERVOORT had taken one precaution which redounded greatly to the benefit of the Division. Before changing direction he had decided that one strong platoon might be equal to the mission at NEUVILLE AU PLAIN. He accordingly detached a platoon from Company D under LT TURNER B. TURNBULL and sent it north while the rest of his strength moved south. A Frenchman interrogated during the assembly had told that he believed only a few Germans were in NEUVILLE and that they would be found in the outlying houses. TURNBULL proceeded to

his task with instructions to mop-up the hamlet, mine the main road to north of NEUVILLE and the east-west road running to south of it and set up a defensive position on the most favorable high ground. He had done these things by 1000, by which time VANDERVOERT had set up his CP in STE MERE EGLISE.

As it happened, this precautionary recall of Second Battalion to STE MERE EGLISE worked out well. Shortly after 0930 KRAUSE'S position had been heavily counter-attacked from the south by a force which appeared to comprise about two companies of infantry supported by mobile guns on tracks and three or four tanks. The approach of this force was signaled by an intense concentration of machine gun and mortar fire which fell mainly around the southern roadblock. KRAUSE went immediately to that area. He had time only to observe that small groups of the enemy were working around on both flanks of his own position and to order that more men from Companies G and I be brought down from the center of the town to fill in along the open spaces between his roadblocks;* then he was hit in the lower leg by a shell fragment which numbed the member but did not otherwise incapacitate him. He was now in radio communication, and telephone also, with all companies.

VANDERVOERT arrived, his men still pushing him in the farm

*The men from G and I were already positioned in the south and he thought it important to round out their position with men from their own companies, as an aid to battle morale.

cart. He told KRAUSE that the simplest plan was for him to order the defense of the town as he wanted it and to give his instructions directly to the Company Commanders; it thus became one command without argument, the two commanders working together as a team, but with KRAUSE having the deciding voice. Second Battalion's strength was distributed around the perimeter so as to complete the circle; Companies B and I were kept as a mobile reserve in the center of the town. The arrival of this additional strength and the accuracy of the American small arms fire quickly brought the enemy attack in check. Early in the skirmishing the Germans herded cattle from the fields onto the main road and tried to drive them on so as to explode the mine field at the roadblock. PVT DOMINICK DE TULLIO moved out well in front of the block, turned the cattle into another field and then grenaded the Germans who were driving them, killing one man, wounding a second and dispersing the rest. By 1130 the attack from the south had died without denting the outpost line.*

However, there was no diminishing of the fire from the south and before the morning was out the mortar and small arms attack was being supported by artillery in such volume that KRAUSE was convinced he was being opposed by several batteries. Two

*DE TULLIO was killed the next day by a high velocity shell. One town pump had been destroyed by an artillery shell and the others were under heavy fire. The wounded in the aid station were badly in need of water. DE TULLIO volunteered to get it and was killed while on this mission.

81 mm mortars, positioned in the northwest of STE MERE EGLISE, were turned against this position by LT WILLIAM E. WILSON and together fired about 65 rounds. But it was impossible to get observation of the enemy position from STE MERE EGLISE because of the interposition of the hedgerows along a high ridge; the mortar fire seemed to have little effect. Looking down the main road, KRAUSE could see an enemy convoy of several trucks moving up toward the ground where he thought the enemy mortars were operating. (Identified on the map as Hill 20) He ordered Company I to move out on a wide swing to the right, then attack leftward toward Hill 20 and deny its use to the enemy.

The Company--strength, 5 officers and 80 men--moved flankward about one-half mile to the west of the main road, then endeavored to cut back diagonally toward the high ground which KRAUSE had indicated. But the difficulty was that they had to follow a zigzag course in order to keep to the cover of the boundary hedgerows and ditches; so doing, they lost time, but what was more costly, they lost their sense of distance and direction. It was 90 minutes later that they got back to ground flanking the main road about one mile south of town; it was quite short of the goal and they discovered too late that they were approaching on a line which put them directly in front of the mortar position which they were supposed to be out-flanking. Accompanying the mortar fire, an intense small arms fire came at them from their right rear so that they were

in effect at an apex of fire coming from enemy positions on both sides of the road. CAPT HAROLD W. SWINGLER was killed by a bullet and several other men were hit. The rest of the men jumped immediately for the cover of the hedgerows and ditches.

During the next two hours, the Company held its ground, gradually built up a fire position facing southward, and then made two successive attempts to move out and around the enemy left flank. Whenever these patrols (of platoon strength) tried to cut in, they were checked by enemy fire; they then made further tries to swing wider and wider around the enemy left, but always they found the way blocked by enemy skirmishers. The platoon attempting the maneuver thereby gained the impression that it was being confronted by successive out-flanking movements by the enemy, aimed at enveloping the Company position. The platoon accordingly fell back on the Company and the latter withdrew to STE MERE EGLISE.

The actual situation was that the enemy force, of approximately Battalion strength, had been impressed by Company I's advance and had become convinced that the American strength at STE MERE EGLISE must be overwhelming. They therefore started to withdraw to the westward and the platoon from Company I had continued bumping into the right flank of the lead elements of this withdrawing column.* But no one was able to guess that at the time.**

*The Battalion succeeded in getting through with most of its forces between the American force at STE MERE EGLISE and the other elements of the 82d Division who were fighting along the MERDERET. The Battalion later opposed Second Battalion, 505, at LE HAM and told this story of their operation. One of GEN GAVIN'S staff officers, who spoke German, had been sent late in the afternoon of D Day to drive a jeepload of ammunition to the CHEF DU PONT position. On his return trip to LA FIERE, he drove in between the two halves of this retreating German column and was captured; several days later he was recaptured by 82d Division.

**The chief witnesses on the Company I action were LT WALTER KROENER and SGT HOWARD P. MELVIN, although about 15 men were interviewed in all. COL KRAUSE reported that Company I had hit the German convoy on the road and destroyed several vehicles with gammon grenades but this was an error. The men of the Company said this did not happen.

THE STAND AT NEUVILLE AU FLAIN

There were 42 men in TURNBULL'S platoon and proceeding via the hedgerows they moved smoothly on NEUVILLE, drawing no fire as they went along. PVT EDWARD EASTON was first scout. He went as rapidly as he could and the men followed, strung out on both sides of the road. They went right through the hamlet and continued on past the last houses for about 40 yards. There they were on the northern slope of the high ground on which the settlement rested. A hedgerow bordering the field to right of the main road was convenient to their purpose. They could see forward for 600 yards and more and to the right flank for no less distance. The earth bank of the hedge was about breast high and the foliage was exceptionally thick. To left of the road there was an orchard through the fruit trees of which one could get a clear view forward for about 200 yards. But beyond the farmhouse set next the sunken road on that side there were clear fields so that one could see clearly for a quarter mile in that direction.

It was here that TURNBULL set up his position. The machine gun and most of the platoon were disposed along the hedgerow on the right side. Two riflemen and a bazooka man were sent back to the shadow of the houses to compose a roadblock, in case enemy armor happened along. One squad was put on the left of the road. There was an ancient gate there, flanked by a moss-grown stone wall and next a manure pile. One could look

forward through the gate and command the orchard. Here they waited. It did not take long.

Thirty minutes after the platoon had arrived, the men to right of the road saw a company of Germans coming down the road, marching in column of twos, unconcernedly, as if unapprehensive of any danger. LT ISAAC MICHAELMAN, TURNBULL'S assistant, certain that the men behind the iron gate had not witnessed the approach, crawled across the road and alerted them. They moved up through the orchard 200 yards and took position around a group of barns: it was their idea that they might remain there unobserved and catch the German column in flank as it came down the road. As they got to this forward ground, the Germans, who had first been sighted at about 400 yards distance, came almost even with them. MICHAELMAN and PVT JOSEPH C. HUDY moved up to the second story of one of the barns for observation. The squad had been a mortar squad but had lost its mortars on the jump, the bundle having blown up: now it was manning a machine gun. There were four men at the gun with SGT ROBERT NILAND in charge;* the gun had been set up in the ditch outside the hedgerow bordering the main road and pointing north, in position to traverse the fields on the far side. But the gun remained silent, the gunners hoping for a better chance to sweep the enemy files with enfilade fire. Then the two

*The other men with the gun were PFCs HORACE H. BROWN and PVTS JOHN P. SLAVIERO and HAROLD DUNNEGAN, BROWN being the gunner.

squads deployed along the hedgerow to rear and on right of the road opened fire and the enemy took cover immediately, flopping next the hedges and into the roadside ditches.

MICHAELMAN, observing from the left, got a bullet through his buttocks; it was the first sign that the enemy had spotted the gun position. After that the crew saw---through open spaces in the hedgerow ahead---that the rearward files of the enemy column were moving around to the westward as if to envelop the gun position. The gun was now in action and was firing bursts of six-to-eight rounds, traversing toward both flanks, but did not seem to be doing much damage. PFC STANLEY W. KOTLARZ, who was trying to cover the left flank of the squad with a tommy gun, sensed that he was doing no good with his weapon because of the extreme range; the out-flanking movement was being carried on at 250 yards distance. KOTLARZ yelled to MICHAELMAN who had already concluded that the situation was becoming too hot to handle. He ordered the squad to withdraw to the platoon line and he himself hobbled back, using his rifle as a cane, with the rest of the squad following along the hedgerow.

At STE MERE EGLISE, COL VANDERVOORT had been able to surmount the handicap of his broken leg by borrowing a pair of crutches from a Frenchman and getting a jeep from a glider. So fixed, he started north for NEUVILLE AU FLAIN, bringing along two 57 AT guns for support of the platoon's position. He got into

the hamlet just in time to see one of his paratroopers--who had been with the roadblock--waving an orange flag. A Frenchman had ridden into the hamlet on a bicycle and had told the men at the block that he was moving in advance of a full column of German prisoners who were coming in under guard of an American detachment. These were the men TURNBULL had fired on; the bicycling Frenchman had pedaled past the platoon's line without seeing it. The paratrooper at the block was trying to give the column the friendly sign just as VANDERVOORT arrived and just as the line opened fire--with rifles, two machine guns and two BARs. In that way, the ruse failed. VANDERVOORT had left one of the 57s at the intersection south of NEUVILLE; he had brought the second gun along right into the center of the settlement. When MICHAELMAN came on back, VANDERVOORT, thinking that the line might be cracking and seeing no good targets for the 57 gun, sent a runner to TURNBULL to ask how he was doing and if he needed help. TURNBULL sent back the message: "OK and everything under control."

There were at that time about 180 Germans confronting TURNBULL'S relatively small group. Yet the position along the high ground was relatively snug. The squad over on the left had refused its own left flank slightly so as to cover the clear fields in that direction; the AT gun was in position to fire directly down the road and the gunners could command a view of the rightofway for at least one-half mile in that

direction. These things provided temporarily a sufficient base of fire.

Even before MICHAELMAN got back to the gate with the left-hand squad, however, the men deployed on the right had begun to feel the mounting pressure of the enemy fire. The Germans were dropping mortar fire accurately along the hedgeline and although the embankment and the boundary ditch afforded good protection, the platoon began to get casualties. Too, the enemy had brought up a self-propelled gun to within about 500 yards of the American line. In its first few rounds, it knocked out the bazooka man at the road block. On its next firing the gun drove the crew away from the 57 AT gun in NEUVILLE and the crew took temporary cover among the houses. They came back shortly, however, and with their first few rounds knocked out the German gun; far up the road they could see, with the aid of glasses, what appeared to be a Mark IV Tank; that was their next target and the vehicle was apparently hit and halted. But there was no answer for the German mortar fire and it kept building up in volume and accuracy throughout the day. This was the cause of the greater part of the platoon's casualties-- 44 men had gone forward and only 16 were present when the time came to evacuate the position and fall back on STE MERE EGLISE.

The enemy had taken full advantage of the natural cover far out on both flanks and had brought his forces forward gradually through the day, attempting an encirclement. Extending

obliquely from the main road in a southeasterly direction, about 600 yards to north of the line which had been taken up by the platoon, there is a large wood. This was made the chief avenue of approach. At the same time, however, another flanking party, moving behind the hedgerows far over on the left, and well out of reach of the American small arms fire, kept pace with the movement around the American right. Against these two wide out-flanking movements, TURNBULL could do nothing effective except hold his ground, and by the mere act of holding, slow the advance of the enemy from the north upon STE MERE EGLISE. That was the way the fight went throughout the hours of the morning and afternoon. The mortar fire kept thinning the American ranks; the return fire from behind the hedgerow had no noticeable effect except to keep the flankers far out and make them move on a wider circle. The advance came on slowly but evenly; on both flanks it passed on beyond the American line; still, TURNBULL held his ground. By the time the enemy group working on the shorter bite and coming through the woods on the right were at the point of entering NEUVILLE, the group which had moved out to the westward was almost in position to cut across the platoon's line of retreat. The sharp signs of the platoon's tightening situation came when they began to draw sniper fire from the buildings at their rear and at the same time came under small arms fire from the forward farm buildings which MICHAELMAN had occupied earlier in the day. PVT CLIFFORD KEENAN, a grenadier working on the

right flank, turned around to consider the buildings just to the rearward of him, on the outskirts of the hamlet; as he started to raise his carbine, he was shot and killed by machine pistol fire. By then the men along the hedgerow could see the forms of enemy riflemen crawling along the ditches bounding the hedgerows out on both flanks; the nearest were not more than 75 yards away, but they were uncertain targets and the mortar fire was coming in so steadily that it was all but impossible to get a clear shot at them. TURNBULL'S force had dwindled to 23 men. They were taking care of about 10 wounded. The fire had been beating steadily on the asphalt of the roadway and there had seemed no way to evacuate these men to the rearward. Now they realized it was too late to save the wounded if indeed it were not too late to save anyone. The circle of enemy force had almost drawn closed about 200 yards to the rearward. The last chance was slipping away while they looked at one another.

TURNBULL pointed in the direction of the enemy skirmishers who were crawling toward them along the ditches. He said to the others: "There's one thing left for us to do. We can charge them."

One of the privates spoke up. "I'm ready," he said.

PFC JOSEPH SEBASTIAN, who had just come in from prowling the right flank where he had talked to CPL JOSEPH TREMEL who had

been with KEENAN when he died, said: "No, I don't think we're quite out off yet. I think there's a chance we can get out; that's what we ought to do." TREMEL had told him that while a few of the enemy had reached the houses on the right flank, the greater part of them were still one hedgerow short of closing on the hamlet.

TURNBULL asked the others: "What about it?"

They supported SEBASTIAN and told him that it would be better to try and get out.

So in a twinkling, they got set. TURNBULL told them to leave the wounded. CPL JAMES KELLY, first aid man, said he'd remain and be taken prisoner, if possible, in order to see the wounded through. Some of the guns far over on the right had to be abandoned because the enemy skirmishers were now coming with a rush.

PFC SEBASTIAN, who had argued TURNBULL into the withdrawal, now volunteered to stand and cover the others with a BAR; CPL RAYMOND SMITSON said he'd stay by SEBASTIAN and support him with hand grenades. SGT ROBERT WILLAND started for one of the machine guns intending to stick with SEBASTIAN and SMITSON and cover the withdrawal; he was shot dead by a German closing in with a machine pistol before ever he could reach the weapon. The others--16 altogether--started back through the hamlet at a dead run, expecting to be out down before they had moved

a dozen steps.*

But though they had not sensed it, there was some help near at hand. VANDERVOORT, who had come up to the skirmish early in the day but had then returned to STE MERE EGLISE to run his Battalion, had continued to worry about the platoon. He had sent word to TURNBULL that the situation in STE MERE EGLISE was such that he should stick it as long as he could, and then fall back on the Battalion. Word had also reached TURNBULL by runner that the platoon would fall back when it got a white flare signal from STE MERE EGLISE. But he had waited all through a fire-swept afternoon and now it was evening, and no signal had come. VANDERVOORT, not knowing about any arrangements for a flare signal, but figuring that the platoon's time must be running out, ordered a platoon from Company E to get up to NEUVILLE and stand ready to cover TURNBULL in case he had to make an abrupt withdrawal. TURNBULL hadn't seen the Company E platoon come in, but they had reached the center of NEUVILLE and had deployed off to the left among and beyond the houses by the time he told his men to cut and run.

The 16 men went past this line like a breeze, scarcely seeing it. They kept on running down the road toward STE MERE EGLISE as fast as they could go. Nothing was said until they gained

*SEBASTIAN and SMITSON were captured but their fire had made the withdrawal possible.

the town except an occasional yell from a non-com: "Keep scattered!" The platoon from Company E, having fired until TURNBULL'S men swept past, also picked up their weapons and ran, purposing to clear out of easy range before the Germans could fire from the ridge of high ground running through the village.

By its all-day stand, the platoon had kept the STE MERE EGLISE force from being hit simultaneously from north and south during the most critical hours of D Day, and by providing this breathing space to the major defensive base of the Division, had helped immeasurably to help stabilize the position of an entire Corps.

THE COMMAND SITUATION

It was fortunate for all concerned that things had happened in the way they did along the eastern half of the Divisional sector and that the relatively small actions north and south of STE MERE EGLISE had yielded big dividends in time gained and consequent stabilization of the defensive base. True, the slanting blow dealt by Company I had not achieved a total result; a considerable enemy force, backed by artillery and some armor, still held the high ground west of and adjacent to ECOQUENEAUVILLE, in position to interfere seriously with the force from UTAH BEACH which was coming to the relief of STE MERE EGLISE. But the local effect had been good; those Germans who had been in position to put direct pressure on the town from a southerly direction had been routed and sent on their way, and it was this gift which 82d needed most of all—a chance to consolidate somewhere along the line. The TURNBULL action had served the same purpose, it gave KRAUSE and VANDERVOORT the time they needed to knit their position and gather confidence.

Elsewhere in the Division sector (as will be recounted in detail later) the situation was far from bright. Along the MERDERET, things were worse than obscure; for many hours, and for reasons which were quite beyond the control of the Division, the situation had bordered on catastrophe and had only been partially restored through unusual exertion, and after

exceptional hardship, on the part of all elements. Things had gone awry in detail; the force had been far scattered; not only had concentration been immeasurably delayed but the Division had lost the effective strength of hundreds of men. There had been no chance to operate "according to plan." A bad drop had dissipated most of the potential force of 507; 508 was in almost equally bad case. The one Battalion which had been dropped on the proper side (west bank) of the River was fighting an isolated uphill engagement in which most of its effort was directed toward survival; the remainder of the Regiment, gathered to east of the River, hadn't found the suitable opening wherein to exert its full strength on the course of the battle.

So as matters stood on the night of D Day, 82d Division was not pressing the offensive to west and south of the line of the MERDERET, nor was it even standing astride that barrier. The decisive bridgeheads were as yet unwon and the Division was, indeed, in danger of being beaten back from the River's eastern approaches.

The tactical difficulties of the Division had proved grave enough. Throughout the day, GEN RIDGWAY had continued to move back and forth from the STE MERE EGLISE position to the bridgehead areas where his men were trying to force the crossings of the MERDERET. The doubts arising from each local situation and from the failure to gain any report from large portions of

the Division strength were great enough to over burden the Commander; what aggravated them was that the Division remained altogether in the dark as to how the battle was going elsewhere. It could not be sure whether any relief was in prospect, for it did not know whether the Americans had taken hold along the beaches or had been driven back into the sea. Even the fate of 101st, which was supposed to be fighting next it to the eastward, remained unknown.

All attempts to communicate with higher headquarters during 6 June were a failure. The radio kept fading out. Division could send, but it could not know whether its messages were getting through to Corps or to Army. In an otherwise altogether uncertain situation, GEN RIDGWAY decided to make certain of one thing—the STE MERE EGLISE position. If the worst happened—if the morrow should show that the seaborne forces were checked and the 82d's strength seemed unequal to continuing a lone-handed struggle against the MERDERET crossings—what remained of the Division would then fall back on the town.

Late in the evening of 6 June, a patrol from VANDERVOORT'S Battalion moved out northeast from STE MERE EGLISE and on getting to the road intersection just west of BEUZEVILLE AU PLAIN, met a patrol from the 12th Infantry, 4th Infantry Division. They returned to STE MERE EGLISE to tell this story. However, it was a casual meeting, and the 4th Division patrol possessed no information as to how its Division stood or what progress

was being made by the column which was supposed to be proceeding from UTAH BEACH to the relief of STE MERE EGLISE.

(The 12th Infantry was due to turn north well to the east of STE MERE EGLISE and the 8th Infantry was to come through the town.)

Some hours later, LT COL W. F. WINTON, Assistant G-3 of Division struck out in the same direction, taking with him a patrol which included several men from the group making the initial contact. They looped up toward BEUZEVILLE AU FLAIN, then moved southeast along the main road from BANDIENVILLE. Southeast of BEUZEVILLE, they met elements of 12th Infantry. They could tell WINTON very little about the situation. WINTON left his patrol with the 12th Infantry and continued on alone to 4th Division's CP. At midnight he talked to 4th Division's Commander, MAJ GEN BARTON. He was given the approximate location of 4th's RCT's. GEN BARTON told him what he would be able to do with his tank destroyers toward relieving 82d's situation and he also said that a column of light tanks under COL RAFF (one Company of 746th Tank Battalion) was proceeding to south of BOUTTEVILLE and would turn northwest toward STE MERE EGLISE.

Soon after, WINTON began his return journey. But he was far from STE MERE EGLISE and many more hours were to pass before Division received the information for which it was already straining.

SOUTH OF STE MERE EGLISE

COL E. D. RAFF, who was in command of the advance elements of what was known as the "Howell Force", had received word before leaving UTAH BEACH that 82d Division had captured STE MERE EGLISE.* The mission of HOWELL Force was to bring relief to 82d Division as soon as possible via an overland march from UTAH BEACH to STE MERE EGLISE. The force came ashore in mid-afternoon, delayed at the Beach only long enough to de-waterproof the tanks and within about 1½ hours was approaching STE MERE EGLISE from the southward, nothing having interfered with the early stages of the advance, owing to the fact that the column was moving through territory which had already been fairly well cleared by the action of 101st Division. Also, elements of the 8th Infantry, which had landed earlier in the day, had moved out ahead of the mobile column and along approximately the same course, their immediate goal being likewise STE MERE EGLISE. But when the column drew unto the crossroads next LES FORGES (approximately 2½ miles southeast of STE MERE EGLISE on the main highway) it came to an abrupt halt. The 8th Infantry forces on ahead had become engaged from the same high ground--Hill 20--which had inconvenienced the southern defenders of STE MERE EGLISE earlier in the afternoon. By this hour the enemy withdrawal from the northern slope of Hill

*The force was composed of one platoon of Company B of 4th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron, Company C of 746th Tank Battalion and 90 infantrymen of 325th Glider Infantry--the latter riding the tanks.

20—the action which had fouled Company I, 505th's attempt to out-flank the position—was already underway or completed. But along the southern slope, barring the passage from UTAH BEACH, the enemy forces still stood firm, with infantry, artillery and possibly some armor. The 8th Infantry had become engaged by fire from this ground at approximately 1000 yards range, and having halted, had brought some 105 mm guns into action; they were firing at what appeared to be a heavy concrete emplacement atop the high ground, near what was deemed to be the center of the enemy position.

RAFF realized at once the seriousness of the situation. The ground between his force and Hill 20 which was now being interdicted by the enemy fire was Landing Zone W, where the Divisional Artillery and other Divisional unit gliders were due to arrive at 2200. The hour was now about 1700 and if the glider landings were to be achieved without undue loss, he had five hours (he figured) in which to clear the Germans from the hill to the north.

So he ordered his Reconnaissance Platoon to advance along the road toward the high ground, moving through the 8th Infantry deployment. The Platoon was to be accompanied by one armored car; one platoon of tanks (with infantrymen riding the tanks) would follow it immediately; the remainder of the force would stand fast, as a reserve.

This advance was covered by the fire of the 8th Infantry's

Cannon Company. The guns opened some minutes before the attack began and were fired so vigorously that they were almost out of ammunition by the time the column got in motion. The armored car proceeded only 300 yards; then it was hit dead-on by an 88 shell fired from Hill 20; the shell did not explode and the car's occupants escaped serious injury; but the car was knocked back many yards so that it collided with the lead tank and stripped a track from it. That ended the advance for the time being. The demonstration convinced RAFF that he had underestimated the enemy strength on Hill 20 and the small force which he had launched initially was not equal to the undertaking. At 1930, having reorganized, he sent forward a full company of tanks with supporting infantry, with instructions to move off leftward away from the main road, and using the cover of the hedgerows, attempt to move cross-fields so as to take the enemy in flank.

This attempt was equally unavailing. The two lead tanks, having turned left and proceeded through two fields, were hit by heavy anti-tank fire and set ablaze; most members of the crews were either killed or wounded. The remaining tanks, which were following along, came to a halt behind the first convenient hedgerow. RAFF went forward to survey the damage; the commander on the spot, CAPT CRAWFORD, told him that he was convinced there were several anti-tank guns—probably 88s—on the hill and that he was fearful the fields and road to south of

the hill had been well mined. By this time, a considerable body of the 8th Infantry had come up to the LES FORGES area. RAFF besought the Regimental Commander to support the attack by advancing his rifle companies toward the enemy left flank while he (RAFF) tried to get the tanks forward around the enemy right. His request was turned down, the Commander agreeing only to support the attack with his Cannon Company, and reminding RAFF that it was not the mission of the 8th Infantry to get the relieving column forward to 82d Division.

So RAFF tried to move again with his tanks and his 90 infantrymen. Time was passing and he realized that it would be the closest kind of thing, if he were to bring Hill 20 under control before the gliders came in. At 2100 the tanks had moved forward one more hedgerow and the force was again in motion with about one hour to go—as RAFF calculated it. From this new vantage point, the tanks had a fairly clear field of fire across Landing Zone W and RAFF thought that this would be of some help in getting his infantry forward. A very few minutes passed. Then an officer standing beside RAFF pointed skyward. RAFF looked; at approximately 1500 feet, heading directly for Landing Zone W was a serial of approximately 60 C-47s towing gliders; they were coming in one hour ahead of schedule.

The troop carriers released the gliders directly above the enemy position. Watching this spectacle, it seemed to RAFF that quite suddenly all of Hill 20 seemed to break out with

fire. He could hear rifles, machine guns and Schmeissers going and he could see that the artillery pieces, too, were being turned against the gliders and the C-47s. A few of the pilots veered off, sensing that something had gone radically wrong down below; some of these craft came down in the LES FORGES area, landing within the 8th Infantry lines. Those which had cut loose at the appointed place and tried to come to earth within Landing Zone W were crash-landed for the most part; some which had escaped the fire came to grief because of the anti-glider poles which the enemy had systematically planted over the chosen fields. One glider landed right next the enemy emplacement on Hill 20. Another came down beside RAFF'S still burning tanks; its occupants contrived to escape before the glider, too, went up in flames.*

Darkness was near at hand and there was no longer any point in pressing an immediate attack against Hill 20. Reports were coming to RAFF from all sides about the glider casualties; he had seen a few himself—a Horsa pilot lying in a ditch, his leg shattered, and beside him his group of passengers so badly stunned that they seemed not to know what was going on. RAFF directed one of his subordinates to collect and assemble near the LES FORGES crossroads all men and officers of the Division,

*Said RAFF: "The difference between the Horsa and the CG4A during these crash landings was quite visible to the naked eye. The Horsa seemed to fall apart, breaking into many pieces. The framework of the CG4A remained more or less intact."

including the glider pilots.

He hoped that he would have enough strength by morning light to clear a way through Hill 20 and he did not intend to renew the attack until then.

WITHIN THE PERIMETER

In the twilight of D Day, the men covering STE MERE EGLISE along the north and northeast saw a great number of Division gliders come in and attempt to make landings well out beyond the American lines; this was another serial out of the same formation which had partly come to grief around Hill 20, while COL RAFF looked on. But these C-47s and their charges were headed for a more northerly Landing Zone embracing fields which would presumably have been cleared of enemy forces had COL VANDERVOORT'S Battalion continued on to NEUVILLE AU PLAIN and made a successful stand there. But the shrinking of the position—under the circumstances heretofore described—left the gliders quite vulnerable to those enemy groups which had either held ground to northeast of STE MERE EGLISE or were now gathering along the northern fringes of the community to renew the assault. Company D, which was deployed along the northern arc, was already feeling the slight pressure of distant enemy fire, presumably from the enemy column which had continued coming south from NEUVILLE AU PLAIN. All told, TURNBULL and his men had contained this pressure for somewhat more than nine hours before their forced withdrawal; it was just a short time before the gliders came in that Company D noticed a pick-up of hostile fire along the northern front. The timing of these events compounded the difficulties of the glider force.

Three gliders landed relatively close to the American lines;

their occupants were at once succored by patrols sent out from Company D. Others were brought down by enemy fire from along the hedgerows to the northeastward; still others crash-landed into the hedgerow embankments or among the anti-glider poles in these same fields, with heavy loss to their human cargo; yet other members of the serial swung over toward the Drop Zone, where 505th had landed that morning, and came to earth among the hedgerows there where the fire was little or no hazard.

This misfortune elsewhere in the Division had at least the good effect of easing the supply situation within the STE MERE EGLISE perimeter. By that hour, all hands had become innured to the need for constant patrolling. In fact, small detachments of the enemy had been so numerous in the general vicinity throughout the day that the runner service between STE MERE EGLISE and the Regimental CP at the Drop Zone was maintained in a series of patrol actions, the runner going out with several riflemen as escort. When bad fortune overtook the gliders, the STE MERE EGLISE defenders looked upon the situation simply as one more problem to be solved by the use of patrols.

They realized that since it was likely that much of the glider personnel would be incapacitated, the glider supply cargo would remain untouched and might fall into enemy hands unless they did something about it.* Some part of this work was done by

*This was the explanation of the two Battalion Commanders.

Company D, but the lion's share of it fell to 88 men from Company E, who, with a large number of 101st Division men (strays) attached, proceeded to systematically comb the fields, succor the crews and salvage the cargo, a task which kept them engaged until well past midnight. The Company put down local opposition largely with the use of BARs; the glider men who were still sound were sent on their way to their assigned missions; the wounded and crippled were made as comfortable as possible; the walking-wounded joined the Company and helped out in the work. The men hacked and smashed their way into the twisted gliders and invariably found that the supply inside—food, ammunition, communications equipment, jeeps, 57 AT guns, engineering supply, etc.—was in perfect condition. All cargo was shifted back to within the defensive perimeter as quickly as possible; the command became partly mobile with the aid of the jeeps and the possession of the 57 AT guns gave it a brace against the appearance of enemy armor. The only supply difficulty—water shortage—did not become acute until the second day and was due altogether to the damage wrought by enemy artillery on the town water system. It caused extra hardship to the wounded.

Throughout the first phase of NEPTUNE one of the inordinate handicaps on 82d Division operation—effecting that Division far more seriously than any other Division in the NEPTUNE Operation—was that the able-bodied had to watch their wounded

suffer. In all other divisions—even in 101st—evacuation to the LSTs via the Beaches got underway on D Day morning or at worst, by late afternoon. But 82d Division was too far inland for that. Three days were to pass before it could get any medical relief through the arrival of the column from UTAH BEACH. Meanwhile, all elements of Division had to care for their own wounded under the conditions normal to a jump attack—shortage of medical supply and always a loss of a certain percentage of skilled medical personnel. Many died who might have been saved had the situation been otherwise.

KRAUSE felt this was true of his situation at STE MERE EGLISE—that men were dying who could have been saved with an earlier evacuation and better care. And he realized that his men knew it and that it multiplied the mental hazard. The aid station at STE MERE EGLISE was taking care only of the wounded hit in defense of the town; there was an aid station on the Drop Zone which was administering to jump casualties. Yet by the end of D Day, there were about 130 men hospitalized in STE MERE EGLISE. Most were suffering from fragmentation wounds of one sort or another—artillery, mortar, hand grenade, rifle grenade. Not more than 6 or 7 men had been hit by bullets. KRAUSE had received a bullet in his left thigh at 1700—his third wound of the day. The medics made him go to the hospital. He spent one day there, the command passing to MAJ WILLIAM H. HAGAN, III, while KRAUSE was kept informed at his bedside of the progress of the action.

lying on a pallet and waiting until he was clear of shock, he reflected on the fact that the spirits of the men had seemed to be so much higher than his own, and he wondered why. It was thought that gave a number of other commanders pause during the STE MERE EGLISE action; the men never seemed to doubt for a moment that they would hold the town; the commanders themselves were frequently beset by the gravest worry. Thinking of these obliquely contrasting attitudes some time later, VANDERVOORT epitomised the reasons for the difference in the viewpoint of command and of the commanded during an operation of semi-seize character. His words: "The only final judges of the true situation are the men out on the line."

The Commanders within STE MERE EGLISE could hear fire from all quadrants of the perimeter. From their interior position it gave them an exaggerated feeling that pressure was coming against them simultaneously from all sides. The men, however, knew in detail what was coming against them and they saw nothing which they knew they could not handle.

The measure of the danger was not to be found at the CP but in what was happening around the roadblocks.*

*These are not gratuitous observations by the HO. There was a decided contrast in the estimates made by KRAUSE and VANDERVOORT (the former especially) of the pressure against STE MERE EGLISE and what the men had to say. The HO called this fact to the attention of the two Commanders who thereon went over the data and came to the conclusion here outlined.

Most of the material in this chapter is to be found in the KRAUSE and VANDERVOORT interviews; however, company critiques were held of Companies D and E and what is said of the company actions is largely the testimony of the men.

It remained for an impartial witness to pass an unwitting judgment on the contrast in these two points of view. The Mayor of STE MERE EGLISE had witnessed the fight throughout the day from a position within the town. He had been there in mid-afternoon when COL KRAUSE--becoming suddenly aware that he was getting fire from within his own lines--had sent his men on another prowl of the houses and had dragged forth a half-dozen snipers who had been missed in the first mop-up. Perhaps he had also felt the danger come closer when at 1730 artillery fire began to range in on the Battalions' CP, thus beginning an intermittent shelling which lasted throughout the night. And he made it of record that he was on hand when at about 2100, the enemy made his last infantry thrust from the south--an attempt that the men out on the line described as "hardly more than a strong patrol action."

In a letter which is remarkable for its simplicity and depth of feeling, the Mayor expressed to COL ELMAN some three weeks later his reaction to the battle and to the spirit of the men who had carried it.

"On the evening of June 6," he wrote, "from the ditch where I had taken cover I heard the battle drawing closer to us. The Germans came back as far as the outskirts of the town. There was hand-to-hand fighting. In the morning I had heard paratroopers say: 'We are attacking; the forces coming by sea will be here in six hours.' In the evening, however, they still

awaited reinforcements. One of your men told me: 'The sea was too rough.' The women of the town cried and prayed. 'Don't leave us!' I heard them say to the men. One of the paratroopers replied with a smile and a laugh: 'We will never leave you. We are staying right here.'**

*This letter, which was kept in COL ERMAN'S file, was copied verbatim.

THE ROADBLOCK ACTIONS

The thrust from the north which 1LT TURNBULL'S men had held back for so long a time, and which seemed to be coming on against the perimeter at about the time the gliders came in through the twilight, developed slowly and raggedly during the hours of darkness. It was badly reconnoitered and the enemy appeared to be greatly uncertain, as if proceeding without any well-laid plan.*

Close contact was first felt by Company D's First Platoon, which under 1ST LT THOMAS MC CLEAN was holding ground forward of the northeast roadblock. At about 2300 this group began to draw small arms fire in moderate volume. MC CLEAN moved his BARS forward one field and they returned this fire at a range of about 150 yards.

The effect seems to have been to roll the advance off MC CLEAN'S left shoulder and turn it toward the blocks covering the roads directly to the westward; as MC CLEAN'S platoon held their ground throughout the night, continuing to draw some random fire, but always from the left front.

The blocks were well ready for the test. CAPT DE LONG, Commander of Company H, had personally supervised the final organization of all of the blocks, taking this chore off KRAUSE'S hands. Strength had built up steadily during the day; at 0800 that morning DE LONG had had only 14 riflemen, one mortar, one

*This was VANDERVOORT'S estimate of it as reported in his interview.

machine gun, one bazooka and 18 mines ready for installation in his own Company sector; by noon this force had swelled to 6 officers, 74 men, 5 bazookas, 2 grenade launchers, 3 machine guns, 4 BARs and two mortars; there were corresponding gains in the other sectors; and still, because of the spread of the area to be defended, the line was pretty thin.

The day had passed in relative quiet for the men at the blocks; they saw no enemy forces close up and they had little or no chance to use their rifles. A short while after dark, the first attack fell on the block facing toward NEUVILLE AU FLAIN. The enemy skirmishers came on rather stupidly and obviously. They opened a machine gun against the ground where the block was set up and supported it with a scattering rifle fire; then after shooting a few rifle grenades, their individuals came crawling along the hedgerows and ditches on both sides of the main road. The Americans answered with small arms fire, grenades and bazookas, but couldn't tell in the darkness whether they were picking any of the skirmishers off. It had looked from the beginning as if the enemy had simply blundered into the block. They had walked almost to the minefield; SGT LEONARD HODGES had seen them coming down the middle of the road and couldn't believe that Germans would act that way; finally, he had yelled to them to halt, and they had thereon scattered to the ditches and started firing. Begun thus uncertainly, the first foray ended in the same manner; before HODGES knew whether

his fire was having any effect, the Germans began backing away; they then tried to circle around the right of the block; the exchange of fire, however, had given them a clearer definition of the American position and the ground around HODGES and his men became very hot; gradually the enemy group worked rightward to within 100 yards of the block, set up three machine guns in a ditch and laid down a fairly heavy screen of fire—most of which was absorbed by the hedgerow embankment. HODGES took two men with him, crawled along the ditch on the opposite side of the road, got to within 40 yards of the German position and whispered to the others: "Let 'em have it!" Together, the men threw about 30 grenades—fragmentation, white phosphorus and gasmon. Although a few grenades came back at them in reply from the enemy group, the sudden attack had done its work—all three enemy guns were destroyed. That stopped the attack on HODGES' block and the Germans then moved rightward (away from HODGES' left). The skirmishing had gone on more than four hours; HODGES hadn't lost a man.

S SGT HARRY YACHECHAK was in charge of the block to the leftward; when the enemy swung around to that side, in search of a soft spot, YACHECHAK couldn't see them at first, but his men began to hear and feel rifle and machine pistol fire coming at them from about 200 yards range. YACHECHAK'S forward machine gun fired back—about two belts. Then a German field piece opened fire on the block and the first round landed square on

the forward gun position, killing both men and blowing the weapon apart. YACHECHAK did a lot of quick figuring. The gun had been covering the hedgerow to the front of where his other 15 men were deployed. he had balanced his force this way on purpose, feeling that it meant greater all-around security. But the destruction of the forward gun meant that a 150-yard gap existed in the American forward line and the enemy could close to within one hedgerow distance of the remainder of the block. He decided that this was a not-too-bad situation and that it would be better to hazard it than to send another gun forward and risk that the enemy would range in on it. Also, he was bothered because he had heard an American machine gun (possibly the gun left by TURNPULL at NEUVILLE) firing out front and he thought for a few minutes that it might be an American gun crew who were confused about their direction. So he remained where he was, doing nothing, and the enemy group came through the gap. It is probable that they were made unwary by their too easy success over the gun and the lack of any further fire. The night was light and the field was very green. As they streamed across the field, YACHECHAK could measure their bulk, and from the moon glint, judge the shape of their helmets. He yelled to his men that they were Germans; all along the block they opened fire with all weapons; the Germans fell back instantly, but quite a few of their number had fallen in the field. YACHECHAK'S men did not go back to the hedgerow where the forward gun had been. They yielded that much ground--the only

ground yielded at STE MERE EGLISE during D Night---but the enemy could not maintain himself there. DE LONG came out in the morning to look for his men, reconnoitered first the line where the forward gun had been, found the destroyed gun and became alarmed that his line was broken; later he found YACHE-CHAK and the others taking it easy in their rearward position right next the houses; they were laughing at him.

DE LONG had believed that the real danger would come at the block facing westward; that was not the case, though at that point occurred one of the more startling events of the night. An American jeep, loaded with ammunition and driving hell-bent out of STE MERE EGLISE, bore down on the minefield before anyone at the block could flag it. Mines, ammunition, men and the car blew up together in a terrific blast. No part of any occupant was ever found and the number and names of the victims remained unknown. German snipers along this portion of front tried to take immediate advantage of the confusion and DE LONG'S CP, about 50 yards from the block, came under a sudden and intense small arms fire. LT HARVEY J. ZIEGLER of Company H, took a detail of two men out to a mine field some distance beyond the scene of the explosion. Working under fire, they collected a number of the mines, brought them back and re-established the close-in field. This feat won ZIEGLER the DSC.

Having made his few half-hearted and unsuccessful passes out

to the right of the MONTIEBOURG road, the enemy for a time recoiled and then at about 0400—just as the light began to break—renewed his attack against LT MC CLEAN'S position to northeast of the town. Having reinforced his platoon with some of the glider men, MC CLEAN now had a total strength of 55 and was in a fair position to deal with the attempt. The three machine guns and one 60 mm mortar within his position were put into operation immediately. One of the machine guns—in advanced ground on MC CLEAN'S left—felt pressure from enemy flankers and therefore withdrew almost to the rifle line; MC CLEAN was confident that his right was in good shape and so he switched the machine gun which had covered that flank over to his left to meet the rising pressure; it checked the enemy advance for the time being. The fire fight continued until about 0800; there was a short breather then because the enemy did not come on and MC CLEAN was beginning to run out of ammunition. The men were well covered in the ditches and behind the embankments and had maintained themselves without taking much loss.

The perimeter had not been dented at any point; the enemy, however, was not yet fully beaten; both sides were making ready for the last grip.

THE LINK-UP

The hours between 0400 and 0900 on D PLUS ONE (7 June) were the most anxious period for 82d Division of the entire Normandy campaign. No word had yet come from the outside; the Division was still without knowledge of what was maturing to the south of Hill 20. During the night the situation along the MERDERET had shown no general improvement and while a solid lodgement had been gained at CHEF DU PONT the enemy pressure against the east end of the LA PIERRE crossing continued unremitting; now it began to appear that fresh and unmeasured forces were gathering to strike the Division from the north at STE MEERE EGLISE. These signs--among other things, a build-up of artillery fire against the Division CP area from the direction of the MONTEBOURG road--were fully disturbing to the command and resulted in the shifting of the greater part of the strength of one regiment--506th--from the MERDERET to the STE MEERE EGLISE portion of the Division front. (See account of the MERDERET actions for further details.) In the absence of any positive information as to what was occurring outside, GEN RIDGWAY continued to be concerned most of all for the security of the position at the town.

LT COL WINTON, who had talked to MAJ GEN BARTON at 4th Division CP at midnight, got back to 82d CP at 0800 and told what he knew. Still, he was reporting the situation as BARTON had understood it to be at 2400; that news was now 8 hours cold and

in the intervening period, 82d Division had heard nothing from the fast column which was supposed to be moving toward it from the south. At 0929 on 7 June, Division received this message from its rear echelon in England: "No info on your locations. All headquarters deeply concerned." It was a slightly grim irony. At that hour the 82d was embattled all along the line and its worry was not that higher headquarters were hearing nothing of its own movements but that it was hearing nothing from them.

The intelligence brought by WINTON did, however, influence the situation and movements to south of STE MERE EGLISE and of Hill 20 where considerable changes had occurred in the early morning hours. For one thing, the 8th Infantry had been straightened out; COL RAFF had talked to GEN BARTON late on the night before and the latter had directed that his elements cooperate fully in clearing the ground south of STE MERE EGLISE. BARTON had also been asked to prevent, if possible, the landing of further glider serials on Landing Zone W until the high ground was cleared, the 325th Glider Infantry being due to arrive early in the morning of D PLUS ONE; RAFF was then asked by BARTON to employ his force on the left during the morning attack and advance to the top of Hill 20, while 8th Infantry carried the burden of the attack on right of the main road.* The line set up for the night defensive position.

*Most of these details were provided by RAFF in his initial

had been accommodated to this plan, RAFF holding the left with his tanks and about 200 men while a Battalion of the 8th Infantry held the right; when the attack was ready to jump-off, however, two platoons of CAPT CRAWFORD'S tanks had moved over to support the forces on the right and one platoon remained with RAFF'S scratch force. By that time the 325th Glider Infantry had landed and was already collecting its forces. (See "Attack Through the Ford" for details.) Some of this Regiment's planes came down in the no-man's land between the two forces; but either the Germans on the Hill were not sufficiently alerted or there had been some further deterioration of their position during the night; 325th suffered very few losses from enemy gunfire. The greater number of the planes landed in the fields closer to the LES FORGES crossroads and along a general line to the eastward of this position, strung along all the way back to the beaches; so landing, they were out of the range of enemy fire. After releasing the gliders, however, some of the C-47s flew directly into the teeth of the position on Hill 20; the enemy opened fire with all infantry weapons and at least one anti-tank gun; two of the C-47s exploded and burned just above Hill 20 as the forces of the American attack watched and waited on their line of departure.*

interview. They were checked with GEN BARTON during an interview in Paris on 27 August 1944 and were subsequently checked against 4th Division records with LT COL WILLIAM GAYLE.

*From the RAFF interview.

The attack jumped off at 0900. With the additional support of one Battalion moving from ECOQUENEAVILLE toward STE MERE EGLISE the 8th Infantry produced an envelopment of the enemy right on Hill 20. By 1030 the advance had reached the high ground and enemy resistance to south of STE MERE EGLISE no longer had any base though sniper activity continued. RAFF in the meantime had received information from COL LEWIS of 325th that in view of 82d's rapidly fluxing situation--the growing certainty that STE MERE EGLISE would be held and the rapidly mounting doubts about the situation along the MERDEFET--his instructions would probably be changed by GEN RIDGWAY. When by mid-morning it appeared that the situation at Hill 20 was coming under control and there would be no further serious difficulty in achieving the link-up between the 8th Infantry and the STE MERE EGLISE defenders, he was ordered by Division to withdraw all of the tanks and proceed via CHEF DU PONT to the vicinity of 82d CP; GEN BARTON agreed to this shift. The column went on its way and within an hour or so 325th Regiment was moving in the same general direction.*

Within STE MERE EGLISE, the situation had again cooled by that hour and the enemy early morning attack against the northern sector had faded shortly after 0900, when the Second Platoon of Company D came up to reinforce First Platoon and LT MC CLEAN's men received a plentiful re-supply of ammunition. There was no

*From the RAFF and WIENECKE interviews, supported by 82d G-3 Journal and 325th G-3 Journal.

real activity on this ground during the remainder of the morning.* But once again, the Germans had been rebuffed along the right flank of the northern sector only to have another stab at the left, next the MONTEBOURG road. At about 0920, following a preparatory artillery fire from directly north of the town, the German infantry attacked straight down the road, coming along the hedgerows and ditches, and followed closely by their own cannon. The foot troops got into the buildings in the northern outskirts and one self-propelled gun was brought forward as far as Second Battalion's CP, which was in this sector. The gun went into action there and, firing straight down the road, drove off the crew of the 57 mm gun covering the MONTEBOURG road. VANDERVOORT then saw one of his own privates run out, take over the 57 gun, return the fire and destroy the 57 gun. That incident marked the high tide of the enemy advance and also its recession. The German infantry faded back.**

*As the enemy fire dwindled, a German medical officer came forward under a white flag to ask 1ST LT WAVERLY W. WRAY for permission to carry out the wounded. SGT CHARLES SWAN saw the conference and thought that it might be a ruse to cover a withdrawal. He worked his way forward along a hedgerow on the left flank and saw the German infantry quitting their foxholes and retiring along the ditches. He was close enough to mow them down with his tommy gun (being about only 30 yards away) but he looked back and saw that the white flag was up and so he concluded that he had better not fire.

**According to VANDERVOORT, the perimeter position was never considered as a whole and the troops distributed proportionately according to the ground. The relationship of the hedgerow lines running toward the town and their juxtaposition to the highways, etc., made any such distribution impossible. In some places troops were stretched thin over critical ground within the perimeter and at other places they were concentrated more than was needed. It was, in other words, a numerical distribution

As the pressure died, MC CLEAN'S platoon was withdrawn from the firing line and sent on a special mission, moving a little south of west from STE MERE EGLISE in the direction of FOUQUEVILLE to meet the upcoming elements of 8th Infantry; this mission kept it occupied throughout the mid-day and the platoon was not on hand when at 1715, the American forces at STE MERE EGLISE attacked northward from the town with the object of destroying the enemy forces remaining in the vicinity.

In the intervening hours, juncture had been made with the 8th Infantry, elements of that Regiment had moved up to support the left of the north-facing line and American armor had come into the town from the eastward.

It was in most respects a full-dress attack that MAJ GEN COLLINS the Corps Commander, was privileged to witness; he had arrived at GEN LEBLANC'S CP about 15 minutes before the line began its advance. The plan was for Company E, 504, to make a sweep northward, keeping to west of the main road; MC CLEAN'S platoon (which was expected to return by the appointed hour) was to keep pace with Company E, moving along on the right of the main road. Support Battalion of the 8th Infantry, which had advanced on STE MERE EGLISE from ESCOFFEAUVILLE, had come under

and not according to terrain. But a majority of the men were combat-seasoned and knew the prime lesson of keeping juncture. As one of them said to the CO: "We had learned to worry like hell about the people on our right and left and to keep moving until we found them."

such heavy artillery fire on approaching the town from the south that it had swung around STE MERE EGLISE on the eastward and had then come into 82d's ground from a northeasterly direction. The Commander had then moved the Battalion somewhat to west of the LIONNEBOURG road and of the ground held by VANDERVOORT'S Battalion of 505. Since it had previously been directed that for the advance northward toward NEUVILLE AU FLAIN the MONTEBOURG road would be the boundary of the two Divisions, with 4th Division on the right, the local situation was thus temporarily scrambled; Second Battalion of the 8th Infantry was moving to the attack through 82d's sector and a portion of VANDERVOORT'S command--MC CLEAN'S platoon--was to operate in 4th Division's sector.

During the last half-hour of preparation, there had been an intense build-up of enemy artillery fire against the town, caused, perhaps by the fact that the enemy had seen the American armor moving up. This appearance had been somewhat obvious. Force HOWELL, which had been under COL RAFF, had arrived at the 82d CP around noontime and six of the Shermans from Company C, 746th Tank Battalion, were now moving east from the CP area to give the infantry attack close-up support. Almost coinciding with, or perhaps slightly preceding this movement, a task force composed of Company B, the assault gun platoon and three tanks from Headquarters of the same Battalion (746th) arrived at the central intersection in STE MERE EGLISE, having come west from

REUVILLE. The advance of this force and its subsequent movements had not been coordinated with the attack that was about to take place by the 8th and 505th elements; it was acting more or less on its own, responding to a call that an armored force was threatening STE MERE EGLISE from the north. At the intersection, the armor turned north and continued moving. As the force reached higher ground a few hundred yards beyond the center of STE MERE EGLISE at the limits of the built-up area, the tanks came under artillery and mortar fire and simultaneously the crews saw for the first time a column of enemy armor about 300 yards away; there were about five tanks and perhaps the same number of vehicles in the column; the slight rise in ground had screened the column from view until that moment. Both forces opened fire at about the same time and the leading American tank, which was commanded by LT HOUSTON PAYNE, succeeded in knocking out an anti-tank gun and setting two of the enemy tanks afire before exhausting its supply of ammunition; by that time an enemy hit had knocked off PAYNE'S antiaircraft gun and periscope. As he moved back, he motioned to the second tank to fire; after 12 rounds the second tank's gun jammed; thereon, MAJ YEATTS, the Battalion Executive and commander of the advance party, brought up the third tank and began to fire. Meanwhile, LT COL C. G. HUPFER, the Battalion Commander, reconnoitering to the northeastward for a route by which to outflank the enemy column, had found a trail leading north which gave

into a secondary road that led to NEUVILLE AU PLAIN. PAYNE took this road followed by two Shermans from Company B. Come to within 300 yards of NEUVILLE and approaching it from the east, PAYNE saw an enemy tank near the village church. He opened fire before his own approach was detected and his first few rounds set the tank ablaze. The German column which had first confronted PAYNE'S tank on the main road was now in full retreat, leaving its disabled guns and vehicles behind; Company B's First Platoon still held to the main road, firing at the vehicles which were now speeding toward NEUVILLE.* The Second and Third Platoons, however, had moved east and north to support COL HUFFER'S out-flanking movement; before they could reach the line where PAYNE had gone into action, the retreating German armor had paused and re-engaged and both of the Company B tanks alongside PAYNE were hit and disabled. LT FRANK KOGUT got his Second Platoon up to the scene in time to hit and disable the German tank which had made this double score. KOGUT'S tanks then machine-gunned the hedgerows liberally to the east of NEUVILLE; in consequence of this strafing, 25 enemy infantrymen came out of positions along the hedgerows with hands raised in air. Later the tanks moved into the hamlet; they captured 35 more Germans; they released 19 American prisoners whom the NEUVILLE force had been holding; and they interrupted the work

*The probable relationship in time of HUFFER'S advance to the infantry attack is indicated by the fact that when the Company came through the town enroute to the LD, it came under intense artillery fire from the MONTBOURG road and NEUVILLE directions, which fire appears to have come from the armored column.

of three enemy ambulances which were hastily evacuating the wounded from an aid station in NEUVILLE.

Company B then out-posted the village. But they held for only a few hours. At 2100, no infantry having come forward to the support of this advance position, the Company B tanks withdrew to bivouac at NEUVILLE.

The infantry forces which had attacked from STE MERE EGLISE, independently of, and perhaps a few minutes later than this initial tank thrust, had been quite unaware that American armor was fighting a successful battle that far up the road. The Company B tanks had in fact ridden past the main enemy infantry position confronting STE MERE EGLISE; the strength of this position had been disposed preponderantly to the left of the main road and the tanks had rolled on past what amounted to an open flank. Nor was it strange that the attacking American infantry had missed this sally as so much mortar, machine gun and machine pistol fire was enveloping the northern fringes of the town by this time that the riflemen had sight and hearing for scarcely anything except the close-up battle. (However, the artillery fire had died by this time, which suggests that HUFFER'S attack had destroyed its base.)

At 1715—jump-off hour—the situation was approximately this; The six Sherman tanks from RAFF'S force came on toward Company E which had been on the Line of Departure for about 30 minutes;

but on beyond the tanks to the leftward of their own position, Company E could see no signs that Second Battalion, 8th Infantry, had completed its deployment and was ready to go; as for the situation on the right, it was still a blank, MC CLEAN'S platoon not having returned from its mission. Three of the Shermans steadied short of Company E's sector and turned left into the zone where Second Battalion, 8th Infantry, was supposed to attack; the other three moved on up to Company E's position; at first there had been some thought of getting artillery support for the attack but it was reckoned by the infantry commanders that the opposing lines were drawn too close for such fire to be both safe and effective; so the tanks were asked to put 10 or 12 rounds into the foreground where the enemy force was thought to be; it was done.

Then without waiting for the appearance of either the Battalion on the left or the Platoon on the right, Company E jumped off with the three tanks following along. The way led along an unimproved road which running along the western fringes of STE MERE EGLISE, cuts back somewhat tortuously to the main road at the northern extremity of the built-up area. For a short distance, a sunken trail runs parallel and close to the main highway on this side of town. As the men of Company E worked their way along, it seemed to them that this sunken road was the chief source of the enemy fire. They got to the intersection of these two unimproved roads without losing a man; there,

they were supposed to hold. Instead, they found the situation delivered wholly into their hands; their maneuver had brought them in on the flank of the principle enemy body which was deployed along a ditch paralleling the second road. The tanks moved immediately to the fore so as to screen their own infantry and at the same time enfilade the ditch. For perhaps 10 minutes tanks and riflemen poured fire into the ditch as rapidly as they could get it out; the blast was such that the enemy could scarcely raise up to fire a shot. A white flag was raised amid the carnage; LT JAMES J. COYLE, shouting at top voice, was able to bring the fire of his men under control within a minute or two; the German fire ceased; the ditch was filled with the dead and the dying and from out of the defiladed spaces, 160 prisoners--many of them wounded--came crawling, or tried to run into the fields, hands in air.

The right flank of the battalion of 3th infantrymen had closed on the Company in time to participate in the final stage of this action. They added their fire to that of the 505 men, though it was the feeling of the latter that the tank fire had wrought the real execution. In the last stage, COYLE had forced the surrender of the greater number of the enemy by moving along the ditch, accompanied by several other men, and covered by one of the tanks. They fired as they went along, thereby forcing a number of the enemy to scurry into an open field to the rear, where they throw down their arms in token of surrender.

COYLE was hit by a bullet just about the time the show was over. A few of the enemy had broken away toward the MONTEBOURG road as the firing began. The First Platoon moved to that line as rapidly as possible and built up a fire position along the abounding hedgerow, thus to prevent any escape by that route. So doing, they captured the enemy Battalion commander and shot quite a few of the Germans who were trying to break back toward NEUVILLE AU PLAIN.

On the right, MC CLEAN'S platoon reached the Line of Departure about 15 minutes after Company E had jumped off. They could see the others on ahead of them and they strained unsuccessfully to catch up. Field by field, the left flank kept moving ahead of them. At last the platoon came to a large field ringed all the way around with vacated German fire positions and foxholes; MC CLEAN distributed some of his men among these holes, figuring that he could use their fire to get the remainder of the platoon to the far side of the field which was supposed to be his objective line. He had hardly completed these dispositions when Company E made its coup at the ditch on left of the road; thereon, small groups of the enemy, fleeing the fire on the left, tried to cross into the field on the right. They were either shot down, taken prisoner or driven back to the road where they again came under Company E's fire. MC CLEAN then moved his platoon up to the far side of the field where the men deployed briefly along the boundary ditch. They

could see groups of Germans, some of them waving white flags, moving around aimlessly in the fields beyond. So the men held their fire and motioned the enemy to come on in. Altogether about 100 prisoners were taken by MC CLEAN'S men.

To the infantry all of this closing action had seemed ridiculously easy and they could not understand how it had happened or why the fight had gone so suddenly out of the German force. Not having seen COL HUPPER'S tank force go down the MONTEBOURG road and thence to NEUVILLE, they did not know that it was in fact playing dustpan to their broom and had come athwart the enemy line of retreat. Nor did the tanks at NEUVILLE know that their action had been so timed that it had suited the infantry action exactly. Neither force had a working knowledge of the other's plan and intent; but the planned enemy must have seen it all as a carefully-planned and skillfully-done envelopment.

In that way ended the fight to capture and hold SEE MERE EGLISE. That evening the Corps Commander directed that 82d Division secure the left flank of 4th Infantry Division as it proceeded on its sweep north, clearing the territory from MONTEBOURG STATION to the Beach. The supporting mission of the 82d, which was assigned to 505th Regiment reinforced by one battalion of 325th Glider Infantry, was diagrammed in detail by GEN COLLINS; the 82d's elements were given a very narrow sector.

As of the night of D PLUS ONE, therefore, 82d Division's initial assignments were completed eastward of the MERDERET and northward of the DOUVE and in the days which immediately followed, the chief concern of the Division would be the winning and consolidation of the bridgeheads on the west shore of the MERDERET.