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THE OPERATIONS OF THE 9TH INFANTRY
DIVISION IN THE CUTTING OF THE
COTENTIN PENINSULA, 14-18 JUNE 1944
(NORMANDY CAMPAIGN)

Type of operation described: AN INFANTRY DIVISION ATTACKING
AND BREAKING THROUGH A DEFENSE LINE TO SEVER A PENINSULA AND
ISOLATE THE DEFENDERS FROM THEIR FORCES ON THE MAINLAND

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THE OPERATIONS OF THE 9TH INFANTRY
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ORIENTATION

INTRODUCTION

This monograph relates the operations of the 9th US Infantry Division in its drive to sever the COTENTIN PENINSULA, NORMANDY, FRANCE, 14-18 June 1944 during the NORMANDY Campaign.

A brief account of the major operations which preceded the action to be described will provide the necessary background information required by the reader.

On 6 June 1944 Allied forces composed of the American First and the British Second Armies initiated a combined sea and airborne invasion of the French Coast. (See Map A)

The American First Army landed with two corps abreast, V Corps on the left, assaulting OMAHA BEACH, and VII Corps on the right, assaulting UTAH BEACH on the east coast of the COTENTIN PENINSULA. In conjunction with the VII Corps landings, the American 82d and 101st Airborne Divisions executed an air drop on the COTENTIN PENINSULA, to the west of the UTAH BEACH defenses. (See Map A) (1)

The advance elements of the 9th Infantry Division, part of VII Corps reserve, began landing across UTAH BEACH on 10 June in preparation for its future employment.

By 14 June, VII Corps had firmly established its beach-head, a link-up with V Corps to the south had been achieved

(1) A-1, p. 26

and all D-Day objectives had been secured. With the beaches secure, the way was cleared for continuing the drive west across the DOUVE RIVER to the west coast of the peninsula and north to the important port of CHERBOURG. (See Map B) (2)

THE GENERAL SITUATION

The initial mission of the First US Army after the successful landings in NORMANDY were accomplished was to capture CHERBOURG on the northern coast of the COTENTIN PENINSULA. (3) This major port was vitally needed in order to support future large-scale operations on the European Continent.

As a prelude to the capture of CHERBOURG, it was necessary to seal off the COTENTIN PENINSULA in order to prevent the Germans from reinforcing their troops there. Accordingly the First Army plan assigned to VII Corps the dual mission of cutting the peninsula from east to west and of seizing CHERBOURG. The V Corps would continue to push south in conjunction with the British Second Army on the left. (4) Speed in seizing the port of CHERBOURG was essential because of the critical supply situation. Weather and high surf conditions were adding to the difficulties of unloading supplies across the beaches.

DISPOSITIONS AND PLANS OF THE VII CORPS (See Map B)

VII Corps plan for cutting the peninsula called for the 90th Infantry Division to continue its drive to the west to secure the line of the DOUVE RIVER, while the 4th Infantry

- (2) A-2, p. 115
- (3) A-1, p. 26
- (4) A-1, pp. 56-58

Division on the right continued to push north and west toward CHERBOURG. The 82d Airborne Division, on the left, was to protect the south flank of the corps along the north bank of the DOUVE. The 9th Infantry Division, after its landings were completed, was to assemble in the vicinity of ORGLANDES and COLOMBY prepared to complete the severance of the peninsula west of the DOUVE RIVER in the vicinity of ST. LO-D'OURVILLE. (See Maps C and D) (5)

The terrain in the VII Corps area of operations was divided into two compartments by the DOUVE RIVER. The first, the area to the east of the river, between the DOUVE and the MERDERET, consists mainly of low, flat pastureland, orchards, and small patches of woods. The ground varies from 10 to 50 meters in height and there are no dominant hills. The second compartment, composed of the area between the DOUVE and the west coast of the peninsula, is bounded on the south by the PRAIRIES MARECAGEUSES, a marshy, inundated area and on the north by the SEYE RIVER. To the west of the DOUVE the ground rises slightly, culminating in a low hill-mass northeast of BARNEVILLE-SUR-MER. This hill-mass rises to a height of some 140-150 meters and overlooks the BRICQUEBEC-BARNEVILLE-SUR-MER Highway. (See Map D)

The most interesting features of the entire area are the hedgerows. These consist of earthen embankments, 3 to 4 feet wide and about 4 feet high, overgrown with a maze of small trees, hedge and matted vines. The hedgerows, with their mass of tangled vegetation, border every field, thus

(5) A-2, p. 126 and p. 131

dividing the terrain into an almost continuous series of small, rectangular compartments. The German defense was particularly favored by these natural "strong points", for adjacent compartments were mutually supporting. The attacker was forced to reduce each individual compartment, or "strong point", before proceeding - a slow and costly process. (6)

The DOUVE RIVER flows south to ST. SAUVEUR-LE-VICOMTE, then turns east. Although not a major obstacle, its low banks and flat valley were partially inundated.

Because of the ever-present hedgerow and the lack of commanding terrain, cover and concealment, in varying degree, exists throughout most of the area. These same terrain characteristics limit observation and fields of fire to a few hundred yards in most places.

The major roads in the area under consideration are worthy of mention because of their importance as routes of communication. On the north a highway runs from GOURBESVILLE west to STE. COLOMBE, then across the DOUVE to BARNEVILLE-SUR-MER, on the west coast of the peninsula, where it intersects the main coastal highway running north and south. This coast road was of major importance. It provided the German with his last remaining land route of communication between the defenders of CHERBOURG and the forces in the southern COTENTIN. In the south the main road runs west from PONT L'ABBE across the DOUVE to the important communication center of ST. SAUVEUR-LE-VICOMTE and on to ST. LO D'OURVILLE on the west coast. This road also intersects the main west

(6) Personal knowledge

coast road at a point just northeast of ST. LO D'OURVILLE.
(See Maps C and D)

Major enemy forces opposing VII Corps were elements of the German 77th, 91st, 243d and 709th Infantry Divisions. These forces were disposed generally on the north and west of the corps front so as to defend CHERBOURG and protect the escape route on the west coast. (See Map B) (7)

At the time of the operation to be described, three of the five divisions assigned to VII Corps, the 4th Infantry and the 82d and 101st Airborne Divisions, had been in action for seven days and had suffered moderate casualties. Although these three divisions had seen no combat prior to their landings in NORMANDY, they had acquitted themselves well and were fast becoming battle-experienced veterans. However, since they had carried the brunt of the first week's hard fighting, their combat efficiency was somewhat reduced. Of the two other divisions assigned to VII Corps, one, the 90th Infantry Division, received its initial baptism of fire on 10 June. On that date it was committed through the MERDERET bridgehead with the mission of attacking west to secure the line of the DOUVE. Thus it had been in action only four days, and had not, as yet, become adjusted to combat. (See Map B) (8)

The 9th Infantry Division, in Corps reserve, was the only division in VII Corps with prior combat experience. This division was composed of combat veterans of the operations in NORTH AFRICA and SICILY. These troops were fresh

(7) A-2, p. 117 and p. 118
(8) A-2, p. 129 and pp. 211-212

from six months rest and training in southern ENGLAND and were a well organized, well led, combat tested team. Morale and esprit de corps in the units of this division were at peak levels. In the opinion of the writer, the 9th Infantry Division, at the beginning of the operation herein described, was one of the finest, if not the finest, fighting teams in the Armies of the United States. (9)

On the whole, morale and combat efficiency throughout the VII Corps was high because of the initial successes gained in the establishment of the beachhead.

Supply, although still critical due to the absence of major port facilities, was adequate to support the immediate operations of the corps. Over-the-beach supply operations were increasing the volume of supplies in the beachhead despite the difficulties involved.

German forces facing VII Corps (elements of the 77th, 91st, 243d and 709th Infantry Divisions) had suffered rather heavy casualties during the first week of beachhead fighting. Some units were decimated while others were fighting as composite groups. A week of hard fighting had taken its toll of morale and combat efficiency.

The German supply situation on the COTENTIN was good. Stockpiles of supplies of all types were available in CHERBOURG and at other communication centers on the peninsula as a result of German pre-invasion preparations.

VII Corps held the advantage in relative combat efficiency. In addition to enjoying numerical superiority

(9) Personal knowledge

over the German defenders, the corps had available fresh reserve units from a division with previous combat experience.

THE SITUATION OF THE 9TH INFANTRY DIVISION

The original VII Corps plan specified that the 9th Infantry Division would begin landing on UTAH BEACH on 10 June and assemble in Corps reserve in the vicinity of ORGLANDES and COLOMBY. However, due to the slow progress of the 90th Infantry Division in its attack to secure the line of the DOUVE, this area was still in enemy hands when the 9th Infantry Division began its landings. This situation necessitated a change in plans. A new division assembly area in the vicinity of STE. MERE EGLISE was designated. (See Map C) The first elements of the division landed on 10 June, on schedule, and began arriving in the new assembly area. Due to the confusion still prevailing, both on the teeming beach and the crowded waters off shore, unit commanders experienced considerable difficulty in getting their units ashore. In some instances it became necessary to "commandeer" landing craft to haul men and equipment to the beach. To make matters worse, German shore batteries along the line of defenses extending north of UTAH BEACH to QUINE- N/S
VILLE were raking the beach and the waters off shore with accurate harassing fire. (See Map B) The big, open, slow-moving barges being used for ship-to-shore movement of men, supplies and equipment made prime targets for these guns.

(10) In spite of these difficulties, unloading of the

(10) Personal knowledge

division continued throughout the day (10 June) and by 11 June, the 39th Infantry, less some of its transportation and supporting weapons, was ashore. Two of the supporting field artillery battalions, the 34th (155-mm How) and the 60th (105-mm How) had also arrived in the assembly area during the same period. (11)

While the advance elements of the 9th Infantry Division were arriving on shore, the 4th Infantry Division was finding it difficult to advance north against the strong German coastal defenses extending north to QUINEVILLE. Harassing fire continued to fall on the beaches from that area and was threatening to slow down the unloading of supplies. The VII Corps Commander, Major General J. Lawton Collins, decided that speedy reduction of these fortifications was essential. Accordingly on 11 June he issued orders attaching the 39th Infantry and the 34th and 60th Field Artillery Battalions to the 4th Infantry Division for the accomplishment of this task. (12)

9th Division units continued to come ashore during 12 and 13 June. By midnight 13 June the unloading of the division was completed except for small detachments. These small groups joined their units during the next few days.(13)

When the 9th Division's units arrived in FRANCE in June 1944, they had not seen active combat service since the end of the Sicilian Campaign in August 1943. Consequently all units were at approximately full strength in personnel and

- (11) A-3, p. 3
- (12) A-2, p. 108
- (13) A-3, p. 3

equipment. Supplies of all types were available and were adequate to support immediate operational needs. (14)

The early June weather in NORMANDY was moderate and, for the most part, skies were clear. However, the COTENTIN PENINSULA, surrounded on three sides by the ENGLISH CHANNEL, is subject to the vagaries of channel weather. Thus occasional rain squalls swept over the area. These weather conditions had no appreciable effect on the operation to be described.

All Allied forces in FRANCE were operating on British Double Summer Time. The interesting feature of this time system was that darkness did not fall until approximately 2300 hours. This should be borne in mind by the reader as an aid in visualizing the conditions under which the operation took place. (15)

The terrain over which the 9th Division operated during the period: 14-18 June has been described in some detail under "Dispositions and Plans of the VII Corps." Consequently no further description of the terrain is deemed necessary in this section.

It will be recalled from "The Dispositions and Plans of the VII Corps" that, on 10 June, the 90th Division jumped off on an attack west through the MERDERET RIVER bridgeheads with the mission of securing initial objectives along the line of the DOUVE RIVER. (See Map B) On 12 June it became apparent that this attack was hopelessly bogged down by the formidable hedgerow country and stubborn German

{14} Personal knowledge
{15} Personal knowledge

resistance. General Collins, dissatisfied with the 90th Division's slow progress, decided to change his plans. A brief description of the new Corps plan is necessary here. The new plan was to commit the 9th Infantry and 82d Airborne Divisions through the 90th Division. The 9th Division, on the right, was to seize the 90th Division's objectives on the DOUVE. Also the 9th Division was given the additional mission of crossing the DOUVE and severing the COTENTIN PENINSULA by driving through to the west coast. After its regiments had been passed through, the 90th Division was to turn north and protect the 9th Division's right flank. The 82d Airborne, on the 9th Division's left, was to drive west to the DOUVE in conjunction with the 9th Division. (See Map C) (16)

Enemy units in the 9th Division's proposed zone of action were estimated as the equivalent of 2 regiments, supported by 3 or 4 battalions of artillery and some miscellaneous personnel. These units were thought to be elements from the German 91st, 243d and 709th Infantry Divisions. (17)

Before outlining the 9th Division's plan for the accomplishment of its mission, a brief enumeration of the major combat units (assigned and attached) available for employment on 13 June is in order. Available organic units were as follows: The 47th and 60th Infantry Regiments, the 26th and 84th Field Artillery Battalions (105-mm How), the 34th Field Artillery Battalion (155-mm How) and the 9th Reconnaissance Troop. The 39th Infantry Regiment and

(16) A-2, p. 131 and pp 133-134

(17) A-3, FO No. 1, p. 1

the 60th Field Artillery Battalion, having been attached to the 4th Division on 10 June, were still not available.

Attached units were: The 746th Tank Battalion (less Company A) and the 376th AAA AW Battalion (M). (18)

THE PLAN OF THE 9TH INFANTRY DIVISION (See Map C) (19)

The division's plan was to attack in column of regiments with the 60th Infantry (746th Tank Battalion, less 1 company, attached) in assault. The line of departure would be marked by the front line positions of the 90th Division's 358th and 359th Infantry Regiments. The time of attack was set at 1000 on 14 June.

The 60th Infantry was to cross the line of departure at H-hour, capture RENOUF, and continue northwest to seize the high ground west of ORGLANDES. From that point the advance was to continue to the west to the division objective - the line of the DOUVE.

The 47th Infantry was to remain in its assembly area as division reserve, with its 1st Battalion held in readiness for immediate employment.

The 26th and 84th Field Artillery Battalions (105-mm How) were to be in direct support of the 60th Infantry. The 34th Field Artillery Battalion (155-mm How) was to be in direct support of the 26th Field Artillery Battalion. The 376th AAA AW Battalion was assigned the mission of providing antiaircraft protection to the division artillery.

The 9th Reconnaissance Troop was to relieve the 90th Reconnaissance Troop in the vicinity of GOTTOT and maintain

(18) A-3, p. 2

(19) A-3, p. 4 and FO No. 1, p. 1

contact between the 60th Infantry's left flank and the 82d Airborne Division's right flank.

The general axis of advance was to be RENOUF - the high ground west of ORGLANDES - STE. COLOMBE.

FINAL PREPARATIONS FOR THE ATTACK (20)

During 13 June, regimental and battalion commanders from the 60th and 47th Infantries and commanders of supporting units reconnoitered the front line positions held by the 90th Division. Small unit commanders were briefed and advance parties were sent forward to select assembly areas west of the MERDERET RIVER. Movement to assembly areas for the attack was accomplished during the night 13-14 June. Extra ammunition was issued and final, detailed plans were completed by small unit commanders. The battle-tested men of the 9th were ready for the coming attack. N/S

NARRATION

OPERATIONS ON 14 JUNE (See Map C) (21)

At 1000 the 60th Infantry crossed the line of departure as scheduled. Due to the lack of maneuver space in the narrow gap existing between the left flank of the 359th Infantry and the right flank of the 358th Infantry, the 60th Infantry attacked initially in a column of battalions with the 3d Battalion leading. As elements of the 90th Division on the right continued to turn northward and the 82d Airborne Division on the left drove straight west, the 9th Division's zone in the center widened. The men of the 60th Infantry were subjected to small arms, mortar and artillery N/S

(20) Personal knowledge

(21) A-3, p. 4; A-2, p. 134

fire as they crossed the line of departure. This fire, delivered from well emplaced troops in hedgerow positions, slowed initial progress considerably. Then too, some of the units of the 60th Infantry became entangled with 90th Division units. This was inevitable because of the lack of room. Too many units were committed in a very narrow zone. Infantry units from both divisions were required to execute an extremely complicated maneuver in the face of stubborn enemy resistance,

In spite of these initial difficulties, elements of the 3d Battalion, in the lead, continued to advance. Heavy machine gun fire from RENOUF, the 60th Infantry's initial objective, delayed its capture during the afternoon. Division Artillery fired a concentration on the town and, by 2000, the town was cleared. At this point the 9th Division's sector had widened sufficiently to permit the employment of two battalions abreast. The commanding officer of the 60th Infantry, Colonel Frederick J. de Rohan, promptly took advantage of this by committing the 2d Battalion on the right of the 3d Battalion. Advancing abreast, these two battalions pushed on westward from RENOUF. By dark (approximately 2300) they had reached the ORGLANDES - PONT L'ABBE Highway. Here the day's fighting was ended and units dug in for the night. A day's hard fighting in the difficult hedgerow country had netted the 60th Infantry a gain of approximately one mile. At midnight the division commander, Major General Manton S. Eddy, ordered the 60th Infantry to continue the attack at 0500 the next morning, 15 June.

The 47th Infantry remained in reserve throughout the day. Small elements of this regiment had not yet come ashore. Patrols were dispatched northward in the direction of GOUBESVILLE^R to gain information of enemy activities in that area.

The Division Artillery (less the 60th Field Artillery Battalion) rendered close-in supporting fires and fires on small troop and tank concentrations throughout the day. The artillery was considerably hampered by the lack of ground observation. Numerous missions were fired without the benefit of observation. It was found necessary to employ air observation almost exclusively to adjust fires.

The 9th Reconnaissance Troop maintained contact with elements of the 90th Division on the right and the 82d Airborne Division on the left.

The division's attack on 14 June had made slow progress. No spectacular gains were registered. However, one objective had been gained. The 60th Infantry had broken through the initial crust of resistance and had secured maneuver space. It was now possible to commit more of the division's combat power into the attack.

HEDGEROW FIGHTING (22)

The specialized techniques employed by the small units throughout the operation in fighting over the hedgerow terrain deserve description. Thus a brief digression is felt to be justified in order to provide the reader with a more intimate picture of the operation as a whole.

(22) Personal knowledge

To begin with, it was known well in advance of the peninsula assault that units would be required to operate over the peculiar hedgerow terrain. However, pre-invasion training did not prepare units for hedgerow fighting. Techniques for the reduction of hedgerow "strong points" had to be developed after units entered combat. The problem of attacking over the hedgerows would have been difficult enough without stubborn German resistance. Once off the main roads, few roads existed. The only available supply routes were narrow, ~~sunken~~ wagon trails running between the hedgerows. These the Germans mined and covered with automatic weapons and 88-mm fire.

The typical hedgerow "strong point" consisted of a square or rectangular field measuring approximately one hundred yards on a side and surrounded completely by earthen walls overgrown with thick vegetation. Along these embankments the Germans had dug deep fox holes which provided splendid protection from all types of fire, and commanded the approaches to the field. In the corners were located machine guns or other automatic weapons commanding the approaches from adjacent fields. Thus each of these defensive compartments presented a problem in itself. When one hedgerow was reduced by the attacker, the Germans merely withdrew to the next hedgerow and the job had to be done all over again. This field-to-field fighting was slow and costly. The whole operation consisted of a series of small unit actions and close-in individual fighting for the possession of a single field.

Various methods for reducing these strongly held positions were developed and put to the test. One method was to place a curtain of artillery, mortar, small arms and machine gun fire along the entire length of the hedgerow facing the attacker, with special attention to the corners. Small units then advanced along the perpendicular hedgerows, avoiding the open fields, and stormed the position with grenades and small arms fire.

One of the most interesting and successful methods employed a combined arms team composed of a tank dozer and a small detachment of infantry and engineers. Engineers, equipped with demolition charges, blasted the side of the hedgerow. Then the tank dozer, protected by infantry, completed the breach in the embankment with its dozer blade. Other equally ingenious methods for dealing with this problem were tried by enterprising individuals, all schemes meeting with varying degrees of success.

It is to be emphasized that hedgerow fighting demanded the fullest display of initiative, aggressiveness and courage from the individual riflemen. The combat troops of the 9th Division, confronted with the heartbreaking task of attacking through the hedgerow country against determined German resistance, rose admirably to the demands of the occasion.

OPERATIONS ON 15 JUNE (See Map C) (23)

Promptly at 0500 the 60th Infantry, with the 1st Battalion 47th Infantry attached, began to advance on its previously

(23) A-3, pp. 4 and 5; A-2, pp. 135-136

designated objective - the high ground west of ORGLANDES. The 2d and 3d Battalions, with the 2d Battalion on the right, led the attack, with the 1st Battalion and the attached battalion in reserve. The line of departure was the front line positions occupied the night before. Almost immediately the two assault battalions ran into stiff German resistance. At 0745 the 90th Division reported that about 16 German tanks had been observed moving south from the vicinity of ORGLANDES. These tanks were not accompanied by infantry, and did not appear to be part of any coordinated counterattack, but they constituted a serious threat to the 60th Infantry's flank. Accordingly they were engaged by 57-mm antitank guns and rocket launchers when they came within range. In the ensuing fight, 3 Mark III Tanks were knocked out and the remainder began to withdraw toward ORGLANDES. At this point an artillery concentration from division artillery completed the rout. In this action, the 60th Infantry lost two 57-mm antitank guns. N/S

At 1000 General Eddy, while the attack was still in progress, ordered the 60th Infantry to change its axis of advance from northwest to west. The new objective was REIGNEVILLE. This was done in order to clear the way for the employment of the 47th Infantry, under the command of Colonel George W. Smythe, on the 60th Infantry's right. The 1st Battalion, 47th Infantry was released from attachment to the 60th Infantry and ordered to rejoin its own regiment. The 60th Infantry's old objective, the high ground west of ORGLANDES, was redesignated as the objective of the 47th

Infantry. At 1300 the 47th Infantry launched its attack with the 1st Battalion in the lead. By 1630 the 3d Battalion was committed on the 1st Battalion's left. The 3d Battalion advanced rapidly against light resistance and by 2000, had reached the regimental objective. The enemy showed evidence of withdrawing to the north. However, the rapid advance of the 3d Battalion left it in an exposed position, for the 1st Battalion, held up by fire from ORGLANDES, had not been able to keep pace. Fortunately the Germans made no effort to counterattack the exposed 3d Battalion. By late afternoon the 1st Battalion was able to move forward to a position abreast of the 3d Battalion's right flank. The 47th Infantry's objective had been secured and no further advance was attempted during the night. After 2000 the regiment redispersed itself on the objective so as to protect its right flank against a possible counterattack.

Meanwhile the 60th Infantry continued its attack toward REIGNEVILLE, with the 1st Battalion passing through the 2d Battalion to give the attack new impetus. As the 1st Battalion reached a position just northwest of REIGNEVILLE, it was vigorously counterattacked by a strong enemy force estimated as a battalion supported by four tanks. This surprise thrust forced the 1st Battalion to relinquish some 500 yards of hard-won ground. The 2d Battalion, which had been backing up the 1st Battalion's advance, immediately attacked through the 1st Battalion and regained the lost ground. By late afternoon the 2d Battalion had reached the outskirts of REIGNEVILLE. There its progress was stopped

N/S

for the night in order to permit the left flank units of the 47th Infantry to come abreast. Patrolling toward the DOUVE RIVER was carried out by both regiments during the night.

Not clear Map "C"

During the day the 39th Infantry and the 60th Field Artillery Battalion were released from attachment to the 4th Division. These units returned to division control during the afternoon, the 39th Infantry occupying an assembly area in division reserve.

Division Artillery, in addition to placing fire on the retreating tanks south of ORGLANDES, engaged in counter-battery missions throughout the day. Two concentrations, utilizing time fire, were placed on REIGNEVILLE at the request of the 60th Infantry when it was thought that a counterattack was organizing there. Ground observation continued to be difficult to obtain, so aerial observation was utilized extensively.

Substantial gains were made by 9th Division units on 15 June. The attack was given new impetus when the 47th Infantry joined the 60th Infantry in the advance. German resistance appeared to be crumbling to the west and it was believed that the German left flank was withdrawing to the northwest in an attempt to form a new line of defenses running east and west. Thus the way was clearing for a rapid thrust across the DOUVE RIVER and on to the west coast.

OPERATIONS ON 16 JUNE (24) (See Map C)

The division plan for the attack on 16 June was to advance with four regiments abreast. In addition to its

(24) A-3, pp. 5 and 6; A-2, pp. 136-140

own three regiments the 359th Infantry, 90th Division (less one battalion) was attached to the 9th Division for this attack. The order for the attack directed that the four regiments attack in line in order from left to right: The 60th, the 47th, the 359th and the 39th Infantries. Time of attack was set at 0500 for all regiments except the 39th Infantry, which was not to attack until 1100. The 87th Chemical Battalion (less 1 company) was attached to the 39th Infantry. The division reserve was composed of the 2d Battalion, 47th Infantry and the 746th Tank Battalion. Initial objectives were designated as follows: The 60th Infantry - REIGNEVILLE; the 47th Infantry - HAUTTEVILLE-BOCAGE; the 359th Infantry - ORGLANDES; the 39th Infantry - the area west of GOURBESVILLE.

In direct support of the attack were 6 battalions of field artillery. In addition to its 4 organic battalions, Division Artillery had the 915th Field Artillery Battalion (attached from the 90th Division) and the 957th Field Artillery Battalion (Corps Artillery) in direct support.

The 60th Infantry attacked with its 3d Battalion in the lead. REIGNEVILLE was quickly overrun and the 3d Battalion made excellent progress toward the DOUVE against light resistance. The 2d Battalion was committed at 1100 on the left flank of the division. This battalion, driving west with amazing speed, soon found itself far in advance of the other units of the division. The momentum of its rapid advance carried the 2d Battalion into STE. COLOMBE, on the east bank of the DOUVE, by midafternoon. Instead of stopping

until its sister battalions could come abreast, the 2d Battalion, operating alone and with both flanks exposed, stormed aggressively across the river. Three bridges were taken and a precarious bridgehead across the DOUVE was established in the face of savage German resistance. Almost immediately the Germans launched a series of strong counter-attacks in an attempt to dislodge the bridgehead. The men of the 2d Battalion were subjected to heavy artillery, mortar and small arms fire, but grimly they held on. No artillery support was available and ammunition was running low. Just before dark, the 3d Battalion reached the DOUVE and reinforced the bridgehead, relieving the pressure on the exhausted and badly mauled men of the gallant 2d Battalion. The 1st Battalion saw relatively little action during the day. It reached the east bank of the DOUVE by dark.

Meanwhile the 47th Infantry attacked at 0530 with its 1st and 3d Battalions abreast, the 1st Battalion on the right. In the 47th Infantry's zone the last high ground east of the DOUVE was located. Here the Germans were determined to hold at all costs. In the face of this desperate resistance, heavy fighting developed and the advance was slow. Just before noon the attack suddenly took on a new tempo because of important developments to the south in the 82d Airborne Division's zone. There evidence of German withdrawal west of the DOUVE prompted General Collins, VII Corps commander, to direct that the 47th Infantry's axis of advance be shifted from north to west, the new objective being the STE. COLOMBE - COLLEVILLE area.

The 47th Infantry's original objective, HAUTTEVILLE-BOGAGE, was secured by 1620, then the regiment advanced west toward its new objective. By dark the 1st and 3d Battalions had established defensive positions along the highway running south to ST. SAUVEUR-LE VICOMTE, with the 1st Battalion positioned so as to protect the division's north flank. The 2d Battalion had meanwhile established a defensive position in HAUTTEVILLE-BOGAGE.

The 359th Infantry attacked on schedule at 0500 and reached the highway east of ORGLANDES. There it was ordered to stop its advance so as to allow the 39th Infantry to attack across its front and seize ORGLANDES. This unusual maneuver was designed to allow the 39th Infantry to follow up the advance of the 47th Infantry. The new mission of the 39th Infantry was to protect the north flank of the division. As a result of this complicated scheme, the 359th Infantry did not participate in any further action during the day.

The 39th Infantry began its advance north into its initial objective area west of GOURBESVILLE at 1100. After cleaning out small pockets of resistance in that area, the regiment turned west and attacked toward ORGLANDES, in accordance with its new mission. ORGLANDES was ably defended N/S
by a strong German force. The 1st Battalion, making the assault, was not successful in dislodging the enemy from the town. Thus, instead of proceeding westward to protect the division's vulnerable north flank, the 39th Infantry was forced to remain in position east of ORGLANDES during the night and contain the German defenders there.

Division Artillery activities during the day included counterbattery and close support missions. Because of the 2d Battalion, 60th Infantry's rapid drive over the DOUVE, no artillery support was immediately available to this battalion in its fight to maintain the bridgehead west of the river.

Operations on 16 June found the division shifting its axis of advance from northwest and north to the west in an all-out drive to the line of the DOUVE RIVER. The day's fighting was climaxed by the establishment of a bridgehead over the river west of STE. COLOMBE. The division was now in a position to drive west and complete the cutting of the peninsula. For its actions on 16 June the 2d Battalion, 60th Infantry received the Distinguished Unit Citation.

(25)

Because of their important effect on 9th Division operations on 17 June, developments on the south flank in the 82d Airborne Division's zone on 16 June are briefly outlined here. During the afternoon elements of the 82d Airborne Division crossed the DOUVE RIVER at ST. SAUVEUR-LE VICOMTE and established a bridgehead against light resistance. (See Map C) The establishment of this bridgehead contributed materially to the success of the 9th Division's drive across the peninsula. One of the regiments of the 9th, ~~the~~ 47th Infantry, was destined to use this bridgehead as a springboard for its drive to sever the peninsula. (26)

(25) A-4, p. 169

(26) A-2, pp. 136-137

OPERATIONS 17-18 JUNE (See Map D) (27)

The 47th Infantry, having been relieved of its job of protecting the north flank of the division in the HAUTTEVILLE-BOCAGE area by the 3d Battalion, 39th Infantry, was assigned a new mission. It was to move south along the highway to ST. SAUVEUR-LE VICOMTE, pass through the 82d Airborne Division Bridgehead and drive westward astride the ST. SAUVEUR-LE VICOMTE - ST. LO D'OURVILLE Highway. Its objective was to seal off the peninsula by blocking the escape route to the south between ST. LO D'OURVILLE and ST. SAUVEUR-DE-PIERRE-PONT. Accordingly, the 47th Infantry moved south during the night 16-17 June and, early on 17 June, pushed through the southern bridgehead with its 3d Battalion leading. When the 3d Battalion was delayed along the road just west of ST. SAUVEUR-LE VICOMTE, Colonel Smythe sent the 2d and 1st Battalions, in that order, around the right flank to HILL 110, an intermediate objective. HILL 110 was occupied without incident. Meanwhile the 3d Battalion got under way again and seized HILL 90, also an intermediate objective. Thus Division Field Order Number 3 seemed slightly out of date when the regiment received it at 1500. Field Order Number 3 designated HILLS 90 and 110 as 47th Infantry objectives. Colonel Smythe's men were occupying these two hills when the order reached them. General Eddy, the Division commander, then issued verbal orders directing the regiment to push on vigorously and block the ST. LO D'OURVILLE - ST. SAUVEUR-DE-PIERRE-PONT corridor. The 2d

(27) A-3, pp. 6-7; A-2, pp. 142-144

Battalion pushed southwestward from HILL 110 and, by 2100, reached a line about one-half mile southwest of BESNEVILLE, astride the main highway. The 1st Battalion moved west from HILL 110 to CADET, then south, encountering little opposition. By 2200, 17 June this battalion had severed the main coastal highway in the vicinity of GRANDE HUANVILLE, thereby cutting the peninsula and blocking the last German escape route. During the night 17-18 June the 3d Battalion drove southwest from HILL 90 and secured ST. SAUVEUR-DE-PIERRE-PONT during the early morning hours of 18 June, meeting only light resistance. Also, during the morning of 18 June, the 2d Battalion moved west to a position south of the 1st Battalion on the main coastal highway. This ended the 47th Infantry's action on 18 June. The remainder of the day was spent in mopping up and consolidating positions. At 2100 the regiment was relieved by the 257th Infantry, 90th Division. It then moved to a position in division reserve during the night.

Meanwhile the 60th Infantry debouched from its STE. COLOMBE bridgehead at 0600 on 17 June and drove rapidly westward astride the main east-west highway to ST. JACQUES-DE-NEHOU. This town was entered without resistance. At this time the 1st Battalion, 39th Infantry was brought up and attached to the 60th Infantry. This battalion occupied positions facing north astride the road leading north from ST. JACQUES-DE-NEHOU in order to protect the 60th Infantry's right flank as it continued its attack west. By 2200, 17 June the 1st and 2d Battalions had occupied positions on

HILLS 133 and 145 respectively, overlooking the BRICQUEBEC - BARNEVILLE-SUR-MER Highway. These two battalions had encountered little opposition. Also at 2200 the 3d Battalion was ordered by General Eddy to push onward to BARNEVILLE-SUR-MER and block the coastal highway to the north. Company B, 746th Tank Battalion and Company A, 899th Tank Destroyer Battalion were attached to the 3d Battalion for this mission. Company K, mounted on the tanks and tank destroyers, led the way southwest down the highway toward ST. MAURICE. There the battalion, through error, turned southwest along the unimproved road instead of keeping to the main highway west. This caused some confusion and delay. As a result, the battalion did not reach BARNEVILLE-SUR-MER until 0500 the morning of 18 June. The town was entered without opposition, except for a few very surprised German Military Police. Promptly roadblocks were established on the two highways leading north.

The early morning of 18 June found the 60th Infantry, with its attached battalion from the 39th Infantry, occupying positions from BARNEVILLE-SUR-MER to ST. JACQUES-DE-NEHOU, a distance of approximately 6 miles.

On 17 June the 39th Infantry, after a heavy artillery and mortar preparation, succeeded in clearing ORGLANDES, the 1st Battalion making the final assault on the town. The 1st Battalion then joined the 60th Infantry and went into position near ST. JACQUES-DE-NEHOU, where it remained through 18 June. The remainder of the regiment proceeded west from ORGLANDES and went into defensive positions facing north in

the HAUTTEVILLE-BOCAGE - STE. COLOMBE area. It was assigned the mission of protecting the division's right flank. (See Map C) On 18 June the 39th Infantry (-) moved west again, this time to a position north of BLANDAMOUR, where it blocked the highway leading south from BRICQUEBEC. (See Map D) There it remained throughout 18 June. N/S

In its operations during 17-18 June the 9th Division had made brilliant gains averaging over 6 miles. By its aggressive advance the division had reached the west coast of the peninsula and cut the coastal highway in two places. Thus one of the main missions assigned to VII Corps had been accomplished. But congratulations were not yet in order as events on 18 June were to prove. The German forces were not to be sealed within their peninsula stronghold without making desperate attempts to break out. Strong units of the crack German 77th Infantry Division, which had been cut in two by the 9th Division's quick thrust to the west coast, made several attempts to cut their way through to the south. These desperate counterattacks, one of which almost succeeded, are worthy of examination in some detail.

GERMAN BREAK-THROUGH ATTEMPTS ON 18 JUNE (See Map D) (28)

The first counterattack struck the 1st and 2d Battalions of the 60th Infantry. These two battalions, it will be recalled, were located on HILLS 133 and 145 overlooking the BRICQUEBEC - BARNEVILLE-SUR-MER Highway. During the very early hours of 18 June a motorized column composed of infantry and artillery elements from the German 77th Division

(28) A-3, pp. 7-9; A-2, pp. 144-145

moved southwest along this road and struck the 60th Infantry positions on HILLS 145 and 133. Alert observers were able to pinpoint the location of the head of the German column at a point on the highway north of HILL 145. Quickly all guns of the division artillery were brought to bear on this point. After the first concentration landed on the head of the column, the artillery had a field day. A creeping wall of fire moved up the crowded road to a point some five miles to the northwest toward BRICQUEBEC. To this terrific rain of shells was added the fires from all available infantry weapons of the 1st and 2d Battalions. These combined fires wrought havoc in the German column. The few who survived dispersed and fled to the north in confusion. A reconnaissance made later in the day gave graphic proof of the terrible effectiveness of the fierce artillery fire. The entire five mile stretch of road was littered with demolished vehicles, artillery pieces and other items of equipment. In some places the debris made the road impassable.

Other elements of the German 77th Division made two attempts to break through road blocks set up along the SEYE RIVER north of LE VALDECIE. These road blocks were manned by the Antitank Company and the Antitank Mine Platoon of the 60th Infantry. The bridges at these two points were mined and wired for demolition. At 0300 German infantry and motorized detachments attempted to dislodge both road blocks. These attacks were driven off by small arms, machine gun and anti-tank gun fire. Both bridges were then destroyed to forestall further break-through attempts in that area. However at 0500

part of the German 77th Division Artillery again attacked the west road block. This time antitank and machine gun fire knocked out two vehicles and killed or wounded several of the enemy. Among enemy captured during this attack were members of the 77th Division Staff.

Meanwhile, further to the east, the 1st Battalion, 39th Infantry was engaged in a fight for its life. This battalion, along with the 60th Field Artillery Battalion, had moved to a position about one thousand yards from ST. JACQUES-DE-NEHOU, astride the road leading west. General Eddy, fearing a breakthrough attempt in this area, has ordered road blocks established to the north of the 1st Battalion's position. For reasons unknown, the 1st Battalion failed to establish one of the road blocks, as ordered. This failure to comply with orders resulted in near disaster. The entire 1049th German Infantry Regiment, along with other elements of the 77th Division, moved south across the SEYE RIVER and, at 0430, assaulted the 1st Battalion. Although taken by surprise, the troops reacted quickly and managed to beat off German attempts to envelop both the right and left flanks. The nearby 60th Field Artillery Battalion was unable to fire because of the enemy's proximity to its positions. While small detachments of artillerymen held the enemy at bay, the artillery pieces were hastily withdrawn to a position further to the west where they could be put into action. Soon, employing previously prepared map data, artillery fire was brought down on the attacking force. Meanwhile the infantry had been forced to withdraw to a new position east of ST. JACQUES-DE-NEHOU.

At this point communication with the division CP, which had been nonexistent since the start of the attack, was again established. Quickly the battalion regrouped and mounted a vigorous counterattack behind the supporting fires of division artillery. Moving aggressively forward, these gallant troops drove the Germans north across the SEYE RIVER and reestablished their positions. This valiant counterthrust decisively defeated the 1049th Regiment and ended the enemy attempts to break out of the GOTENTIN PENINSULA.

The intensity of this action can be measured by the casualties suffered. The German attackers lost 300 dead, while the 1st Battalion counted only 36. For their courageous performance in this engagement, the 1st Battalion, 39th Infantry was awarded a Distinguished Unit Citation. (29)

In summary, the operations of the 9th Division during the period 14-18 June resulted in a decisive victory. In its drive across the peninsula, the division had gained some 15 to 16 miles over rough terrain and against stubborn resistance. The aggressive push to the sea sealed the fate of CHERBOURG and entrapped within the peninsula some 25,000 to 30,000 German defenders. In addition, the German 77th Division was cut in half and slashed to pieces when its isolated elements attempted to break out of the trap. As a result, this German division was rendered ineffective as a fighting force. In blasting a 7-mile-wide corridor to the west coast, the 9th Division had gained valuable maneuver space for the VII Corps. The Corps was now free to turn north in an all-out drive on CHERBOURG. (30)

(29) A-4, p. 173

(30) A-4, p. 174

Accurate casualty figures for this operation are not available. However, it can be stated that casualties were minimized by aggressive and rapid advances. On the other hand, German losses were heavy. An entire German division had been eliminated. The loss of this division undoubtedly speeded the fall of CHERBOURG.

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

1. THE 90TH DIVISION'S FAILURE TO ADVANCE, 10-14 JUNE

In the writer's opinion, the 90th Division's attack on 10 June bogged down because aggressive small unit leadership was lacking. The individual soldier, faced with the realities of combat for the first time, is apt to become demoralized. This is true, no matter how thorough pre-combat training has been. If squad and platoon leaders and company commanders do not take aggressive measures to prevent this demoralization from spreading, no advance is possible. In battle, individual initiative and positive, firm leadership must be present if any unit is to be successful. In our peace-time training, we are constantly faced with the very real problem of developing aggressive leadership and initiative in our small unit commanders. It is a difficult task indeed, for the grimness and confusion of actual combat cannot be simulated in training. The troops composing the 90th Division were no better and no worse than those of any other division. Had they been firmly led and controlled, they would have advanced successfully to their assigned objectives. In all fairness, it must be stated that, after its initial failure, the 90th Division turned in a very creditable performance in

its later actions on the continent. This fact provides us with convincing evidence that, no matter how thorough and realistic our training, there can be no substitute for actual combat experience.

2. THE PROMPT EMPLOYMENT OF RESERVES TO MAINTAIN THE IMPETUS OF ATTACK

When it became apparent on 13 June that the 90th Division's attack was stalled, General Collins, VII Corps commander, was faced with a decision. The decision was this: Whether or not to employ the reserve. The success or failure of many of the military leaders of history has turned on this difficult decision. General Collins promptly and unhesitatingly decided to commit his reserve division so as to retain the impetus of the attack. This prompt and aggressive action had a decisive effect, for it sealed the fate of the German defenders of CHERBOURG and made possible the early capture of that vital port city.

3. THE 9TH DIVISION'S RESTRICTED ZONE OF ATTACK ON 14 JUNE

The decision to commit the 9th Division through the narrow gap between the 90th Division's 358th and 359th Regiments placed a severe restriction on the 9th's initial attack. As a result, only one battalion participated in the initial attack on 14 June. During the entire day only two battalions saw action. In this narrow zone elements of two divisions attempted to execute an extremely complicated maneuver while in contact with the enemy. The inevitable result was that units became entangled and advances during the day were limited while commanders attempted to gain maneuver space. The 9th Division was not able to commit its full striking

power until the afternoon of the second day, 15 June. Only then did it become possible to employ two regiments. Thus, nearly two days of maneuvering were required to bring the preponderance of the division's strength to bear against the enemy.

In the writer's opinion, better results would have been obtained by a passage of lines. This would have permitted the employment of two regiments abreast in the 9th Division's initial attack. In addition, this plan would have largely eliminated the complicated maneuvering for space which took place on the first day of the attack. The best plan is a simple plan which is easy to execute.

4. TRAINING IN HEDGEROW FIGHTING

The infantry units who fought in the hedgerow country of NORMANDY were forced to develop special techniques for reducing hedgerow "strong points" after they were committed to action. This proved to be both time consuming and costly. It is believed that prior small unit training should have been directed toward development of techniques for coping with the hedgerow problem. Such training would have given the infantry soldier confidence in his ability to advance in this type of terrain. Further, it would have paid big dividends in terms of reduced casualties and time saved.

5. THE ACTION OF THE 2D BATTALION, 60TH INFANTRY ON 16 JUNE

The aggressive, rapid advance of the 2d Battalion, 60th Infantry on 16 June is praiseworthy. This fast-moving drive established a bridgehead over the DOUVE RIVER. However, in outstripping the rest of the division, this battalion exposed

both its flanks and found itself without artillery support. As a result its position across the DOUVE was extremely precarious. In the writer's opinion, it is open to question whether or not the advantage to be gained by advancing far beyond adjacent unit and artillery support can justify violation of sound tactics.

6. USE OF ARTILLERY TO BREAK UP A COUNTERATTACK

Massed artillery is often effective in repelling a counterattack. The enemy counterattack against the 60th Infantry positions on HILLS 145 and 133 early on 18 June gives evidence of this. The German column was caught on the BRICQUEBEC - BARNEVILLE-SUR-MER Highway. Furious and accurate artillery fire raked the entire column. This heavy volume of fire was the decisive factor in breaking up the attack. The ability of our artillery to shift and mass its fires rapidly and accurately has a devastating effect.

7. USE OF AERIAL OBSERVATION TO ADJUST ARTILLERY FIRE

In the hedgerows it was frequently impossible for ground observers to adjust artillery fire. In such close terrain visibility was often limited to a few hundred yards or less. To overcome this handicap, aerial observation was extensively employed. The artillery liaison plane, equipped with voice radio and carrying a trained observer, proved effective. By this means the artillery was able to deliver accurate, observed fire on targets impeding the infantry's advance. If aerial observation had not been available, artillery support during this operation would have been far less effective.

LESSONS

1. Aggressive small unit leadership and individual initiative are essential to success in combat.
2. Prompt employment of reserves at the proper time and place produces decisive results.
3. When a division is committed in a very narrow zone, its initial striking power is limited to that of one or two battalions until adequate maneuver space is gained.
4. Before employment in special terrain, small unit training should be directed toward the development of techniques for coping with the problems presented by such terrain.
5. Rapidly advancing infantry run grave risks against an alert, aggressive enemy when they go far beyond adjacent unit and artillery support.
6. Massed artillery fire, accurately directed, can be decisive in repelling a counterattack.
7. When close terrain renders ground observation impossible, aerial observation is an invaluable aid in the maintenance of effective artillery support.