



OBJECTIVE SAINT-LÔ

7 JUNE 1944 - 18 JULY 1944

GEORGES BERNAGE

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Translated by Heather Williams



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Introduction

The 29th Infantry Division

This division has a great tradition, and the history of its infantry regiments dates back to the eighteenth century, when it was first established in Virginia and Maryland. In 1758 the 1st Virginia Regiment was created from the militia units of the English colonies in America and was to be commanded by Colonel George Washington, who appeared to have a promising future ahead of him. Virginia is the oldest American settlement, being founded as early as 1606. In 1760 the 2nd Virginia Regiment was created and the two regiments would both participate in the French and Indian War. The 1st Virginia Regiment was reorganised in 1775 and placed under the command of Colonel Patrick Henry. During the War of Independence, the two regiments played a major role in the Battle of Great Bridge, which helped to drive the British Army out of Virginia. A little less than a century later, the Civil War was to alter the history of the United States dramatically. The two Virginia regiments allied themselves with the Confederate camp and the 1st Virginia Regiment was to be the first regiment in 'Kemper's Brigade', serving under General James L. Kemper for the majority of the war, and only fighting under General Robert E. Lee at the Battle of Appomattox Court House (8 April 1865). The 2nd Virginia Regiment was integrated with the 'Stonewall Brigade' and was one of the three regiments under Brigadier General Thomas J. 'Stonewall' Jackson to fight in the First Battle of Bull Run for the Confederate Army.



The cloth badge worn by men from the 29th Infantry Division at the top of their left

shoulder.



The men of the National Guard from Maryland become soldiers in the 29th Division. Seen here are those from 'E' Company, 115th Infantry (1st Maryland Infantry), leaving Elkton Armory shortly after their enlistment. *(US Army)*



The men of the 29th Division debarking at Greenock, Scotland, in October 1942.

After the Civil War the 1st Virginia Regiment became the 176th Infantry Regiment, while the 2nd Virginia Regiment became the 116th Infantry Regiment and only the latter was engaged with the 29th Infantry Division

during the First World War. However, up until 1941 when this division was reorganised, one of the two brigades belonging to the 29th Infantry Division consisted of two regiments from Virginia, known as the two 'Southern' regiments.

However, in 1941 a secondary infantry brigade, the 58th Infantry Brigade, would form a new component of the 29th Infantry Division. The other two regiments in the division, the 175th and the 115th, were from Maryland and have their own interesting history, being formed from militia units from the borders of Western Maryland and who participated in some of the early battles against the British troops in the War of Independence. In August 1775, the two companies left Frederick, Maryland, and marched for twenty-one days to Boston. These companies were the foundations of what was to become the 115th Infantry Regiment. In the early days of the American Revolution, under the command of Mordecai Gist, a 58-year-old gentleman from Baltimore, fifty-eight men from the city gathered together on 3 December 1774 to form what would be the 'first uniformed military company in Maryland'. The company would be a composite of the Maryland troops that would be provided by the state for General Washington's army, following a decision made by the Maryland Assembly on 1 January 1776. The regiment took the name of its leader, Colonel William Smallwood, and participated in several battles before being absorbed into the 5th Maryland Infantry Regiment following a reorganisation of the army in December 1776. It would participate in many battles during the war and later played a role in the War of 1812. In 1861, at the beginning of the Civil War, the two regiments became 'enemies' when the 1st Maryland remained loyal to the Union and joined the Army of the Potomac, while the majority of men in the 5th Maryland chose to join the Confederates.

The 1st Maryland formed the foundations for the 115th Infantry Regiment, and the 5th Maryland the 175th Infantry Regiment, with the former fighting in the First World War as part of the 29th Infantry Division. Both regiments were later gathered together to form a Maryland infantry brigade (until 1941); the 58th Infantry Brigade.

It is this duality of its origins, North versus South, blue uniforms versus grey, that led to the creation of the 29th Division's emblem: the Korean

Ying-Yang in blue and grey, hence the nickname, the 'Blue and Gray Division' (US spelling). Only the 115th and the 116th Infantry Regiments took part in the First World War, fighting as part of the 29th Infantry Division that had been established in August 1917 at Camp McClellan. The division spent three weeks in the trenches from 8 October and lost 4,781 men.



Tidworth, 12 March 1913. These men from 29th Signal Company are taking part in manoeuvres in a jeep belonging to the 116th Infantry Regiment.



Woolacombe, Devon, 28 October 1943. A team from 116th RCT fire live ammunition at the advancing infantry under conditions aimed at preparing them for D-Day. Their Browning machine gun, used by the majority of infantry, had a range of 3,800m and was capable of firing between 400-600 rounds a minute. (*DAVA/Coll. Heimdal*)

After the First World War the division was absorbed by the National Guard. It was at this time that the 57th Infantry Brigade (formed of regiments from New Jersey) left the division, which now became more homogeneous with its 58th Infantry Brigade, made up of two regiments of from Maryland and the 88th Infantry, formed with two regiments from Virginia, which had replaced the 87th Brigade. The 'Blue and Gray' Division had found its 'soul' and was now a National Guard unit made up of reservists who trained once a week.

In September 1939 Europe was once more at war. The National Guard were attached to 'armouries', which they joined in order to carry out their training, but this routine ended on 3 February 1941, when an Act of Congress established military service for all those serving in the National Guard. The 29th Infantry Division was now reactivated as a fighting unit and the National Guards of Maryland, Virginia, Pennsylvania and the District of Columbia (Washington D.C.) were to join their garrisons. On 13 February 1941, Major General Milton A. Reckord took command of the 29th Division and joined its headquarters at Fort George G. Meade, Maryland. Under his command were 7,583 men, including 656 officers.

The 29th was still a 'square' division, with four infantry regiments divided into two brigades: the 58th Brigade from Maryland (115th and 175th Regiments) and the 88th from Virginia (116th and 176th Regiments). The artillery was grouped into a third brigade, the 54th Field Artillery, comprising of regiments from Maryland (110th), Virginia (111th) and Pennsylvania (176th). The Engineer Battalion (121st) were recruited from Washington D.C. On 15 April 1941, 10,000 recruits arrived at Fort Meade to complete their 13-week training course.

Unfortunately, their equipment was either outdated or missing. So while the Baltimore newspapers spoke of the 'new 37mm anti-tank gun' as 'the ultimate weapon for mechanized combat', at the same time the Germans regarded it as being obsolete and ineffective, which was proved a short time later when the first moves of Operation Barbarossa took place on 13 September 1941. The division next moved to the training camp at Fort A.P. Hill in North Carolina, then Fort Bragg on 27 September; a miserable area that was infested with mosquitoes and snakes. More divisions were assembled on 20 October and the 29th now found that it was to be 'triangularised', meaning that it would be made up of three, not four, infantry regiments, which was a reflection of the general developments taking place in the US Army at the time. In early December 1941, the 29th went back to its barracks in the mud of Fort Meade and on 7 December, Japan attacked the US Naval Base at Pearl Harbour. It was war!



Another photograph taken on 28 October 1943. A Bangalore torpedo containing 20lbs of TNT explodes beside a second wall of barbed wire protecting a bunker. The first wall has already been breached and the engineers have already marked a passageway using white strips. On 6 June 1944, the 121st Engineer Battalion would lose 71 per cent of its equipment! However, training such as this would prove particularly useful; the Bangalore torpedoes would play a decisive role in opening up the exits from the beaches. (*DAVA/ Coll. Heimdal*)



A member of the 121st Engineers Battalion; Ed Lewis, from Steubenville, Ohio. He is carrying a BC-745 radio and holding a 511 model antenna. This photograph was taken on 9 April 1943, near Tidworth. (*DAVA/Coll. Heimdal*)

The 29th Division was now charged with defending the East Coast and guarding against an invasion at Chesapeake Bay, North Carolina. They took part in anti-invasion exercises, defending a mock-invasion by 1st Division during an amphibious exercise at Cape Henry, near Virginia Beach. This was almost a prelude to Omaha Beach, although this time the 29th were defending, rather than attacking.

In early January 1942, General Reckord took command of the III Corps Area and was replaced by Major General Leonard T. Gerow. At this time, the division was reorganised to become 'triangular' and lost the 176th Regiment, which was assigned to protect the federal capital. New recruits arrived to fill the gaps left behind and the division left Fort Meade in mid-April for Fort A.P. Hill. Various manoeuvres were carried out in North Carolina (from 6 July) and at Camp Blanding, Florida (from 17 August), before Major General

Gerow reported on 6 September 1942 that the division was ready to be sent overseas. When the men arrived at Camp Kilmer, New Jersey, (as the first to use this transit point), their destination remained a secret. On 26 September 1942 they headed into Jersey City by train, where a third of the division (the 116th 'Stonewall Brigade') boarded the *Queen Mary*. At dawn the following day, the ships passed the skyscrapers of Manhattan and headed for Europe, with the rest of the division following on 5 October, aboard the *Queen Elizabeth*.

The *Queen Mary* arrived in Greenock, on the Firth of Clyde, Scotland, on 3 October 1942 and were greeted by a British band. There was a thick fog hanging above the water and the air defence balloons floated above them. The men knew that they were now entering the war: during the crossing they had already witnessed the sinking of a ship and the death of 332 British sailors. The *Queen Elizabeth* docked on 11 October, but the division's stay in Scotland was brief as they headed for the south of England, with the landscapes the young Americans saw from the train windows on their journey conforming to their ideas about England. They arrived on the big, chalky and desolate plains of Salisbury and headed for the Tidworth Camp, which was still partially occupied by equipment from 1st Division, bound for North Africa. The training was hard: two 40km (25mi) marches and one 64km march every week were required to test the soldiers' physical fitness and those who could not do it were transferred.

The 29th Division was the second American unit in the UK, although after the departure of 1st Division for North Africa, it remained alone, with various British and Canadian units charged with defending England. This was also to be its first Christmas overseas. On 20 December 1942, the 29th Provisional Ranger Battalion was established, under the command of Major Randolph Millholland, the 1st Rangers having left England with 1st Division. This new battalion of the 29th Division was formed from the nucleus of three officers and fifteen men of the 1st Ranger Battalion and were joined by volunteers who could match the physical requirements. All the men were then transferred to the British Commando base at Achnacarry House, Scotland, where the 29th Rangers were attached to 4 Commando, under Lord Lovat. They would take part in three raids in Norway with the commandos,

before rejoining their compatriots at Tidworth. During this time the 29th Division suffered its first casualties of the war, when six men of the 175th were killed during an air-raid on Bournemouth, on 23 May 1943.



One month before D-Day, the soldiers were confined to their camps to await the invasion. Here we see S/Sergeant William M. Wheeler, originally from Baltimore, Maryland, sharpening his knife on 18 May 1944, two weeks before the invasion. He was a member of Lt. Allsup's 'A' Company, 175th Regiment, and would land in France on 7 June. (*DAVA/ Coll. Heimdal*)



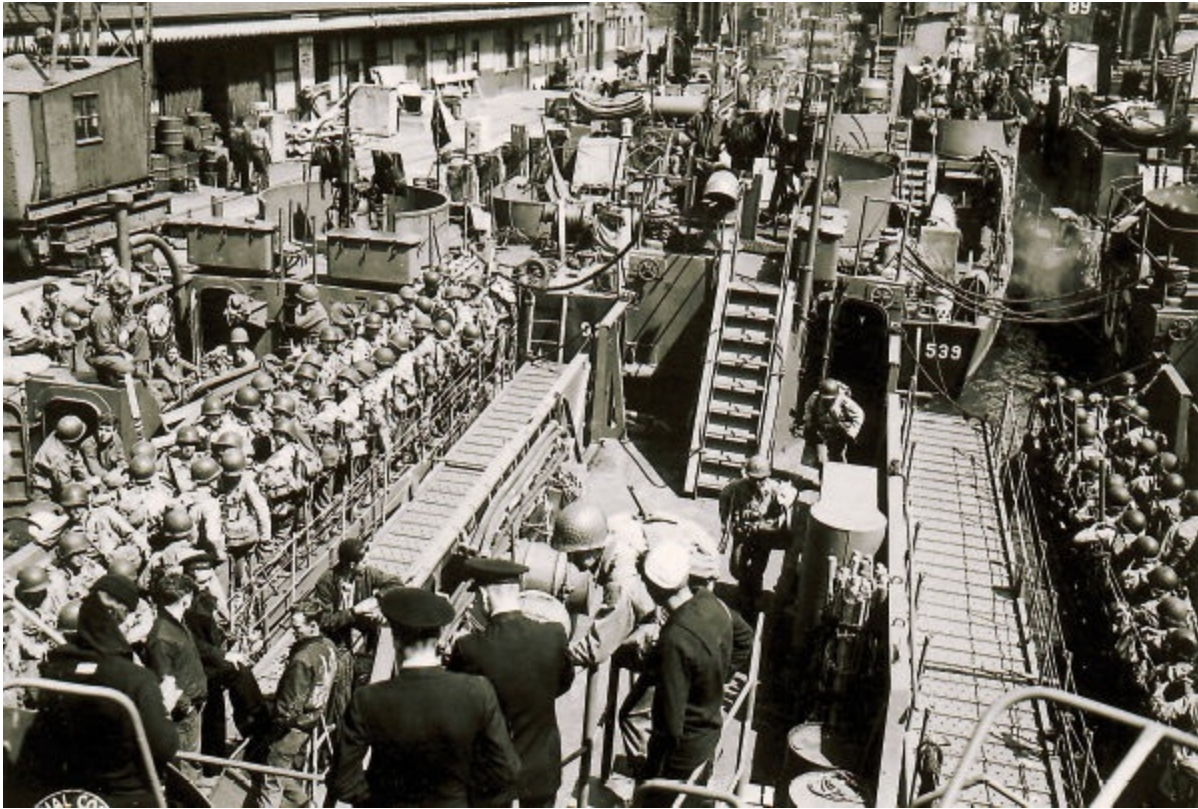
In this photograph taken on 6 May 1944, assault troop equipment from the 29th Infantry Division practices boarding the landing barges, under the watchful eyes of US Navy officers. On the following day, 7 May, the equipment will start being taken to the assembly zones. (DAVA/Coll. Heimdal)

As part of Operation Bolero, the codename given to the US military's troop build-up in the UK, the 29th Division left Tidworth at the end of May 1943 and took up residence in Cornwall and Devon. Here it relieved the British 55th Division and took charge of defending the south-west coast. The 'Blue and Gray' Division now began training on the bleak moorlands of Dartmoor and Bodmin Moor. It was a tough test: the men faced strong winds that carried an icy rain, often horizontally, and had to cross a desolate landscape covered with a thick, spongy grass that engulfed their feet, which were already worn out by stress. The eyes of the 'Blue and Gray' soldiers would often look on with envy at the protective walls of the famous

Dartmoor prison, which was visible from all across the moor.

In July 1943, General Gerow left the 29th Division to take command of V Corps. He was replaced by Major General Charles H. Gerhardt, who had previously commanded the 91st Division. Gerhardt was immediately flown to England and took up his new command on 22 July. It was he who would lead the division into combat.

Charles H. Gerhardt was born in 1895. His father was a career officer and so naturally, he followed in his footsteps and studied at the US Military Academy from 1913-1917, graduating 50th out of 139. He joined the 3rd Cavalry Regiment in Texas, following them to France, where he was then assigned to the 89th Division, fighting with them in the offensives at Saint-Mihiel, Meuse and Argonne. At the outbreak of the Second World War he was in command of the 51st Cavalry Regiment in Texas, before being given command of the 91st Infantry Division in Oregon, followed by his new post with the 29th Infantry Division. He wanted to transform the National Guard members of the 29th into real soldiers, and so imposed a strict code of discipline and instilled in them a far more aggressive attitude. He established the division's battle cry 'Twenty-ninth, let's go!' as well as the famous regulation regarding the helmet chinstraps, which now had to be buckled on the chin itself. He insisted that the war would be won 'at battalion level', and during a meeting with key men from the battalion, declared that 'in a year, a third of you will be killed, and the price could be even higher if senior officers do not know their jobs and never get out of their chairs!' In spite of the strict regulations, he was respected by his men, who nicknamed him 'Uncle Charlie', and would remain at the head of the 29th Division until the end of the war.



On 14 March 1944, units from the 29th Division are unloaded from an LST onto a Rhino ferry that will then take them ashore, during an exercise at Slapton Sands. (*DAVA/Coll. Heimdal*)

At the end of the summer, the 175th headed for the western tip of Cornwall, with Captain Frank McKenna thus having the honour of occupying the most western garrison in England with his men from 'I' Company. At the start of July, the first amphibious exercises had begun on the beaches at Slapton Sands, on the east coast of Devon. At the same time, certain companies continued to train on the moors, learning how to attack pillboxes and other fortified areas. They then joined the new US training centre that had been established at Woolacombe Beach on Devon's north-west coast. Here they learnt the technique of loading a landing craft using a strong, autonomous combat team of thirty men. Woolacombe Beach was chosen because of its similarity to the beaches of northern France, which were equally as flat, with similar tides. The training centre was ready to receive troops from September, with each combat team spending three weeks there. Soldiers were taught how to use flame-throwers, bazookas, demolition charges, Bangalore, mortars and machine guns, as well as take part in

amphibious exercises, culminating in one big operation. All this was carried out under the control of Brigadier General Norman D. Cota, who had just succeeded Brigadier General Alexander as deputy commander of the division.

On 15 October 1943, V Corps was ordered to concentrate all of its efforts on the Normandy beaches for Operation Overlord, although few of the division's officers were made aware of the exact nature of the mission. At this point, V Corps moved its headquarters to the Royal Navy's underground facilities in Plymouth, which had been cut into the rock and thus provided its staff with shelter from the bombs.

At the end of December 1943, British civilians were evacuated from Slapton Sands as the whole of the beach was now to be used to train the US troops for the invasion.



Major General Charles H. Gerhardt to command of 29th Division on 22 July 1943, replacing Major General Leonard T. Gerow, who was moved to the head of V Corps. Major General Gerhardt was strict with his command, but earned the respect of his men, who nicknamed him 'Uncle Charlie'. In this photograph, you can see the way in which he preferred the strap of the helmet to be buckled on the chin itself. (*DAVA?Coll. Heimdal*)

A: The arrival of the landing craft during the first wave on Omaha Beach. Most of them drifted off course to the east as a result of the strong tides, meaning that when the men disembarked they did not know where they were. (*Heimdal*)

B: The confusion was made even greater with the arrival of the second wave of landing craft. What's more, they had to arrive amid the wrecks of previous boats, as well as the

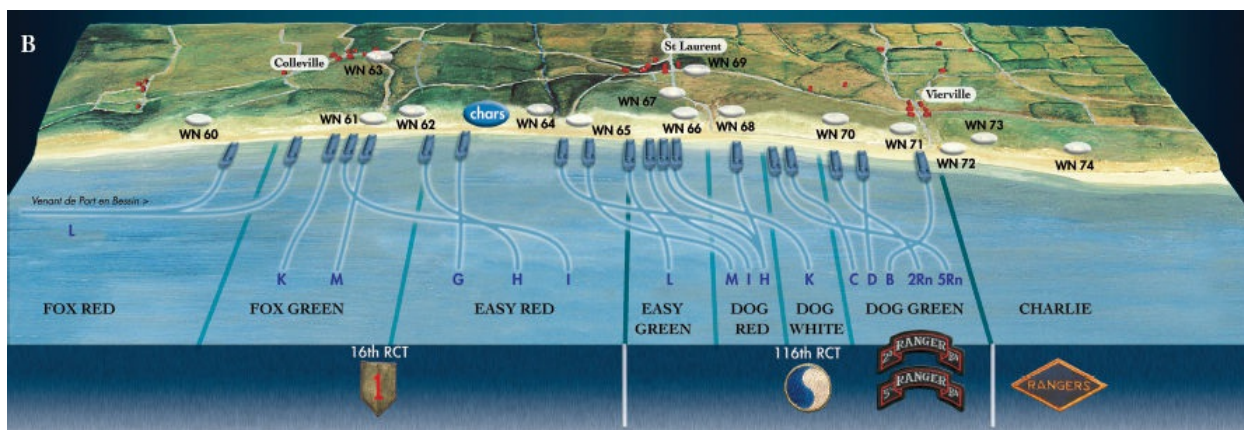
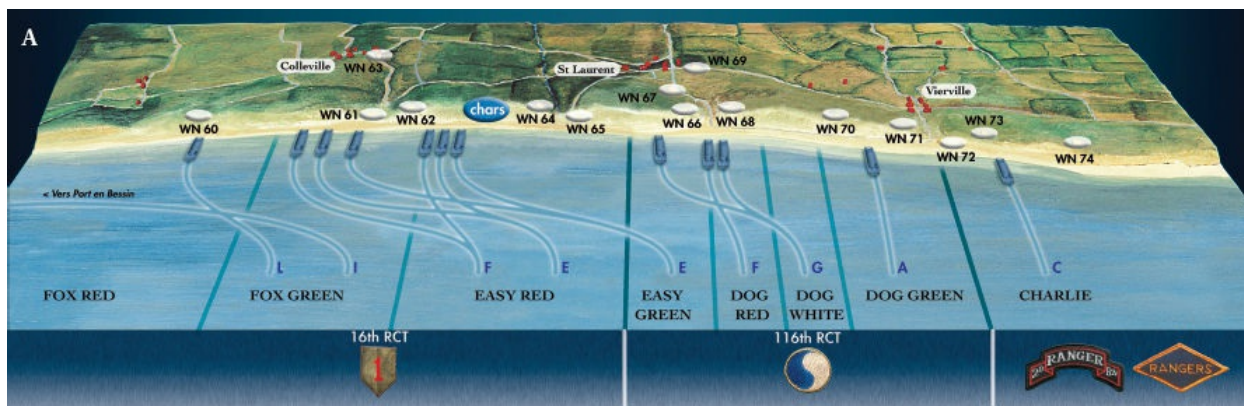
bodies of the injured and dead. (*Heimdal*)

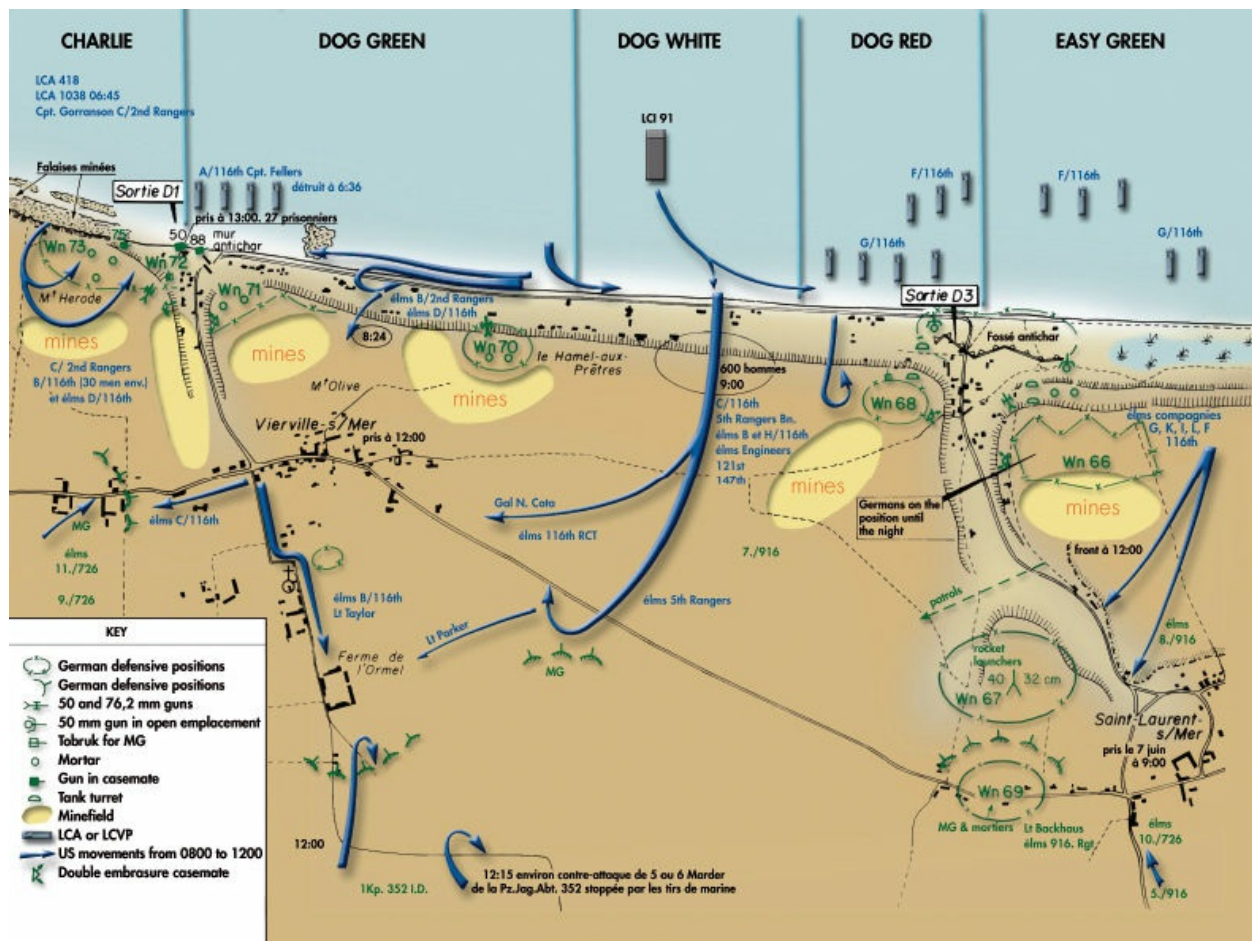


This photograph was taken in Red Beach sector and shows a Rhino ferry (a wide, flat barge equipped with a crane). On the beach can be seen the house where Major Bingham took shelter.



Robert Schiska (who can be seen in profile, on the right), originally from Mansfield, Ohio, landed at 7.30hrs on Easy Red with H Company, 116th RCT. The landing barges arrived at WN 64 and could be see the mouth of the Ruquet valley, on the right. Schiska is shown at the Omaha Museum (1a) in the same profile. (Heimdal and Musée Omaha, D-Day, Vierville)





Vierbille, from 9am on the morning of 6 June, by General Cota, the 116th RCT, and elements of the 5th Rangers . (*Heimdal*)

1.

The 'Blue and Gray' Division

From the Hell on Omaha Beach to the Hell in the Hedgerows

On 7 June 1944 at 10am, the soldiers of 175th Infantry Regiment disembarked from their landing craft. The day before, their comrades of the 116th RCT had been through hell on Omaha Beach, at Saint-Laurent-sur-Mer.

On 6 June, 1st Battalion 116th RCT had landed under the cliffs, further west down the beach than intended, and immediately came under fire from snipers installed along the cliff-top. The losses were heavy: up to 66 per cent of the unit. Those who survived found themselves stranded on the beach for most of the day, forced to communicate by radio. Under Major Sidney V. Bingham, 2nd Battalion had landed at 7am and a dozen men had managed to make it to the top of the slope, east of D3 (the entrance to the vallée des Moulins). However, they were unable to destroy the machine gun at WN66 and so had to fall back. As for 3rd Battalion, which had landed behind 2nd Battalion between 7.20 and 7.30am, although it was to suffer fewer losses, its men were still spread out 1km along the beach, facing the vallée des Moulins.

The arrival of LCVP 71 changed this, bringing with it twenty-four men, including Brigadier General Norman Cota (deputy-commander of 29th Division), Colonel Charles D.W. Canham (commander of 116th IR) and Major Howie. Driven by Feliciano, a veteran of the Sicily landings, LCVP 71 hit a Teller mine, which luckily did not explode. Instead, the boat came to rest on a sandbank and the rest of the landing had to be completed on foot, in just under 3ft of water.

The location of the landing was good and Cota was able to reorganise 'C' Company. Cota and Canham realised that they were facing a weakly

defended sector between WN70 and WN68 on Dog White, while elsewhere on the beach, all hell was breaking loose. Available troops close-by included 'C' Company from the 116th (around 120 men), and the 5th Ranger Battalion (around 450 men). Facing them was flat ground for around 150m, marshy in places with no shelter, which then became a steep climb leading to fields that could provide some shelter. 'C' Company began moving forward along the road by the seafront at 7.50am. On the other side of the wall that separated the beach from the road, lay a double row of barbed-wire. A soldier called Ingram E. Lambert jumped over the wall with a Bangalore in his hand in order to cross the road and blow up the wire. However, despite pulling the wire, the Bangalore failed to explode and Lambert was killed by a machine gun. Sub Lieutenant Stanley M. Schwartz crossed the road and succeeded in creating a large breach in the barbed-wire, although when another soldier stood up to try and pass through it, he was also shot and killed. In spite of this, many men were able to get through the wire and managed to hide in the trenches beyond the road, where they were also joined by another group who had cut through the barbedwire on their left. After about 5-10 minutes, as others crossed the road and joined them in the trenches, they continued to move forward, although progress was slow due to fear of mines. They advanced in a small column, heading west to use a footpath and headed out onto the plateau and into the fields, where the terrain was flat and exposed. Having lost only six men, Captain Berthier B. Hawks and 'C' Company arrived at the top at around 8.30, followed later by the 5th Ranger Battalion. They then proceeded to clear out a trench system along the ridge and a machine gun nest located at WN68, which had been firing on the beach below.



General Norman D. Cota, deputy commander of 29th Division.



Major Sidney V. Bingham, 2/116 commander (*US Army*)



Colonel Charles D.W. Canham, commander of 116th Regiment (*US Army*)



Colonel Eugene N. Slappey, commander of 115th Regiment (*US Army*)

At 8.30am, Brigadier General Norman Cota organised the first breakthrough of the German lines on Omaha Beach. However, as he began to climb the slope the Germans fired two mortar shells, killing two men who had been next to the General and injuring his aide. They had to get out of their uncomfortable position and reach the summit as soon as possible. They were joined by a machine gun unit from 'H' Company (116th), elements of 'B' Company (116th) and Rangers, as shells landed all around them, pinning the men to the ground.

Further east, at Saint-Laurent, in what is now the Normandy American Cemetery, two sections of Easy Company (116th), led by Lieutenant Spalding, had progressed west of the terrible WN62, where the road leading to the current cemetery can be found. At 9am, appalled by the disaster that was unfolding on the beach, General Omar Bradley was thinking of organising a retreat, when he heard the good news that certain groups had managed to break through. At 11am, further reinforcements from 29th Division, Colonel Eugene N. Slaphey's 115th RCT, landed on the beach and proceeded to their assembly points, southeast of Saint-Laurent, to reorganise. On the beach, Colonel Slaphey met with General Wyman, who ordered him to engage his battalion at Longueville (west of Formigny), which was a very difficult objective. They were joined by Cota, who informed them of the breakthroughs by the 116th RCT, north of Vierville. The discussion on the beach between Wyman and Cota led to another decision to send a battalion from the 115th RCT to clear the area around Saint-Laurent. Inland, confusion still reigned as small units advanced into uncharted territory without any coordination between them. When Colonel Slaphey finally headed inland at around 4pm, he was unable to receive any news of his battalions because the radios were not working.

By 11am, any advance inland was still nigh-on impossible from the main exits on the beach, with only those groups who had been able to climb onto the plateau and use the height advantage able to see what was happening below. Many of the radios had been lost and those they did have often did not work. As a result of the confusion, the units did not know where they were. Above the sea were meadows, but after this a dense network of farmland and hedgerows criss-crossed the patchwork landscape. This meant that many American units crossed from one field into the next without knowing that their comrades were advancing in the same area. Sometimes one unit had cleared a particular field, only for the Germans to reinstall a machine gun, which another American unit had to come and clear again. Pockets of German troops still remained in areas cleared out by the Americans, or pockets of American troops could be found in those areas held by the Germans; a situation that remained until late in the afternoon.

The bodies of soldiers killed at Omaha Beach on 6 June are grouped together and identified before being temporarily buried in Cemetery No.1, as official figures declared 3,881 dead. The 29th Division, who had not yet entered the fighting, unlike 1st Division, suffered particularly heavy losses. The 116th RCT registered 341 killed, 241 injured and 25 missing. 'A' Company from the 116th was practically annihilated, with most of the men coming from the town of Bedford, which would be plunged into deep mourning. The 16th RCT of 1st Division was also hit hard, with 962 casualties. (DAVA/Heimdal)



Omaha Beach was wide and sandy, with pebbles on the upper part, as seen here. The wrecked boats and other various bits of debris as a result of the apocalypse could still be seen by Lieutenant Allsup when he landed on D+1. (NA/Coll. Heimdal)

At the top of the slope overlooking Dog White, the advance of parties from the 116th RCT and 5th Ranger Battalion had been going between ten and eleven hours, under the leadership of General Cota. The rest of the Rangers were blocked by machine gun fire, despite several attempts to

advance further to the south, before succeeding after around fourteen hours to the north-west, towards Vierville, using the road that ran parallel to the coast. This road had already been used by elements of 'C' Company (116th), as well as other elements of the 116th RCT, who had managed to make it to Vierville. As General Cota arrived behind the advance, a section from 'B' Company, who had travelled along the road by the presentday site of the American cemetery, crossed through Vierville without making any contact with 'C' Company before passing near the church and heading for the Ormel Farm. Here, the twenty-five men from 'B' Company ran into a nest of German resistance and took fourteen prisoners after their attack. However, three German trucks carrying reinforcements forced Lieutenant Taylor to retreat to the chateau at Vierville.

The 3rd Battalion, 116th RCT, made it to the plateau between WN66 and WN65 at around 10am. There were no hedges in this area and progress remained difficult due to the heavy German machine gun fire. They had to travel south of WN66, where a pockets of resistance and German snipers still held the village of Saint-Laurent. The men of 2/116 would remained locked in fighting here throughout the afternoon.

At around 2pm, three exits were opened on the beach, although WN62 and WN66 were still operational. At 12.15pm tanks from Panzer-Jäger-Abteilung 352 had launched a counter-attack, but had been halted between Formigny and Vierville by naval shells. Elements of the 116th RCT had reached Vierville by noon and patrols had been sent onwards towards Louvières. Colonel Canham arrived at around 6.30pm and by the time night fell, the area around Vierville remained the narrowest part of the bridgehead. In the meantime, 121st Engineer Battalion, which had been due to land at D1, had lost 75 per cent of its equipment in the process. By the evening the five elements of the American Battalions were stranded in an area one square-mile and had come up against determined German resistance. The patchwork landscape and lack of armoured vehicles and artillery provided little or no opportunity to extend the bridgehead.

7 June - 175th Infantry Regiment

The third infantry regiment of the 129th Division (the 175th) arrived at 9am

on 7 June. In command of First platoon was Lieutenant John S. Allsup. He was one of the 'ninety wonders'; officers who had completed their training in just ninety days. Before setting foot in Normandy he had been enjoying himself in St. Ives, Cornwall, where his unit had been stationed. The day before had witnessed the hell of Bloody Omaha, but now his men were about to leave their landing boats and head to shore. Nearby, an LCT was still on fire and as the smoke mixed with the steam, the drama and horrors of the previous day were recalled once more. The stench of the oil and diesel fuel combined with those of cordite and vomit merely added to the anxiety that was already knotting up their stomachs. As the tide rose, the boats had to circle around before awaiting orders to head for the beach. Allsup glanced at his watch; it was 11.15am. As he was about to shout to the helmsman to bring them ashore, there was a terrible explosion to his left. Another boat had hit a mine and was sinking on its port side. A few men had managed to escape, but others were disappearing under the waves, weighed down by 20kg of equipment. What's more, an hour after leaving the larger boats, the men were now huddled impatiently in the smaller landing crafts, with many suffering from seasickness as the boats pitched and rolled on the waves.

Allsup shouted at the helmsman to head for the beach straight away. However, the man was afraid of hitting another mine and refused. Allsup called him a moron, pointing out that they couldn't just drive in circles forever. 'Straighten up!' he said, 'We can't land at Dog Red, we have to head for Dog White.'

Finally, the quartermaster began to head for the beach, but soon stopped as he was still terrified of hitting a mine; he had witnessed some horrific scenes in the past few weeks. Allsup was exasperated, 'Quartermaster! You'll take this boat up to the beach or I'll do it myself. Now that's an order!' The boat started up again, but not before there was a brutal bang on the port side. Luckily, nothing happened. They had to reduce their speed in order to navigate the various obstacles that remained in the sea, not to mention the corpses that were still bobbing up and down on the waves. Allsup recalled, 'We couldn't wait any longer. The seasickness, the stench, the fear and the whole atmosphere of death was even greater than our nerves.'



Lieutenant John S. Allsup was one of the dashing ‘ninety wonders’; officers who had completed training in ninety days. He originally published his memoirs in 1985 (Heimdal), although he changed some of the officers’ names, which have now been restored here.
(*Coll. G.B.*)



Omaha Beach, 7 June 1944, the day when Lieutenant Allsup and his company arrived. This image shows a half-track tank and a DUKW, while an infantry section disembarks from an LCA. (*Heimdal*)

Banks of mist and smoke hung over their landing zone, and according to Allsup in his memoirs, a machine gun and other heavier artillery were firing at the boats behind them: there were still German strong points in this particular sector in the late morning of 7 June. In the landing craft, the men took out their weapons from their plastic sheaths for one final check. Allsup stuffed his plastic bag into his jacket so as to protect his map and then readjusted the raincoat under his belt. The shore was in front of them, but the boat was still some distance away. Sergeant Datum, who was only 5ft6, completely disappeared under the water and had to be dragged out. Datum was soaked and smashed the butt of his rifle while swearing 'like a drill sergeant', as two dead soldiers rolled past on the waves.

As they reached the pebbles at the top of the sandy beach, a machine gun

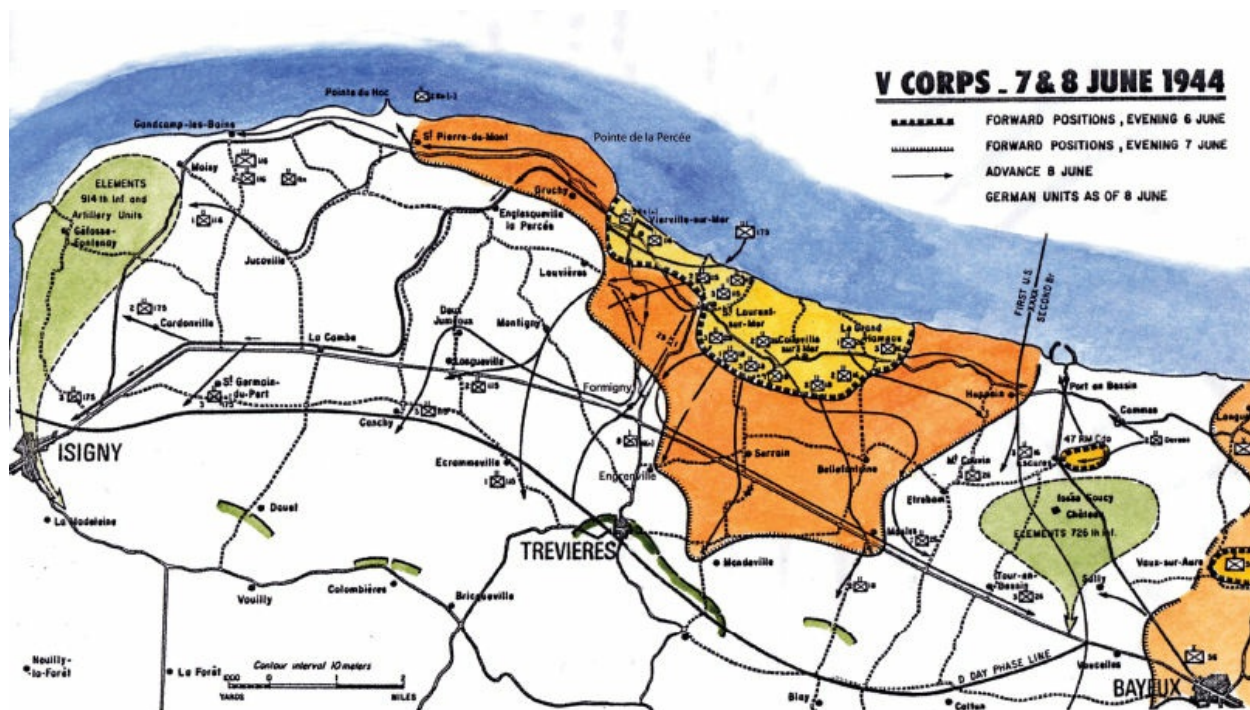
fired at them from above. They saw a lieutenant sat nearby, crying: half of his men had been blown to pieces when a shell hit their landing craft. Everywhere were scenes of desolation and destruction. A German battery behind Vierville-sur-Mer continued to fire on them and at the top of the beach, a group of engineers were lining up thirty dead bodies; their feet sticking out of the sheets that covered them. Lieutenant Allsup commented, 'We had spent months of training only to end up on a miserable French beach, drenched in blood. Good God, was it all going to be worth it? I hoped so with all my strength because the price would only get higher and higher before the damned war was won.'

They skirted around the pocket of resistance south of Vierville and made it to the quarry where 29th Division had set up its command post. It was now midday and hot. Their uniforms were uncomfortable due to the sweat and saltwater, not to mention that fact that they smelled terribly of the anti-gas substance with which they had been statutorily impregnated with. This lead the soldiers to joke that if the wind was blowing in the wrong direction, 'Fritz' would know they were coming before they could even see or hear them. On top of this, the area was made even more dangerous due to minefields.

It was time to eat and the men were hungry. They tucked into their K rations: a small box filled with cheese, crackers and a small pot of instant powdered coffee or orange juice, as well as sweets and three cigarettes. In a C ration, the box contained canned pork and beans, meat and vegetable hash, or meat and cooked vegetables. Their rest was only disturbed by the screech of the GMCs that passed along the coast, or the navy shells that sounded like a freight train when they exploded. After the meal it was back to routine marching, stopping occasionally to rub their tired shoulders that were being sawn down by the heavy straps.



The BAR machine gun was an effective weapon and highly valued by Lieutenant Allsup. (Musée Mémorial de Bayeux - Heimdal image)



This map shows the movements of V Corps on 7 and 8 June 1944. By the evening of 7 June, the bridgehead at Omaha was still very narrow, especially in the Vierville area to the west, where the 29th Division had assembled. The following day, the 116th RCT, which had suffered heavy losses on 6 June, headed along the coast to relieve the Rangers at Pointe du Hoc, before cutting across to Maisy on 9 June, where the artillery and infantry of the 352.ID had retreated to. We will follow the 175th RCT who were headed for the RN13 road, east of La Cambe, via Vierville, Gruchy and Englesqueville. Elsewhere, by the evening of 8 June, those objectives set for 6 June had still not been achieved. Trévières, for example, would not be cleared of the Germans until 10 June. However, to the east, the meeting of the British and Americans was nearly complete. (Heimdal)

The soldiers joked among themselves. Allsup recalled that:

In the company, having a good friend was as important as having water to drink. Living together for so long had created bonds and a team spirit, which was then brought into combat. It was already clear that the non-commissioned officers didn't have this as much with the men, and it was even rarer among the officers. Perhaps that was a good thing as any camaraderie with the men might distort the judgement of those who had to give out orders. If all men were born equal, then in combat some are more equal than others!

As they advanced towards the church at Vierville they were overtaken by Sherman tanks from 747th Tank Battalion, which sent up a cloud of dust and exhaust fumes as they passed. They rested for a while in Vierville before moving on, but after the carnage of the day, the men were exhausted. Nothing had gone according to the plans set out in England: 'We had an excellent game plan, but unfortunately the game was knocked out of shape in Normandy because the Germans had not learned the same rules from the same books that we used!' However, the Germans from Grenadier-Regiment 916, or what was left of it, had to fall back to Formigny. A report made by Lieutenant Colonel Fritz Ziegelmann (First staff officer 352. ID) while in captivity (MS-B-433) declared that, 'Around 9am, the Grenadier-Regiment 916 reported that its progression towards the centre [of Vierville] was satisfactory. Our own attack from Vierville-sur-Mer/Saint-Laurent began with the pioneers from 352nd Battalion. Losses in Vierville were significant on both sides. Telephone communication with the commander of WN76 (Pointe de la Percée) confirmed the report by 916 Regiment and also reported that the enemy was continuing its landing virtually unopposed. On the left, 914 Regiment confirmed that it was still engaged with the Americans at Pointe du Hoc.'

The Germans thus had to pull back to Longueville and Formigny. Elements of the 914 were ordered to stay on at Longueville and were reinforced by a battalion from the 916 and Ost-Battalion 439 (not the 621). They were to move towards La Cambe and block any American advance westwards, with Isigny appearing to be the most likely junction between the two American bridgeheads. Such was the situation by 2pm on 7 June.

By the end of the day, Lieutenant Allsup and his men were in a bivouac.

At 8.30pm he was summoned to the company CP with his fellow lieutenants Reynolds, Ferris and Atkins, by Captain Mueller. He told them that General Gerhardt had ordered the 175th and its associated regiments to leave the assembly area and advance towards Isigny:

Regimental HQ has designated that 1st Battalion will lead the attack, with 'A' Company at the head. The 747th Tank Battalion will have five tanks to act as armoured support and it will be your section, Sam, that will be the strong point. Gentlemen, in front of us now is what we've been sitting on our asses waiting for for months! You are all great guys and your men are well trained, so go get 'em! Any questions? Oh Sam, prepare the lads while I inform the others and then we'll go over everything together in five minutes, OK?

Lieutenant Allsup, a little stunned by the honour that had been bestowed on him, puzzlingly studied the map before being joined by again by the captain:

OK Sam, we're here, at Gruchy. You have to take the road to Englesquevillela-Percée as far as the RN13, which will bring you a mile east of La Cambe. You'll have the five tanks from the 747th to support you and Reynolds and Ferris will protect your flanks as much as possible. We don't know what's ahead of us, except that there are 8km from here to the junction with the RN13, which is your objective. I suggest that you send two scouts ahead, as usual, unless the situation calls for something different.

Allsup was then introduced to Lieutenant Erickson who would be commanding the tanks; his own tank, named Daisy, taking the lead. Allsup decided to put two men behind Daisy, with himself following behind the second tank, along with his men in a twoman column. He returned to his men to tell them that they would be leaving in eight minutes before showing them the route on his map. He explained that there was to be radio silence and no more than three paces between each man in the two lines of the column. It was now 9.30pm.

They set off, with Joey Liccaro and Murphy Reardon behind Daisy, the lead tank. The narrowness of the road, the ditches (which could contain

mines) and the hedges didn't provide much protection on their flanks and the men had to 'breathe in'. The column stretched for over 1.5km and at 11.40pm, the first tank stopped. Lieutenant Erikson reported that there was a bend in the road and they needed to send scouts ahead. Liccaro and Reardon were well trained in advancing in the dark and went 100m up the road. They returned soon after with nothing to report. Despite the need for sleep, the column was progressing well. It stopped at 2am on the orders of Lieutenant Colonel Whiteford (commander of 1st Battalion), so that the men could take some rest. Due to the radio silence, all orders were transmitted by liaison officers. The tanks stayed on the road while the majority of the men took shelter in a nearby wood, with a few still on guard at the front. The bridgehead was still narrow and they were nowhere near their objectives of D-Day; to get out of the area where they were currently stuck as quickly as possible. Namely the Vire valley to the west and the marshes of the Aure to the south.

8 June

It was a very short night. Allsup only slept for a few hours in a foxhole next to his friend, Stevens, who woke up from a nightmare screaming, 'The Krauts are coming!' 'I very nearly punched Stevens,' Allsup recalled, 'then I suddenly realised that it was only a dream. I was clutching my rifle and was lucky not to have screwed everything up because otherwise I would have fired for no reason. It just shows what the combination of fatigue, night time and the constant fear of death can do to a man.'



Lieutenant Allsup and his men would quickly become veterans. (*Coll. G. Bernage*)



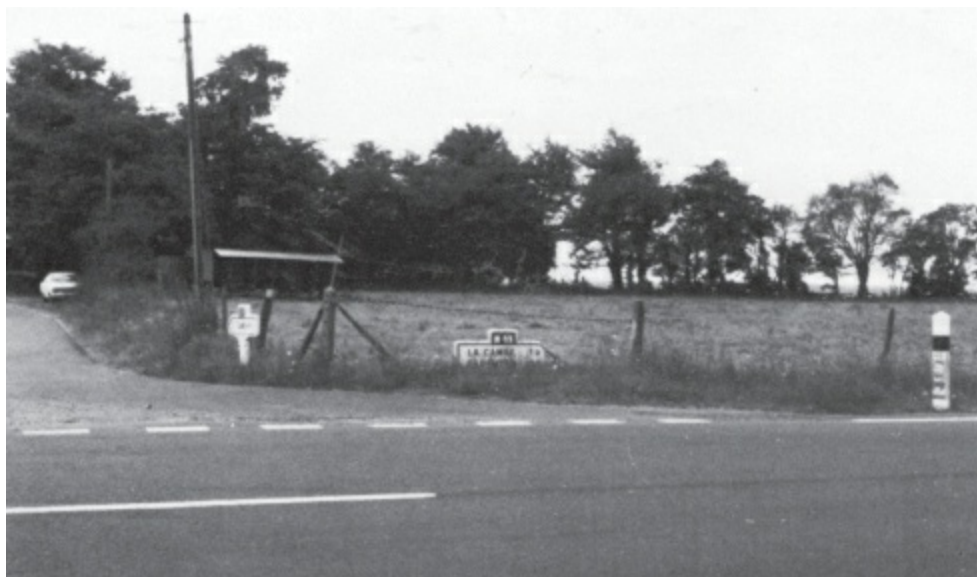
The black and white images in this chapter are those of John Sam Allsup, taken during his return to Normandy before the publication of his memoirs in 1985, meaning they are now over thirty years old. Where the landscape has changed, we have provided more up-to-date images. This photograph was captioned: 'First bivouac in Normandy on the N13 road and La Cambe'. (*J. Allsup/ Heimdal*)



Looking north along the road that Allsup's section walked down, just before the junction with the N13. (GB)



On the right, before the crossroads and at the end of a small road, a monument indicates that an airfield had been set up there. (GB)



‘It was at this intersection that the scouts gave us the green light.’ There is no upto-date image as the RN13 now has four lanes of traffic, spanned by a bridge that takes the road from Englesqueville. (J. Allsup/ Heimdal)



‘La Cambe was right in front and the 621 Ost-Bataillon were waiting for us.’ They passed through La Cambe, where the population gave them a rousing ovation. (GB)

The column set off again at about 6am. The sun had already risen and the dew hung on the trees and bushes nearby. Liccaro and Reardon were still in front of Daisy, reconnoitring the terrain ahead, with the liaison officers continuing their incessant coming and going due to the radio silence. As time passed, there was not a German in sight and it was already 7.30am. Erickson went to speak with Allsup, informing him that they were ‘damned close’ to the junction with the Isigny road, and so had to send scouts ahead and inform HQ of the situation. He would slow down so that the men could take a look, then if everything was alright, they would continue. Liccaro and Reardon returned less than ten minutes later with their news: the intersection looked clear and there were buildings visible ahead on the right, which had to be La Cambe. Daisy started up again, although they were now on a main road, much to the worry of Allsup, who didn’t like the fact that the roadside ditches

were clear and open and provided no protection in case of heavy fire.

As they reached La Cambe, the residents appeared and started to cheer. A farmer offered the grateful soldiers some milk as they stopped at a local garage. It was almost 8am. When they were about 1km out from the other side of town, a lieutenant from 'B' Company ran up and told them to be careful; the battalion had information about two German infantry companies who were hiding up ahead on the left-hand side of the road. He brought with him some reinforcements from his section and Allsup now made him divide his men on either side of the road, with more on the left to combat the presumed threat. It was 8.30am and suddenly, machine gun bullets ripped through the air. The GIs threw themselves into the roadside ditches, but three of them were too slow to react and were hit.

Allsup rolled down into the ditch before lifting his head up to see a 'Kraut' running quickly across the road towards a building. He adjusted his rifle to shoot but missed him by a good 30cm. The Germans were supposed to be up on the left, but the intelligence must have been wrong because the shots were actually coming from the right. As the column remained stationary, the purr of an aeroplane could be heard overhead. It might have been a Spitfire due to its black and white stripes on the wings, but Lieutenant Erickson didn't have time to identify it. Allsup had just left him when 'bang'; an anti-tank shell hit Daisy with its full force. Erickson was thrown into the road like a rag doll and screams could be heard coming from the wreckage of the tank. The Germans continued to fire on them while the aeroplane, in turn, dropped bombs onto the column. Allsup yelled at Roberts to fire the yellow flare and alert the others, but as Roberts rushed into the middle of the road, a second plane appeared and began to fire.

Someone yelled out, 'That son of a ***** is going to do it again! Hey, Sam! What can we do? Can we shoot it?' Everyone was pinned down to the ground, but as it flew over, Allsup had time to see that it was actually an Me109, a 'German' plane with camouflage stripes. In fact, Albert Pipet (*D'Omaha à Saint-Lô*, 1980) notes that, 'The Typhoons did hit American columns, with around twenty losses (six killed and eighteen wounded). Lieutenant Carl Hobbs was seriously wounded and evacuated after a 20mm shell exploded by his shoulder.' The reality in this case was much simpler,

and Sam Allsup couldn't believe that there had been a mistake.

Daisy had been destroyed and now the other tanks were blocked behind her, but the German machine guns had to be neutralised. Allsup looked around for Pepe to tell him to go and ask Captain Mueller for some mortar support, but was informed that a 20mm had hit Pepe's portable radio transmitter and taken away half of his face in the explosion. The radio was certainly in pieces and a part of Pepe's face lay next to it on the ground. In the meantime, a bullet ripped through Allsup's trousers, but without causing any damage and he shouted out his orders: 'Hey Slim! Head for the hedge behind us and get over the other side. We'll regroup there. Spread the word, get out of here as quick as you can - and watch your ass!' The men regrouped on the other side of the hedge, with the Germans on the opposite side of the road (north). The Americans were now thirty metres behind Daisy and had a good view of the enemy's position.

There was fighting taking place over on the right. Was that the lieutenant who had been sent to provide them with extra cover? Allsup sent Slim back to the captain to get the mortar teams, as well as some machine guns. Jack, who was as white as a sheet, came up to tell him that Liccaro and Reardon had been killed. Allsup needed a shoulder-held grenade launcher and Jack told him that Casimir Sczpaniak had one, and soon "Cas" appeared. He had been a miner back in Pennsylvania and had declared once and for all that, on balance, the army was easier than mining! 'Anyone else might have wanted to stay over there and work,' remembered Allsup, 'but not him! Instead of carrying a Garand M-1 like everyone else, Cas had a Springfield 30.06 with an adapted grenade launcher fixed to the barrel. Slide a blank cartridge in the chamber, adjust the grenade on the side, remove the pin, place the gun in the ground (because of the recall) and set the height. After that, all you have to do is fire the grenade - towards the target if possible!'

Allsup showed him that the German machine gun was buried at the foot of a hedge on the right. When he ordered him to destroy it, he was stunned by Cas's response: he had never fired the gun ever since he had been given it the day before they had left St Ives. 'It's the truth, Sam. Some good-for-nothing non-com threw it at me right before we left and absolutely no one's had the opportunity to fire a single grenade to test it!' Allsup took the gun himself but

forgot to take the pin out of the grenade. Much to everyone's amusement, it landed passed its target, between the cows. Luckily the second shot was good and the third made absolutely sure: the machine gun was silenced. Now the second tank entered the fray, as the lieutenant in charge told Allsup that he had spotted another machine gun in the doorway of a barn opposite. He fired again, making a hole in the thick barn wall. As the tank pulled up to Daisy, the sergeant examined Lieutenant Erickson's body, before entering the wreckage of the tank, whose engine was still running. He climbed back out signalling that two of the men were killed and he'd helped another whose arm was badly damaged. They then proceeded to get the cable out and the sergeant's tank helped to pull Daisy away.



1. The farm 1.2km from La Cambe as it is today, sitting on a small road running parallel with the main four lanes of traffic. Lieutenant Allsup, Roberts and Cas hid in the ditch.
(GB)



2. “Daisy” was put out of action near the road signs.’ Liccardo, Reardon and Erickson were killed here on the road. (*J. Allsup/Heimdal*)



3. ‘This is where the sergeant threw two 75mm shells, one in the doorway, one just to the side.’ (*J. Allsup/Heimdal*)



4. 'The point of attack, aided by 'D' Company. We lost Jackson in this field.' (*J. Allsup/Heimdal*)



5. 'The famous "T" hedge in front of the farm.' (*GB*)



6. The concentrated firing of the FMs came from the woods (actually a hedge tree). (*J. Allsup/Heimdal*)



7. The route taken by A/175 from Gruchy to La Cambe. (*Heimdal*)

2 Rangers

LA POINTE DU NOC

2 5 Ran 1 116

POINTE DE LA PERCÉE

Grandcamp

2 3 116

Maissy

1 116

C 743

Gélasse-F

A 743

Jacoville

224

St Pierre du Mont

Englesqueville

GRUCHY

2 3 116

Vierville

OMAHA

Indian head 175

7.6 16h 30-7

St LAURENT

110

Colleville

Formigny

Trévières

Ecréméville

1 115

Canchy

3 115

A 121

La Cambe

2 115

Longueville

Beux-Jumeaux

110

(attaque aérienne)

Cardonville

2 175

Osmanville

3 175

St Germain du Pert

Vallée de L'Aure

105th m batteries

Signy

2.6 8h

Route coupée ponts détruits

Colombières

116th 7 juin

115th 7

175th 7

8 -

7 -

6 -

5 -

4 -

3 -

2 -

1 -

0 -

1000

‘At 21.00hrs. That gives you five minutes to work out the details. Any questions? OK, over to you.’

Allsup ordered the men to fix bayonets, but as they were preparing to leave, two other German machine guns began to open fire. They now had to advance in a zigzag between the two lines, resulting in a fatal error for those who ‘zigged’ when they should have ‘zagged’. The Germans also deployed mortars causing many casualties. The men managed to make it to the hedge and crossed the to the machine gun’s position, which had been destroyed by Allsup’s grenade, only to find themselves in a minefield. Their progression was still slow, but at least they now didn’t have to suffer any heavy fire.

Roberts then threw a grenade at the enemy’s position, and two Germans raised their arms in surrender. The youngest called out, ‘Ich bin nicht Deutsch, Ich bin Tschesch’ (I’m not German, I’m Czech). Cas, who spoke Polish, could also understand Czech and the prisoner told them that the Germans had retreated and that they had been told to stay behind and delay the American advance. They were then taken to an S-2 (intelligence officer) for questioning. Further ahead was a scene of carnage: Lieutenant Dick Reynolds had been wounded in the right hip during the attack and was later evacuated and awarded the DSC (Distinguished Service Cross), while a wounded German soldier cried out ‘Mutti! Mutti!’ (Mum! Mum!). Night began to fall as they reached a wood and Allsup decided not to risk continuing forward, a decision backed up by the lieutenant colonel who came to inspect the front. Allsup explained that he would begin again at first light and rejoin Captain Mueller. In the process of explaining to the colonel why he had chosen not to occupy the former German positions, (the enemy probably had set them up as targets), an ‘88’ shell exploded nearby.

It is interesting that Allsup claimed it was an ‘88’ that he heard, unlike his fellow American and British comrades who said it was anything from a Panzer IV to a Tiger. Having discussed it since, for him the ‘88’ had become the ubiquitous sound of the battle. It is true there may have been elements of the Flak-Sturm-Regiment 1 present in the area, but the most common artillery available to the Germans were the 10.5s from the Artillerie-Regiment 352. Allsup has said that he could easily recognise the sound of the ‘88’, which gave out the famous ‘ziip-bang’, but the 10.5 was even more powerful.

And so, on the evening of 8 June the Germans were firing on their former positions, which they now believed to be occupied by the Americans and indeed some of them had. Allsup recalled:

The cries of agony nearly covered the din of the barrage, and of course, the poor assholes who had taken cover in the German trenches were blown to pieces. While I struggled with my shovel, another '88' came whistling by and I instinctively sank my head into the soft earth and tried to bury myself completely. I held my helmet in both hands, with my thumbs stuck in my ears and my eyes screwed tight-shut, as the shell burst right next to me in the ditch. It all happened in a split-second and the smell of cordite burned right to the back of my throat. I opened my eyes and saw a strange white glow at the end of my nose. A piece of red-hot shrapnel had managed to pass between my right hand and my head and rest there. Another man was groaning close to me; he had been hit by the same shell that had managed to miss me. It was so dark that I couldn't see exactly where he had been hit, but he could move his arm so it definitely wasn't broken. In fact, he had been hit just under the arm and the wound was now bleeding profusely. I helped him to unfasten his belt and we made a tourniquet to help stop the bleeding. The Krauts hit us with a more '88s' for a few more minutes. It was a nightmare; the sound of the 'ziip-bangs' from the shells only interrupted by the piercing cries from the wounded. Then, the shooting stopped abruptly, giving way to the groans and appeals of the wounded, even though there were still no medics to be had.

The section suffered five losses, mainly those who had not taken cover in time, and Allsup took the decision to retreat 200m, in case the Germans decided to bombard them once more. This meant that they had to re-cross the minefield, this time at night. At 2am on 9 June, the moon appeared and Sam Allsup was able to follow their previous tracks through the grass, thus allowing his men to escape unharmed. Just as they left the minefield, the moon disappeared again; 'God was watching over us that night,' he recalls. Hank Engels, the soldier who had been wounded next to Allsup, was still bleeding, but morphine and the tourniquet bandage helped him to pull

through. Even though they had dug foxholes, the men were unable to sleep. At 3.30am, shells suddenly began reigning down once more on the positions they had just abandoned. Then, a US navy shell passed over them, ordered by the colonel as artillery support, perhaps from the USS *Augusta* or USS *Texas*.

Albert Pipet (*D'Omaha à Saint-Lô*) also noted that after La Cambe, the Germans had strengthened their positions thanks to the batteries of '88s', which they used to help slow the American advance. As a result, six Sherman tanks were destroyed by an '88' firing from Saint-Germain-du-Pert, which thus confirms Sam Allsup's testimony. A column from 2/175 had destroyed the radar at Cardonville, with support from the cruiser, *Glasgow*, while 3/175 had pushed the Germans towards Saint-Germain-du-Pert and the Aure Valley. According to him, at around 7pm, 1/175 (with 'A' Company and Lieutenant Allsup) came across the back of a German company who were blocking the road to Osmanville with anti-tank missiles. The explosions echoing around were the sounds of the bridges at Isgny being blown up with mines.

In the mean time

The experiences of Lt Allsup and his company have been used here because Allsup's testimony is particularly detailed, allowing the reader to relive the daily reality of these American infantrymen of the 29th, who were lost in the Normandy countryside. His memoirs were originally published [by Heimdal] in 1985, when the events were still clear in his mind. In addition, Allsup had also photographed many of the places where he fought, from La Cambe to Villiers-Fossard. The images are very localised (although in black and white), and are published here alongside more recent photographs for comparison. His testimony is also useful in showing us what happened after the carnage at Omaha Beach; the rapid expansion of the beachhead in this sector, while almost forgotten by history, was certainly no easy victory.

And so while Lieutenant Allsup's section was still 1.2km west of La Cambe, other units were still advancing with caution in the face of German resistance. Colleville was finally taken on 7 June by 1st Infantry Division, who by the evening had reached Huppain, a small village to the east overlooking Port-en-Bessin, and close to the meeting point with the British troops

(see map). *Big Red One* also reached the RN13 road as far as Mosles in the east and Surrain, pushing towards Mandeville-en-Bessin at the south of this important axis and approaching Formigny to the west of this sector. To the west, the 29th Infantry Division was still stuck in a narrow beachhead, and sent 500 men from 1/116 and 2 Ranger battalions to try and link up with the 2nd Ranger Battalion, who were still stranded at Pointe du Hoc.

Their progress was quicker on 8 June, and by noon, Formigny had been taken by 3/115. To the north-west, the 116th IR (29th Division) finally captured Pointe du Hoc further along the coast. They reached Grandcamp and Maisy after facing the German resistance that had fallen back towards Isigny. This included the remnants of I./914, elements of the III./726, the remains of the second group of Artillery Regiment 352, engineers, and two companies of Ost-Bataillon 439. It is here that we rejoin Sam Allsup and the 175th Regiment, who had made it to the other side of La Cambe. The next objective was Isigny and the marshes of the Aure.

To the south, the four bridges between La Cambe and Douet that provided crossings over the marshy Aure valley, which was about 2km of mud and water in width at this time of year, had been destroyed by the retreating Germans. It also provided them with an excellent defensive barrier. The night before, while Isigny still lay in enemy hands, the 115th had been ordered to send patrols out into the swamps to find passageways through the valley, as explained by Lieutenant K. Miller:

I took twenty-eight men with me from 'E' Company, 115th (2nd Battalion). Despite the gruelling pace of marching for the past seventy-two hours, we left Longueville at 17.30hrs. A small boat took us across the river before we waded through the swamp mud for kilometre after kilometre. We arrived in Colombières at 23.00hrs to the surprise of the sleeping sentries. A French woman indicated to us where the enemy officers could be found and we encircled the house. At the same time, a car and three other German vehicles arrived, but stopped at the sound of our gunfire. An intense fight broke out around the command post as we fired through the doors and windows. Seventeen Germans surrendered and nineteen were killed. The next day we counted sixty dead Germans in the village.

After this success, the Canchy sector was immediately chosen to be the location for a 2km-wide pontoon bridge, as the German presence on the southern side was practically non-existent. A long convoy of Weasels arrived from Longueville and construction began during the night of 8/9 June.

The crossing of the Aure marshes



The start of the road through the marshes of the Aure, here by the south bank, with the first of the bridges that had been destroyed. (GB)



View of the marshes looking east towards Colombières. At the time, the Germans had opened the locks and flooded the area. *(GB)*



The Americans in the marshes. *(US Army)*



Helmet belonging to one of the three injured men of 2/115, who passed through the marshes towards Colombières. Despite the impact, the wearer was only injured, leaving the helmet at the farm of M. and Mme Lahaye, at a place called Le Feuillet, where the wounded were treated on 8 June. A monument marking the efforts to get through the marshes has been erected nearby. It states that *'On the evening of 8 June, the Americans, who had decided to cross anyway, sent a patrol out on reconnaissance. Wading and stumbling through mud and water from ankle-height to above the head, the patrol met a man carrying a white sheet who asked them to cease the shelling of Colombières. Further ahead, the patrol engaged in a brief skirmish with the remaining Germans, bringing back across the marsh seventeen prisoners at the cost of only three injured men.'* (Private Collection)

9 June, south of the marshes

At 8.30am, the 3/115 (Major Victor P. Gillepsie) travelled along the same road, which to begin with was blocked by water-logged ditches. It took them two hours to cross the bridge, arriving in Colombières at 10.30am, which by now had been hastily evacuated by the Germans. The Americans were followed by 1/115, who turned off towards Bricqueville and 2/115, who headed for Monfréville and Calette Wood.

Lieutenant Colonel Cooper (110th Field Artillery Battalion) went out in his jeep to reconnoitre the vast marshy landscape. He was accompanied by Louis Azarel, a war correspondent from Baltimore's *Newspost*. When they returned, they brought back an injured GI that they had found on the edge of the marshes. At Bricqueville, the ford had been laid with mines, triggering an

intense fusillade by the Germans, who had consequently been alerted to the Americans' presence. However, after the completion of the decking during the night, a second bridge was quickly constructed to take vehicles over the river and anti-tank guns from 115th Field Artillery Battery (115th IR) were put in position to guard the crossing. General Gerhardt's jeep was the first to cross and, turning around, he exclaimed, 'Great work guys, but watch out for the Krauts in the river bend there!'



'A' Company (175th) now headed for Osmanville and we can trace the route that they took. From Englesqueville to La Cambe, we run parallel to the original road, passing the farm where 'Daisy' was destroyed. Then cross through Osmanville to reach the bridge at Isigny.



Major Victor P. Gillespie, commander of 3/115.



The main road in Isigny leading to the bridge, which can be seen in the background. On the right is No.76, where Sergeant Jack Roberts was found, suffering from shock. (GB)



The same road, this time looking east in the direction of the column's arrival. No.76 is now on the left. (GB)

With its medieval castle that overlooks the marshes, Colombières was taken by mid-morning and the troops began to pass through the town. German corpses and damaged vehicles littered the roads. An American officer caught up with an infantry column coming from Calette Wood, marching towards Mestry. These were the men of 2/115 (under Lieutenant Colonel Warfield), who marched like robots: always moving forward and never stopping. They had not eaten for two days and so the officer shared out his rations with them. Before reaching Mestry, the battalion was attacked by Germans on bicycles, armed with submachine guns.

Meanwhile 1/115 followed 2/115 and used the pontoon bridge at Canchy, before coming under fire at Bricqueville. Up ahead, Major Victor Gillespie and 3/115 finally reached La Folie around 11pm. The artillery also arrived at this bridgehead at the southern end of the marshy Aure valley. The 110th Field Artillery Battalion (Lieutenant Colonel Cooper) was ordered to head for Corainville, where an ideal position had been found for its batteries at the chateau (southwest of Colombières). Later in the night, aircraft would drop bombs a little further ahead. However, in the middle of a relatively dense patchwork of fields and hedgerows, with narrow roads that almost formed a maze, elements of the German 352 Infanterie-Division withdrew to form a new frontline north of Saint-Lô, after the Americans had broken through the line through the marshes. Further west, around Isigny, the situation was also developing favourably.

To Isigny

On 9 June the 175th had to take Isigny, which at the time was being heavily bombed and was currently in flames. At dawn, Sam Allsup and his men started on their way and, less than ten minutes later, one of his scouts gave the alert that someone was coming down the road. As the shapes appeared out of the morning mist, they turned out to be a group of GIs from 'C' Company (Captain Alexander Poushka Jr), who decided to tag along, being temporarily cut off from their own unit.



This photograph, taken by Allsup, shows that the exterior of No.76 used to be plastered. He wrote: 'Technical Sergeant Jack Roberts was lying in the entrance to No.76 when we arrived. The only part of his body he could move were his eyes.' (*S. Allsup/ Heimdal*)

One of the men from 'C' Company began to tell them about a strange occurrence that had happened to them the night before. One of his comrades' canteens was empty and, passing a farm, they saw a young girl of about eighteen stood on the doorstep. As he didn't speak any French, he turned to his friend to ask him to explain that he needed some water and the girl went to find a pitcher to fill his flask. Upon her return, the soldier flashed her a beautiful smile and thanked her. Then, just as he was turning around to leave, he saw the girl begin to point a German rifle in his direction. The soldier was much quicker, and shot the girl four times without waiting for help. There were plenty of comments from his comrades: 'God, what a mess'; 'The little bitch was sleeping with the Germans'; 'After all, this is war.'

As the men carried on along the road where Lieutenant Erickson and their two comrades had been killed, they passed an abandoned German anti-tank gun. Further ahead, the column slowed down a little and the men could hear neighing and whinnying from injured horses:

As we came up to a farm, a road opened up on our left. An entire horse-drawn column had been taken out in the crossfire. It was not a pretty sight. Right at the intersection was an abandoned truck, with a Kraut lying next to it in the dust. The horse, still harnessed, seemed to be expecting his late master to shout 'gee-up', or whatever the Germans say. The entire narrow road was a tangled mess of dead or dying horses, surrounded by dead Germans.

Suddenly, Lieutenant Allsup and his men came across another US column. A big figure approached them and asked who was in command. Allsup noticed the two stars on his uniform and, realising that it was General Cota, declared, 'Lieutenant Allsup, 'A' Company, 175th Infantry Regiment, Sir!' Cota was surprised, 'Who would have thought it? What have you done with your lieutenant's stripes?' Allsup replied that there were too many snipers in the area, and as they were looking for officers, he preferred to hide his rank. What's more, he didn't need to show them in order to lead his men. Norman Cota smiled at this and stated that he was in need of more men to help liquidate a German artillery battery. However, as their company was waiting for them further ahead, the two groups went on their separate ways. Allsup was impressed by Cota's ability to lead his men on the frontline: 'What they said about him was true. He was definitely more at home at the head of a column than the head of a division. He was a real soldier.'

At Osmanville, the 224th Field Artillery Battalion captured the two remaining German horse-drawn batteries. Their surrender was completed without issue and all of their weapons were collected in a neighbouring field. In total, 150 German prisoners were handed over to the Military Police. This meant that during the American advance, the Germans were only able to use small detachments with machine guns or other anti-tank weapons. Each detachment had to fight without any link to each other and amid their confused retreat, the rest of the horse-drawn batteries were also destroyed. This meant that motorised guns, which were more mobile, were the only usable form of artillery.

Before they reached Isigny, the tank commanders refused to move any further, believing that the bridges had been mined. Suddenly, General Gerhardt's jeep appeared. Seeing the men waiting on both sides of the road,

he ordered the tank commanders to move forward immediately. At 3am on 9 June, the tanks entered the town, which by now was in flames after all the bombing. In response to the sniper fire, the tanks fired both their guns and machine guns into the streets. There were around 200 German troops in the town, including elements from the Luftwaffe and Kriegsmarine, who had a base in Isigny. The bridges had not been mined after all and by 5am, the town was in American hands.

Following behind the men at the front, was 'A' Company of the 175th, led by Lieutenant Allsup:

Plumes of smoke mixed with dust rose from the area; we could see that well before we could see any houses. As Isigny emerged from this strange fog, it almost seemed to be coming from the depths of a horror novel. It was as if a giant bulldozer had destroyed all of the buildings, leaving only ruins and death in its wake. I thought that the naval bombardment, which had already hit the woods in front of us, must have been transferred over to the small town. We entered Isigny and made our way through the rubble. Roberts had gone ahead with two other scouts. All of a sudden, a German machine gun began to fire at us from the right, but we couldn't work out where it was coming from, or even who was attacking him. I signalled to Murphy to take his platoon on the left-hand pavement, while Jost and Johnson were to take theirs on the right. I put myself at the head of Jost's platoon, with Slim on my heels. Moving at a trot, we managed to make it to the centre of town. We had to make a bunch of detours to avoid the various piles of ruins; demolished buildings with miserable facades of blown-out doors and shutters and shattered roofs. Smoke, dust and acrid cordite filled the air. The centre seemed almost deserted, with just occasional enemy gun fire puncturing the air. There was movement up ahead: some GIs, bent double, were crossing the bridge in small groups. Crouching down, we moved forward when Haverson ran up to us from the other side to say that Roberts had gone down.

Allsup followed Haverson back to where Roberts was lying, slumped on a pile of stones, but there were no visible injuries. A soldier, who was next to

Roberts at the time, told them that a group of American soldiers, including Roberts' brother, had been captured by the Germans. Roberts had merely fainted with the shock and was now slowly regaining consciousness. Meanwhile, a German machine gun was spotted on the second floor of what appeared to be a warehouse. After firing one burst it went silent, before taking aim again as the Americans were about to cross the bridge. Luckily, its aim was too high and the men managed to get over, one by one, and rejoin their company before leaving the town.

Now and again, a wall collapsed on our way, adding to the dust that dried up our throats. Everyone was relieved when we got past the last house. A GI started to sing a popular English march, whose lyrics had been adapted by us Yankees: ‘ “Roll me over, Yankee soldier, roll me over lay me down and do it again. Oh this is number one and the fun has just begun, roll me over...

Allsup stated that it was hardly surprising the British Army hated the Americans: ‘These bastard Yanks with their big salaries come over here and then nick our wives!’

‘So what, Tommy? You’re unhappy? That’s the lend-lease deal?!’



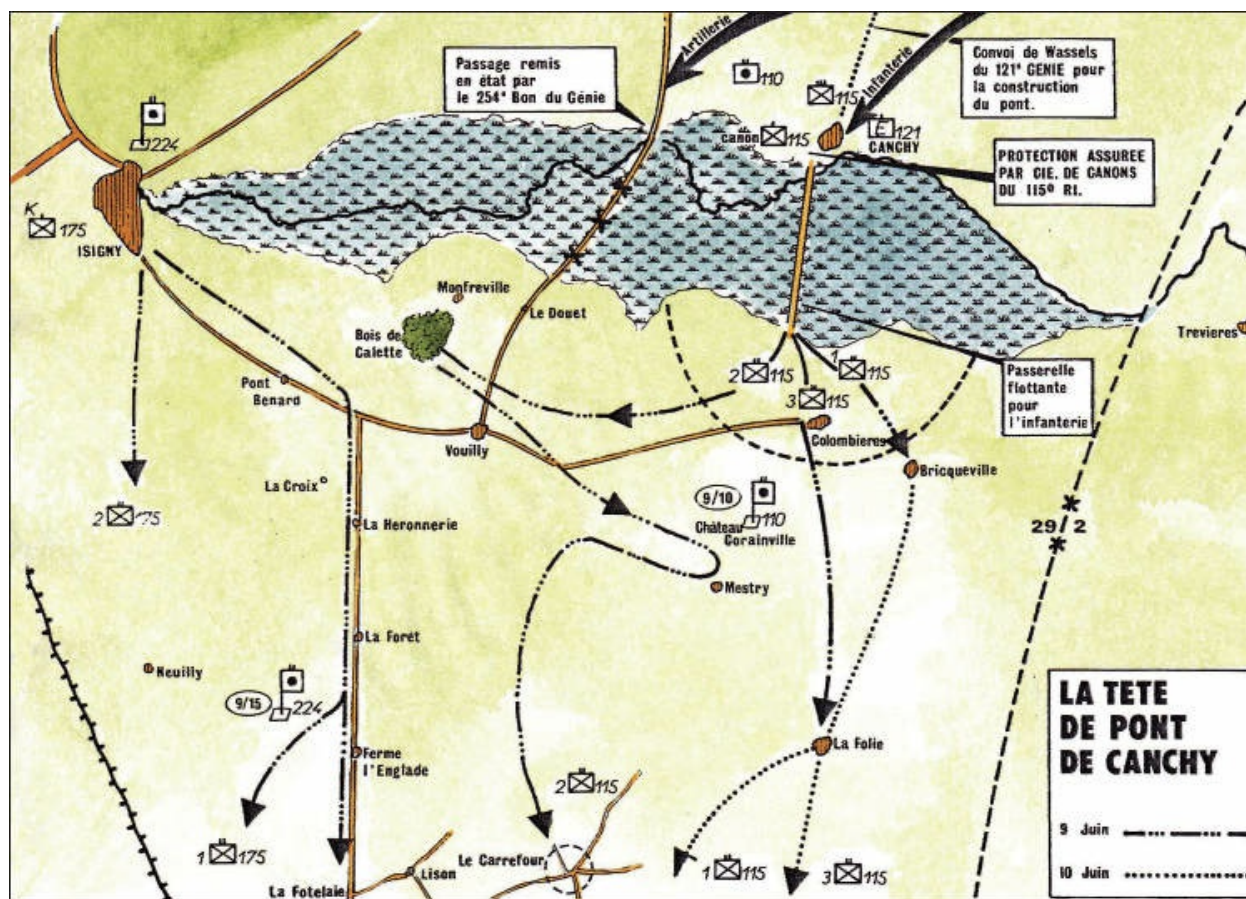
When describing this photo, Allsup noted that, ‘This is what we saw of the escarpment close to the Elle river and the train station.’ In 2001, Madame Defontenay, aged 85, confirmed what had happened regarding the explosion of the ammunition depot. She remembered that it was located to the south of the D196 road and north of the Bois de la

Bougue d'Elle. The hedgerows had been cut down to allow access and an area covering 50 square metres, (which matches Allsup's description) was bordered by a mound of earth. However, this explosion was overtaken in the locals' memory by an even larger explosion: two German trains had collided at Lison train station earlier that day, shortly before the Americans arrived, and four ammunition wagons had exploded. (*J. Allsup/Heimdal*)

As more shells passed overhead and the men enjoyed a hot meal made by their cook, 'Rosie' Rosenkrantz, their joy was at its height. Allsup presented his report to Captain Mueller, who although pleased to see them, told Allsup that they now had to head for Carentan and link up with the paratroopers. 'K' Company (175th), along with three tanks, had already headed in that direction in order to capture the bridge over the Vire river, but it was already destroyed when they got there. The order was given to take Auville-sur-le-Vey on the other side, but the Germans fought back, as Fallschirmjäger-Regiment 6, under Major von der Heydte, continued to cling on to Carentan (see *Objectif Carentan* by Georges Bernage, Heimdal, 2010). At daybreak, a small attack directed on Isigny was quickly repelled, while 'K' Company were forced to do an about turn after coming under heavy German fire.

Faced with such resistance, at 1pm the 175th moved right and headed south towards Pont-Bérnard, with Lison as their objective. Albert Pipet notes that, 'Being in command of the valley had three main advantages: all the German forces to the south of the Aure marshes were at risk of being surrounded and had to withdraw; we could keep a better eye on the Vire valley and its wetlands; but most of all, the GIs further north had an excellent base from which to capture Saint-Lô, which was 15km to the south.'

As the men replenished their ammunition, 'A' Company was now given their new objective. 'I had told Datun that Stevens and his guys were coming with supplies' said Allsup. 'It didn't take them long and in no time at all, every man in the section had two new belts carrying 100 cartridges. What's more, we also stocked up on additional chargers, keeping them close at hand.' The order to change direction worried the men slightly, but they were soon heading towards their new objective, with 'A' Company in two columns.



On 9 June, the 29th Division finally advanced south of the Aure marshes. After a skirmish at Heronnerie, 1/175 advanced as far as Lison and Airel, while 2/175 covered the right flank towards the Vire river. 1/175 then moved on to La Folie and 2/175 arrived at Le Carrefour de la Vigne aux Gendres later that evening, after an exhausting march, where it would meet its fate. (*Heimdal*)

Our boots were soon treading the gravel road towards Rupally and La Madeleine, before ultimately leading to Lison. It was quiet - too quiet. There wasn't a shot fired, nor a Kraut seen on the horizon. Nothing. It was all very unnatural! Our column kicked up a fine dust [the roads were unpaved] and those at the back were soon covered with a white film. Very soon we arrived at Pont-Bérnard and headed for the D11 road. When we got to the crossroads, we stopped for a smoke and to answer the call of nature.

Unfortunately, Allsup and his men had barely had time to light their cigarettes before machine gun fire began to sound to the south-east, towards the hamlet of La Héronnerie. A violent scuffle then took place between 1/175

and elements of the German 352.ID artillery regiment, who were in position along the route. There were also elements from 513 battalion of Schnelle Brigade 30, meaning around 200 men in total. The time was now around 3pm and Allsup and his men were sent to the front. On the outskirts of the hamlet, the rapid cadence of a machine gun signalled the presence of an MG42. Then, a heavier bang answered in reply and they came across an American 57mm anti-tank gun, which silenced the MG. At the end of the fighting, 125 Germans had been killed, including 30 from Schnelle Brigade, while the others had managed to fall back. The advanced party from 1/175 managed to clear the snipers along the way, before reaching Lison, only to find it strafed and destroyed by bombs. Lison and the nearby crossroads of La Foletaie were blocked by the battalion by 6pm. Further advance was made on the eastern bank of the Vire, while the west bank was still firmly held by the Germans, who had used re-enforcements from 17 SS-Panzer Grenadier-Division 'Götz von Berlichingen'. Earlier in the day, a reconnaissance group from this division had been patrolling southwest of Bayeux, towards Vaubadon, and had made contact with 352 Infanterie-Division's command post at Littry. The 'Gotz' would arrive at the line south of Carentan two days later.

The American forces in this sector feared a German counter-attack and so set up camp on the high ground at Lison and La Fotelaie, where the straight road lead to Saint-Lô; their next objective. To ensure the safety of their right flank, which was facing the Vire, 2/175 kept watch on the area around Neuilly-la-Forêt/Saint-Lambert, 3/175 on La Foletaie and 1/175 on Airel.

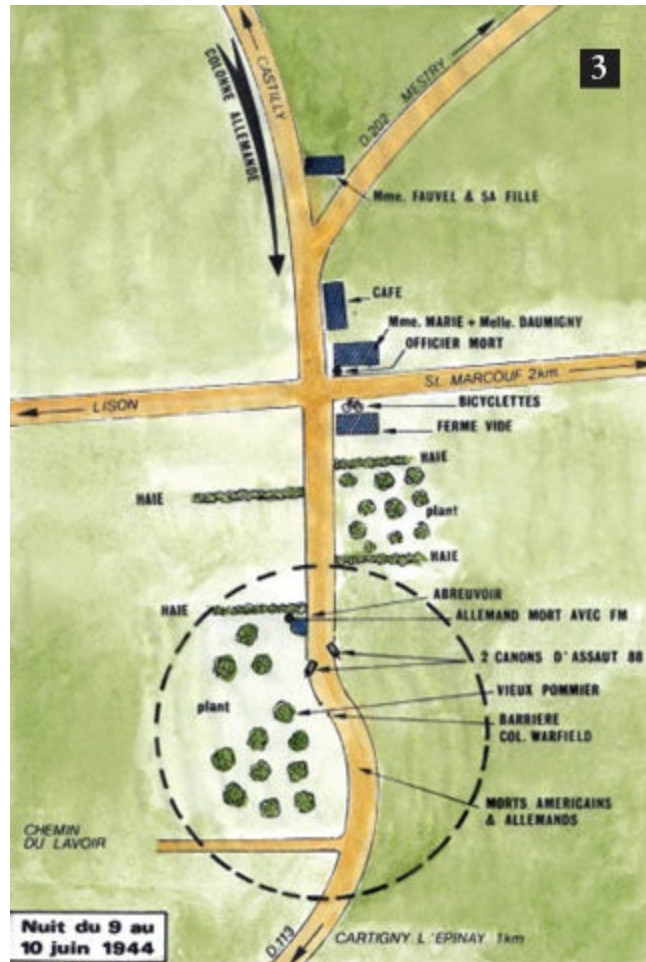
'A' Company were then ordered to veer right, in the direction of Airel. Colonel Paul R. Goode (who Sam Allsup called Robert Harkins in his memoirs), who was in charge of the 175th, came to tell them their mission. According to Allsup, 'He had to be the biggest man we had ever seen in an Allied uniform; about 7 feet tall and around 20 stones. He'd come from a mountain unit and had arrived in England shortly before D-Day, just like many others. As big as he was, he still walked at a great pace and we had a hell of a job keeping up with him!'



1. Photograph taken in 1978 by Albert Pipet at the crossroads, looking north towards the house of Madame Fauvel. Lison is to the left and Saint-Marcouf to the right. (A. Pipet/Heimdal)(GB)



2. The same area today (GB)



3. Map showing the tragic events of 9/10 June at Le Carrefour de la Vigne aux Gendres. The map was drawn by Albert Pipet, following his investigation into what had happened, and was published in his book, *D'Omaha à Saint-Lô* (Heimdal, 1980). The assault guns were naturally, '75s', not '88s'. (A. Pipet/ Heimdal)



4. Image taken in 1978 by Albert Pipet, showing the gate to the orchard where Lieutenant Colonel Warfield was found shot, still with his revolver in his hand, a few metres away from the wreckage of an assault gun (see map). The orchard has since become a corn field and while the hedge remains, the gate no longer exists.



5. This photograph was taken to the south of the crossroads, with the orchard where the American soldiers perished on the left. The house that formerly belonged to Madame Marie is in the background, overlooking the crossroads. (GB)



6. The American memorial commemorating the losses. (GB)



7. Looking north where the German column arrived from and where an American memorial now stands. (GB)



Lieutenant Colonel William E. Warfield.

The colonel told Captain Mueller that the 352.ID had set up a major munitions depot near the forest close by (Forêt de la Bougue d'Elle), and the hope was that 'A' Company would be able to take it intact. The colonel's two scouts guided them through the fields for a mile or so and then veered off to the south. A dead German appeared around a corner and everyone 'vented their feelings with gestures and obscene language...' When the two scouts discovered something up ahead, the colonel raised his arm and the column stopped. The men bunched together in shelter of a natural ditch and observed the scene.

Suddenly, in a thundering boom, the whole depot blew up! We were all lifted up off the ground by the force of the explosion, with the shockwave even lifting the 20 stones of the colonel! Snorting, he got up and walked towards what was left of the depot to see what remained, followed by the men who were waiting to see what had happened ... After advancing a few hundred metres, we climbed the hill and finally saw the crater, which was so big that three 6x6 trucks could have fitted in it side by side. The colonel carried on, although he was already far behind his two scouts.

They rejoined the secondary road and the battalion was now kept in reserve. They were in the hills overlooking the Elle Valley, at Airel. Allsup began to count their losses: his two best scouts, a sergeant, a medic and a radio, as well as an FM BAR. Private Smithson, 'A' Company's postmaster, handed out the first mail to arrive on the continent. He also told them that the C rations had arrived and added that the doctor had told them to have a good shave:

Apparently, the Krauts were using wooden bullets, which had already done plenty of damage to the face of many a soldier, and it was particularly difficult to extract the splinters when the man had a three-day beard. This was the first time we'd heard about these wooden bullets. Surely the enemy must have been using them for practice, which was a great idea, but not for the real thing! I didn't fancy taking one in the head myself!

It was true that the Germans used wooden bullets for practice, but were never used in combat, (except in emergencies such as the night of 5/6 June when units were carrying out drills near the bridge at Ranville), because they were so inaccurate after 50 metres. The story told by the doctor was clearly just a myth to keep the men clean.

To the east, the 2nd Infantry Division had landed and established its command post at Formigny, to attack in the direction of Trévières. The 2/9 moved forward around 11am, and after heavy fighting, reached Rubercy by midnight. The 38th Infantry Regiment also finally reached Trévières around the same time and elements of the Grenadier-Regiment 916 withdrew from the town throughout the night of 9/10 June.

A tragic night near Lison

On the evening of 9 June, after travelling a complicated route along the back roads of Bessin, 2/115 under Lieutenant Colonel Warfield finally arrived at the crossroads north of Cartigny-l'Épinay, to the north-east of Lison. At 2.45am on the night of 9/10 June, they finally made camp at the Vigne-Gendres crossroads, after an exhausting seventy-two hours of marching. The men were worn out and sat down in an orchard to the south-west of the intersection, without even removing their equipment. They huddled together at the base of the hedges to try and sleep.

The back of the long column, which included the company commanders in their jeeps, was still on the road. Suddenly, a second column came up behind them with no headlights on. Slowing down, one officer called out, 'It's 3rd Battalion!' There was a brief flurry of noise that echoed in the night, which was met with gunfire. Was it friend or foe? Orders were quickly shouted out in the midst of the darkness and the brakes from the trucks squeaked in the night air as they stopped, one after the other. It turned out to be a long German artillery convoy, including two Marder guns (from the Panzerjäger-Abteilung 352), who were retreating from the Aure Valley and heading for Saint-Lô. A German machine gun was sweeping the roads and the fields, but as the GIs tried to respond, both Marder guns were pointed straight at their camp and fired. The Americans struggled to react in the darkness, as the Germans jumped down from their trucks, scaled the fences, and shot anything that moved. In the confusion, the American soldiers even gunned down each other. Someone managed to fire a bazooka and take out one of the Marders, but Lieutenant Colonel Warfield and eleven of his officers were killed. Resistance was futile and the rest of the men scattered in all directions. This tragic night cost the 29th Division 11 officers and 139 men, the equivalent of an entire company.

Upon hearing no news of 2/115, General Gerhardt told Major Glover S. Johns to go and look for them. The major returned later, accompanied by one of the surviving soldiers (who was still in shock) and told them what had happened: 'A tank came into the field and killed the whole battalion. I'm the only one left!' Shaken by the news, Gerhardt took the major's arm and said, 'Come on Johns, we have to find Warfield!' They reached the crossroads,

only to find the bodies of the soldiers all over the road and in the field, including that of Lieutenant Colonel Warfield, which was lying at the foot of the gate, his pistol still in his hand. The dead were particularly numerous at the foot of the hedges, while on the road were the two destroyed Marder guns. Two women who lived nearby, Madame Marie and Mademoiselle Daumigny, spoke with the general and gave him some flowers. Eighteen survivors were gathered together and sent to the rear and the other scattered groups gradually rejoined the American lines in the early morning. Private Lehman had stayed hidden in the valley, sheltered by a farmer, while Sergeant Haque and his wounded men were taken in at another farm and offered wine with black bread and butter.



1. On 9 June 1944, 1/175 (29th Infantry Division) captured Isigny. However, the streets of this small town, which had been destroyed by shelling, still needed to be cleared. Here,

men from 29th Division (the division's insignia can be seen on the uniform of the man in the foreground) patrol the main square.



2. This image was taken minutes after the previous one. It is still impossible to see the church tower through the smoke and dust, as it looms, theoretically, at the bottom of the main square, which is now covered in rubble.





3. An American half-track passes in front of the church in Isigny, whose steeple had been struck by several shells. The original caption noted that German snipers had been placed up there.



4. A house in Isigny that has been gutted by shelling. A piece of (Russian) artillery has been abandoned by the Germans during their retreat.



5. Isigny was now firmly in American hands. When Carentan was taken on 12 June, it meant that both American bridgeheads could be linked together. Here, an MP keeps an eye on the vast numbers of US vehicles as they travel to the front.

(Photos Coll. Heimdal.)

Isigny main square



1 & 2. The main square in Isigny looking east. In the background can be seen the road leading to Bayeux. An MP regulates the flow of traffic and the rubble had already been partially cleared after the return of the civilian population. The hotel in the original image still exists.



3. The same square looking in the opposite direction (west). The church tower can be seen in the background, as the local population attempt to return to their devastated town.



4. Looking westwards from the middle of the square. The convoys are seen passing through the ruins in both directions.



5. On 15 June 1944, the civilians have just arrived back in Isigny, only to find their homes destroyed after heavy fire between the Americans and Germans. They can be seen gathering in small groups, trying to decide what to do next.

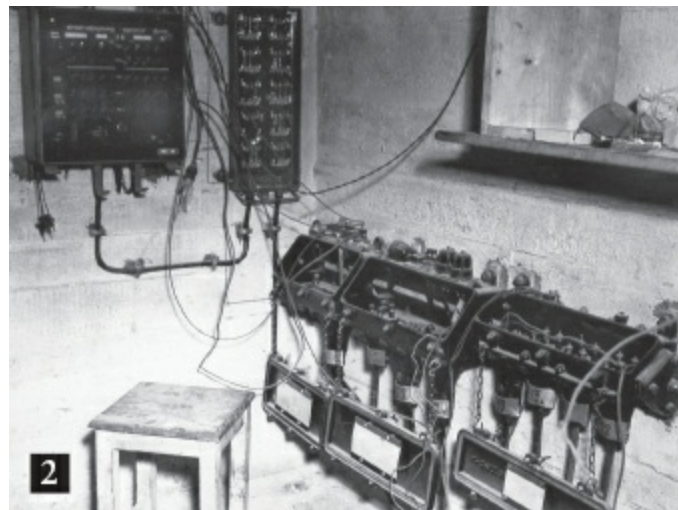


6. A conversation between an American soldier and some locals. In the background can be seen the same ruins as those in Image 1, to the south of the square.

(Images from Heimdal Collection)



1. An American convoy crosses the main square, heading west, on 19 June.



2. This image was taken on 19 June in Brévands, near, Isigny, showing a German telephone exchange that was connected to various coastal defence positions. They had sabotaged the equipment before they retreated.





3, 4, 5, & 6. Images taken from the same place, looking in the same direction, on 17 June.

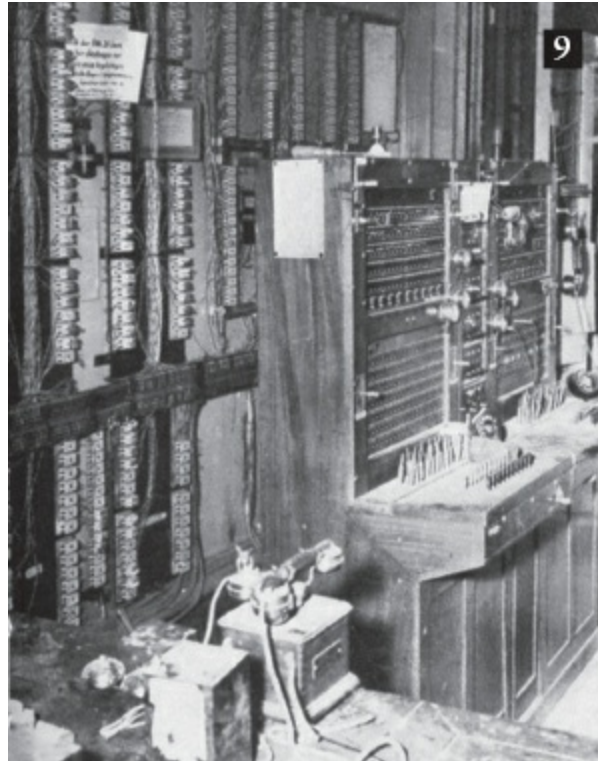
Isigny, 17-19 June



7. The civilians return in their horsedrawn vehicles and are confronted by the immense destruction of their town. Image taken on 19 June.



8. Another view of the main square in Isigny, but this time looking east. A priests can be seen among the returning inhabitants.



9. A telephone exchange in Isigny that had been used by the Germans (you can still see the German inscriptions), which was later reused by the US Signal Corps. Photograph taken on 19 June.

(Images from Heimdal Collection)



10. The civilians set to work clearing the rubble, 17 June.



1, 2 & 3. A series of photographs showing General Meindl (in the hat) and Major Stephani. After studying the map, 'Stumpa' lets out a laugh.

Fallschirmjäger- Division training in Brittany before heading for the front in Normandy.



4. Major Friedrich Alpers.



5. Easter 1944 at the Kerlivien chateau, Brittany. On the left is Major Stephani, commander of the 9th Regiment, and on the right is Major Alpers, commander of 1st Battalion.



6. General Meindl (centre) in discussion with his officers. On the far-left (in the cap) is Lieutenant Colonel Blauensteiner, Chief of Staff of II.Fj.-Korps, with Major Kurt Stephani second from left.



7. Major Kurt Stephani during a training exercise. He was given the nickname 'Stumpa' due to his small size. He died on 20 August 1944 after being wounded trying to retreat from the Falaise Pocket, and was buried at Ecorches chateau.



8. General Meindl sets the target for the sMG34 heavy machine gun.



9. General Schimpf surrounded by his officers during training.



10. (L to R) General Meidl, Sergeant Maass and Major Stephani.



11. Training manoeuvres in the forest. Stephani is sat in the centre (behind the tree), surrounded by his officers. We can compare this with Image 7, which was taken at the same time.

The Knights Cross of II.Fallschirm-Korps



1. Commanded by prestigious leaders, those in charge of the Fallschirm-Korps and 3.FJD had brilliant military careers behind them, sharing between them several Knight's Crosses. The first among them was the head of the paratroop corps, Eugen Meindl. Born in Donaueschingen, in Württemberg on 16 July 1892, he served in the First World War, eventually becoming the Head of Artillery for 52nd Corps. In November 1939 he was made lieutenant colonel and took command of the Gebirgs-Artillerie-Regiment 112 at Graz. Then, as colonel, he commanded the Gruppe Meindl and jumped into Narvik (in Norway) for the first time as a paratrooper. In February 1942, Major General Meindl took command of the Luftwaffen-Division Meindl, which had recently been formed in Russia and in September 1942, took command of XII.Flieger-Korps. On 5 November 1943 he was appointed head of II.Fallschirm-Korps. He received the Knight's Cross (Ritterkreuz) on 14 June 1941 and received his Oak Leaves (the 564th recipient) on 3 August 1944, and Swords (155th recipient) on 8 May 1945. The young paratroopers called him 'Papa Meindl'. He died in Munich on 24 January 1951.



2. Lieutenant General Richard Schimpf, commander of 3. Fallschirmjäger-Division, was born on 16 May 1897 in Eggenfeld, Bavaria. He joined the 9th Bavarian Infantry Regiment at Wrede, on 11 February 1915 and later served in the Reichswehr at Marienburg. He joined the Luftwaffe in March 1935 as a *Staffelkapitän* (squadron commander) and was promoted to major on 1 April 1937, then lieutenant colonel on 1 April 1938. He joined the

Luftwaffe General Staff on 1 September 1938 and after being promoted to colonel in October 1939, received the Knight's Cross on 17 February 1941 after fighting during the French Campaign. He replaced General Meindl as head of the Luftwaffen-Division Meindl in December 1941 and took command of 21. Luftwaffen-Feld-Division soon after. In February 1944 he took charge of 3. Fallschirmjäger-Division and his final promotion to lieutenant general took place in March 1944. He was captured, along with his men, on 8 March 1945 and was held prisoner by the Americans at Bad Godesberg. He was released on 22 December 1947 and died in Dusseldorf on 30 December 1972.



3. Lieutenant Colonel Ernst Blaustein was Chief of Staff for the 2nd Paratroop Corps. He was born in Vienna on 16 May 1911 and joined the Austrian Army on 16 September 1929. He was promoted to second lieutenant in January 1934 and became 1st Officer of 2nd Battalion, 3rd Infantry Regiment the following year. By 1940 he was a captain and took part in the Norway Campaign as part of a reconnaissance unit. He received the Iron Cross 2nd, then 1st Class as a *Staffelkapitän* with 2. Aufklärungs-Gruppe 22. Promoted to major on 1 April 1942, Blaustein joined the Luftwaffe General Staff and became head of the XIII. Flieger-Korps and finally the II. Fallschirm-Korps in February 1944, with the rank of lieutenant colonel. He received the Knight's Cross on 29 October 1944 after leading the 3. FJD's breakthrough in the Falaise Pocket. He was promoted to colonel on 25 February 1945 and served as a general for the Fallschirmtruppen Meindl until the end of the war.



4. Otto Zierach was born on 26 January 1907 at Eberswalde, near Berlin. On 13 April 1928 he enrolled at the police academy at Brandenburg-Havel and joined the famous Wecke Battalion (the forerunner of the paratroopers). On 1 April 1938, Zierach was incorporated into the very first company of Fallschirmjäger-Regiment 1 and promoted to sergeant major. After the formation of Captain Koch's parachute assault battalion, Zierach effectively became his assistant and was with him when he took Fort Eben-Emael and the four bridges over the Albert Canal. He jumped near the Vroenhoven bridge and prevented its destruction, for which he received the Knight's Cross on 15 May 1940 and his promotion to captain. After the Battle for Crete, he joined the Luftwaffen-Division Meindl in February 1942 and then joined the staff of II.Fallschirm-Korps in January 1944. After attending the Luftwaffe Military Academy to complete his training for his new role, he returned to Normandy to fight with 2nd Corps. He was captured on 8 May 1945, but was soon released by the British. He died on 12 August 1976 at Nachrodt-Versede.



5. Karl-Heinz Becker, who commanded the 5 FJR then the KG Becker, was born on 2 January 1914 in Schwedt an der Oder. His career was quite similar to that of Otto Zierach; joining the police force of General Göring on 10 October 1934. In January 1939 he was assigned to a company in 3rd Battalion, Fallschirmjäger-Regiment 1, under the command of Captain Karl-Lothar Schulz. He was promoted to First Lieutenant in June 1939 and assumed command of 11th Company, FJR1, on 1 April. Along with Captain Schulz, he

took part in the capture of the aerodrome at Rotterdam, for which he received the Iron Cross 1st Class. He participated in the Battle for Crete and the capture of Heraklion. On 1 July 1942 he became Adjutant of FJR1 and took command of the regiment's 3rd Battalion in December. He was wounded on the Eastern Front in January 1943, but after recovering from his injuries, was promoted to captain and took command of FJR5 of 3.

Fallschirmjäger-Division in May. He was awarded the Knight's Cross on 9 July 1941 and received the German Cross in Gold on 19 June 1944, with his citation appearing on 29 July 1944, after his actions at Saint-Lô. He continued to fight in the Ardennes until the end of the war.



6. Major Kurt Stephani was born on 15 August 1904 at Donaueschingen (like General Meindl). He joined the Reichswehr in October 1923 and served with an artillery regiment based at Ulm. In April 1935 he was incorporated as a reservist at the officer training school at Döberitz. He was promoted to second lieutenant on 1 November 1937, seeing action in France, Belgium and Russia from June 1941 to August 1942. On 10 October 1941 he took command of 9th Company (MG) of IR75 and received the Iron Cross 1st Class on 8 June 1942. He was promoted to captain on 16 June and on 1 September, took command of the reconnaissance units of XIII. Flieger-Korps. Soon after, he took command of Fallschirm-Aufklärungs-Abteilung 12 and was transferred to the Luftwaffe on 1 January 1943. He took command of FJR9 of 3.FJD on 1 February 1944 and was awarded the German Cross in Gold on 5 June. Although nicknamed 'Stumpa' due to his small size, he distinguished himself on 11 July near the Forest of Cerisy and led FJR9's breakthrough in the Falaise Pocket. After being seriously injured, he died of his wounds on 20 August 1944 and was posthumously awarded the Knight's Cross on 30 September.



7. General Meindl (behind) in discussion with Captain Bodo Götsche, commander of the 3.FJD reconnaissance group (AA12). On the right is Feldwebel (sergeant) Maas.



8. Standing on the left is Major Kurt Stephani, speaking to his driver. Behind, wearing the helmet, is Major Ernst Blauensteiner.

2.

Saturday 10 June

At the 84th Corps' command post, General Erich Marcks was not entirely sure where the Americans were. Lieutenant Colonel Dietrich Kraiss' 352.Infanterie-Division had come under fire from the three American divisions that had landed, and were now awaiting reinforcements, which were primarily to come from 3 Fallschirmjäger-Division. For the time being, however, although Fallschirmjäger-Regiment 6 still held Carentan (situated near the coast and to the west of the Vire estuary), they were unaware of what was happening to the north of the River Elle, where elements of the 352.Infanterie-Division were haphazardly retreating to. Rommel believed that the Americans would want to march on Saint-Lô and cut off the Cotentin Peninsula, which was important when considering what reinforcements to send. Unfortunately, on the evening of 9 June news arrived that Isigny had fallen and that American tanks were already in Lison . The front was now wide open between Isigny and Trévières and the question remained whether nor not 17 SS-Panzer Grenadier-Division, to the west of the Vire, and 3 Fallschirmjäger-Division, to the east, had time to close the gap.

During the first attack on Auville-sur-le-Vey, on the morning of 10 June, 'K' Company (175th IR) were once again pushed back by heavy machine gun and mortar fire. However, later in the day it received reinforcements from a tank platoon, elements of 'E' Company and the 29th Cavalry Reconnaissance Troop. At 6pm, when the tide was low, the infantry and the reconnaissance troop crossed the river and took the village of d'Auville-sur-le-Vey, losing twelve men in the process. Behind them, the 254th Engineers Battalion started to construct a bridge over the Vire. From 3pm, elements of the 101st Airborne Division had made contact with a patrol from the reconnaissance troop at Catz:



Lieutenant General Ernck Marcks commanded LXXXIV.AK, whose headquarters were located near Saint-Lô. He was born on 6 June 1891 in the Berlin suburb of Schöneberg to Prussian parents. His mother was an aristocrat and his father was a professor at the university. Marcks studied philosophy at Freiburg before beginning his military career as a Second Lieutenant in the 91st Artillery Regiment, in December 1911. He was severely injured in the face during the First World War and in 1917 was transferred to the General Staff with the rank of Captain. After the war, he served with various *Freikorps* and worked at the Ministry of Defence in the *Reichswehr*. In 1932 he was the head of the press office under Chancellor von Papen, before joining the army as a major in April 1933. After having commanded a battalion, in 1935 he was appointed Chief of Staff of VIII.AK and served with them in the Polish campaign. In July 1940 he was asked to draft an invasion plan of the USSR and took command of 101.Jäger-Division at the end of December 1940. He was wounded for the fifth time in June, on the fifth day of Operation Barbarossa. Promoted to major general in March 1942, he took command of LXXXIV.AK in Normandy and was responsible for defending 400km of coastline, right up to the Orne estuary. He feared an invasion in Calvados and wanted to reinforce that area. However, on 6 June 1944, his birthday, he still did not have sufficient forces to combat the Allied invasion. He was killed on 12 June, near Saint-Lô.



Lieutenant General Dietrich Kraiss was born on 16 November 1889 in Stuttgart. On 24 March 1909 he joined the Infanterie-Regiment 126 as a second lieutenant and served in the First World War as a company commander. He joined the *Reichswehr* as a captain in the Infanterie-Regiment 13, becoming a lieutenant colonel in September 1934 and colonel in March 1937. He took command of Infanterie-Regiment 90 and took part in the Polish and French campaigns before being promoted to major general in February 1941 and taking command of the 168.ID in the southern USSR. He was awarded the German Cross in Gold on 28 February 1942 and the Knight's Cross in July, then promoted to Lieutenant General in October. In May 1943 he took command of the 355.ID, then the 352.ID in November and was serving with them when the Americans landed on 6 June 1944. After being seriously wounded on 2 August, he later died and was posthumously awarded his oak leaves on 11 August for his courage during the battle for Saint-Lô.

When we arrived in the village, we were surprised to find soldiers from the 29th Division with prisoners. One of the paratroopers, whose lieutenant and sergeant had already been killed, was threatening the prisoners with his machine gun. Colonel Allen from the 401st Glider Infantry Regiment had to intervene and tell the soldier to calm down. The good news about the joining of the two bridgeheads was broadcast over the radio and without wasting time, the colonel crossed the bridge to inform General Gerhardt, before coming back and declaring that 'the two American bridgeheads have met!'

But would this initial success be followed by rapid progress towards the Elbe and Saint-Lô, in V Corps' sector? In the way were Meindl's para corps, who would make sure the enemy paid dearly for every metre of ground they gained. Its headquarters were in Quintin, Brittany (on the north coast), with General Eugen Meindl in overall command. In all, II Fallschirm-Korps's various units totalled around 8000 men: Fallschirm-Aufklärungs-Abteilung 12, a motorised reconnaissance group, had around 900 men although its fleet of vehicles was incomplete; Fallschirm-Sturmgeschütz-Abteilung 12 had a formidable 27 assault guns (StuG III armed with 7.5 cm and StuH 42 armed with 10.5 cm guns); Fallschirm-Maschinengewehr-Bataillon 12 and Fallschirm-Nachschubeinheiten 12. At the front were primarily members of a paratroop division, 3 Fallschirmjäger-Division, whose headquarters were located at the heart of Finistère, at Huelgoat. Created in 1943 from 1 Fallschirmjäger-Division (or Meindl Division), in January 1944, 3 Fallschirmjäger-Division, under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Richard Schimpf, was in training near Melun. It was soon moved towards the centre of Brittany to combat any possible airborne invasion, although even a month before the invasion, it was still without all of its equipment and only had one artillery unit, rather than the regular three: three batteries of 4 x 10.5 cm LFH18 and one battery of 4 x 10.5 cm with no recoil. It also only had twelve heavy guns (88s), and an insufficient number of anti-tank and machine guns. Despite having only around 40 per cent of its vehicles, it did have 17,000 young paratroopers (aged from 17-22). These men were highly motivated, with nearly all of them having only just completed their jump training in Germany, but were commanded by seasoned and hardened officers.



A German paratrooper badge on a jump jacket, from the Saint-Lô area. (*Private collection*)

According to Richard Schimpf, a good fighting spirit animated the troops. Intensive training, skilfully led by seasoned NCOs, paid off in these last few weeks of the war as small groups of men worked together to outmanoeuvre the enemy while fighting in the hedgerows of Normandy. The general believed that the barren landscape of the Monts d'Arrée [a mountain range in western Brittany], the remote villages, having to sleep in tents, and the harshness of life in the country, all contributed to hardening the men. Not to mention the numerous training exercises with firearms.¹ It all provided perfect training for the up-coming battle in the fields around Saint-Lô.



General Meindl in his Kfz Skoda meets with a truck loaded with paratroopers.



1/9 en route to the Normandy Front.

The division, which brought together three paratroop regiments (FJR5, FJR8 and FJR9), followed Kampfgruppe Becker (commanded by Major Becker) into Normandy. The Becker group brought together the various elements of the motorised division. Major Becker was in charge of FJR5, comprised of three rifle battalions, one from each regiment, or the II./5, III./8 (the latter was autonomous: the KG Alpers, which will be discussed later), an anti-tank group (Fsch.Pz.Jg. Abt.3) with three companies of 3 Pak 40 7.5cm and 15 light pieces, the artillery group (I./Fsch.Art.Rgt.3) re-enforced by twelve heavy artillery guns of 8.8 cm Flak, and two engineering companies (Fsch. Pi.Bat.3).

Becker's men reached Avranches on 9 June and on 10 June, received orders to take up position near the Forest of Cerisy, to the north-east of Saint-Lô. General Schimpf set up his headquarters near Torigni and the rest of the division arrived on foot in two groups, after setting off in the evening of 7 June. Their march had been incredibly long and gruelling, as they had had to wait for Becker's men to return their vehicles so that they could advance more quickly. Days later, these vehicles were still arriving on the front line

and on the night of 17/18 June, Becker's men would be the first Germans to form the defensive line in Saint-Lô.

The II paratroop corps was re-enforced by several other units, initially by the Kampfgruppe Heintz, which had been created from the 275.ID (Lieutenant Colonel Hans Schmidt), and whose name came from the commander of the Grenadier-Regiment 984 (whose HQ was in Vannes, Brittany), Colonel Heintz. The 275.ID was made up of 4,700 men (including 600 Russian volunteers) and comprised of a staff (Stab GR 984), two (cycling) grenadier battalions (I./984 and II./984), a tank company (Pz.Jg.Kp.275), with eleven 7.5 and 5cm guns, and artillery group (III./AR275) with twelve 10.5cm guns, and an engineering battalion (Pi.Batl.275). The Heintz group reached the front on 11 June and supported the Becker group's left flank, opposite the Airel sector and between the 'Götz' and Meindl's paratroopers. It was these three battle groups, along with the remains of 352.ID and Schnelle Brigade 30, who would manage to block the advance of three divisions from V Corps.



The ruins of the church in Torigni. The headquarters of II FJK were close by. (RF)

Schnelle Brigade 30, under the command of Colonel von Aufsess zu Aufsess, had been tasked with re-enforcing 352.ID since 7 June. The unit had

been formed in February 1943 as the Reserve-Rad-Regiment 30 (reserve cyclist regiment), although the term '*Schnelle*' (quick) was soon chosen instead (see Tessin and also Niklas Zetterling, *Normandy, 1944*). On 1 April 1944, three battalions were brought together: Schnelle Abteilung 513, with companies, each with fourteen to twenty-two machine guns and three mortars; Schnelle Abteilung 517, with 3 companies each with nine to eighteen machine guns and four to five mortars. The third company also had two tractor-drawn anti-tank pieces and five anti-tank guns, some poor Czech 47mm guns that were mounted on a French R35 tank chassis and some 4.7 cm Pak (t) Panzer-Kampfwagen 35 R (f). One of these makeshift guns would be lost to the west of Littry. The third battalion was the Schnelle Abteilung 518, which was also made up of three companies, each with eight to eleven machine guns and three mortars. Altogether, these three battalions totalled 1,878 men. On 6 June 1944 the brigade was in the Coutances-Granville sector, but then received orders to move to the Bayeux sector. On 7 June, two of the battalions (Schnelle Abteilung 513 and S.Abt.518) were assigned to the sector held by one of the regiments from the 352.ID, the Grenadier-Regiment 915.

German sources are unfortunately quite rare, although there is one work that details the exploits of Fallschirmjäger-Regiment 9. Of the three chasseur regiments of 3 Fallschirmjäger-Division, the story of Fallschirmjäger-Regiment 9 was recorded by one of its veterans, Rudi Frühbeisser, and published in 1966 under the title, *Opfergang deutscher Fallschirmjäger* [Sacrifice of German Paratroopers]. The book is essentially a log of the regiment's actions, complete with testimony from Erwin Schmieger, who was a member of the regiment's 3rd Company. It is their story that we will follow, as we did with Lt Allsup and 1/175.

The regiment was under the authority of one commander, a major, the same rank that would command a single company in the British Army. However, the rank is irrelevant as these were elite officers with exceptional careers behind them. Major Kurt Stephani, nicknamed 'Stumpa' due to his small size, was one of them (see his biography). His deputy was Lieutenant Lindemeier, who would be replaced by Lieutenant Walter Sachs on 31 July after falling ill. The aide-de-camp was Lieutenant Heinrich Deppe (he was to

die on 13 August 1944, after an operation to amputate his foot). Second Lieutenant Willi Geck commanded the motorcycle section (Rgt.-Kradschützen-Zug) and was captured near Mons on 3 September 1944. The radio department was under the orders of Lieutenant Herbert Arnold, while the regimental doctor was Kurt Schmidt (captured near Vavre on 11 September 1944).

First Battalion (I/9) was placed under the command of Major Friedrich Alpers, who held the Knight's Cross. His deputy was Lieutenant Heinz Fambach, who fell ill in June and was replaced by Second Lieutenant Martin Hess (killed 21 June), when the position was then taken by Second Lieutenant Konrad Wagner (wounded and captured 3 September), who had previously been in charge of the battalion's communication section. 1st Company was placed under the command of Lieutenant Josef Moser (killed 29 June), then Lieutenant Hans Waitschascker (killed 11 July). Almost all of the heads of section were killed: Second Lieutenant Wolfgang Gebel on 29 November; Second Lieutenant Eberhard Zuber on 3 September; Second Lieutenant Armin Stoerz on 11 July; Leo Koschitzki on 26 July and Sergeant Erich Kappus on 30 June). The only section leader to be just injured was Second Lieutenant Helmut Linden. Rudi Frühbeisser was a young paratrooper of just eighteen when he fought with this company and immortalised its actions in his book.

2nd Company was commanded by Captain Hans Klepzig. He was killed on 10 July and replaced by Lieutenant Johannes Frisch, only for him to be killed on 11 July and replaced by Captain Buchholz. All the section leaders of this company were killed between 16 June and 11 July. 3rd Company was commanded by Captain Hans Engelhard (killed 4 August), with Erwin Schmieger counted among his young paratroopers. 4th Company was commanded by Captain Günter Simon (captured near Mons on 3 September).

Second Battalion (II/9) was led by Captain Rudolf Reil, who replaced on 27 July by Captain Heinrich Haller (injured on 8 August), then Captain Hermann Holler. The Battalion adjutant was Second Lieutenant Gerhard Weber (killed 30 June). The commander of 5th Company was Lieutenant Werner Kersting (killed 2 July), while 6th Company was commanded by Captain Kurt Ladwig (captured at Mons on 3 September) and 7th Company

by Lieutenant Axel Van de Kamp (captured on 30 July). Two heads of section would be killed and a third injured. 8th Company was commanded by Lieutenant Uwe Claussen (captured 3 September), with two section chiefs injured and a third captured.

The head of Third Battalion (III/9) was Captain Karl Meyer (killed 14 July) and his adjutant was Second Lieutenant Günter Kunzmann (captured near Mons on 3 September). 9th Company was under the command of Lieutenant Oskar Maaser (killed 27 July) and one of his platoon leaders, Second Lieutenant Wilhelm Kremer, was killed on 11 July. 10th Company was commanded by Lieutenant Hans Grundmann (killed 11 July), while two of his section chiefs, Heinz Kuhl and Karl Heinz Reinert, were captured on that fateful day. 11th Company was under the command of Captain Fritz Matula, who was also captured on 11 July, along with one of his platoon leaders, Hans Wilmes. The head of 12th Company was Lieutenant Edgar Lotz (killed 30 July). One of his platoon leaders would be killed on 11 July (Hermann Heigel) and another two in November.

Finally 15 Geschütz-Kompanie (infantry) was under the command of Lieutenant Josef Glaser (killed 12 July). Two of his platoon leaders would be killed that same month: Lieutenants Beck (10 July) and Rudi Feind (26 July). 14 Panzerjäger-Kompanie (anti-tank) was commanded by Captain Hapke (injured and captured on 3 September) while four of his section chiefs would be killed: Max Petersen on 30 June, Lieutenant Comte von Hellermann on 12 July, and Second Lieutenants Bleck on 15 August and Helmut-Busch on 20 August. Second Lieutenant K. Heinz Hamann (injured and taken prisoner on 11 July) was in command of 15 Pionier-Kompanie (engineers). Among his platoon leaders, Second Lieutenant Moldehnke was killed on 4 July, while others were injured, including Second Lieutenant Hugo Karger on 16 July.



Berthold Weitze, the Warrant Officer in Lieutenant Moser's 1/9. (RF)

However, the forerunner to this regiment was a *Kampfgruppe*, the KG Alpers, under the command of Major Alpers.

The alarm was sounded at 1am on 6 June and Major Alpers mobilised two companies from I/9 and a medical unit, using vehicles from one of the infantry units to transport them as their own vehicles were already in use by other sections of the division. They received a hot meal around 10am, along with bottles of tea mixed with some rum. The men also had bottles containing a syrup made with Schnapps, which was hot and much appreciated! They were lacking officers as too few had managed to graduate through jump school, although they did have plenty of experienced veterans instead. The vehicles they used were 5-ton French trucks and each section had one to help transport ammunition, weapons and other equipment. Special supports had been attached to the side of the trucks to carry machine guns, of which there were four per truck.

The embarkation and subsequent departure took place at midday (6 June), with the column soon passing through the village of Commana and reaching

the RN164 road. As the road continued through Huelgoat, Locmaria-Berrien, Poullaouen, Carhaix-Plouguer, Rostrenen, Plouguerne-vel and Gouarec, the soldiers received friendly greetings from the Breton peasants as they passed through various villages. The regiment set up its command post in Gouarec, before heading on through the Mur-de-Bretagne and Merdrignac, finally arriving at Saint-Méen at dusk. After a brief stop, the column continued on through the night, but as they approached Montfort, they could see a red light on the horizon. Surely they hadn't reached the front already? In fact, it was actually Rennes that was being bombed by the Allies in order to slow their progress, and it was the fire from the burning neighbourhoods that they could see. A large German military policeman then appeared to tell them they had better bypass the town, so they took a slight detour that led them near the forest at Liffré.

By dawn of 7 June they had passed through Saint-Aubin-du-Cormier and would go through Romagné, then Fougères before the sun arose. They were now on the RN177 road and after having had little sleep during the night, took a short respite in the forest of Fougères. There was a fuel depot here and as the men rested, Senegalese PoWs refuelled their vehicles. As they continued along their route, the military police stopped a horse-drawn artillery convoy to let them pass.

As they reached Mortain, they could see the evidence of the recent bombings. Shortly before dusk, they crossed through Sourdeval and were told to dismount from the vehicles and hide in the woods to get some rest. After nightfall, they set off once more and passed through the still-burning town of Vire, which had been attacked on the afternoon of 7 June by P-38s. After leaving Vire, they swerved onto the RN174 near La Papillonnière and crossed La Graverie and Etouvy.

As the sun rose on 8 June, the column had reached Campeaux, on the road to Saint-Lô. At the next crossroads (with the current D675), a signpost on the right heralded the village of Villers-Bocage and as the day dawned, the men took shelter in the woods nearby. Here they discovered vehicles from their battalion, along with Sergeant Bässler. He allowed them to listen to his radio and were surprised to hear the following announcement:

While heavy defensive battles are being fought on the Eastern Front, a

maritime and aerial invasion took place on the morning of 6 June in Normandy, France. Along with other infantry divisions, the Waffen-SS, the II para Corps under the command of General Meindl and the 3rd and 5th paratroop divisions, are engaged in the fighting there.

They had not even arrived at their destination and yet they were apparently already engaging with the enemy! In the meantime, the men had the pleasure of bathing in the stream that ran through the woods, south of Guilberville, with some even stripping fully naked to enjoy the moment. Afterwards they enjoyed a hot meal prepared for them by Sepp Reigel, before falling asleep as the sentries kept watch. In the afternoon they cleaned the rust on their weapons that had been caused by the Breton rain (they called it *Soldatengold*, “soldiers’ gold”). A debrief by the officers told them that the last few vehicles had been attacked by the ‘*Maquis*’ [a rural band of French Resistance fighters]. After enjoying more tea, they set off on the road again after nightfall, quickly reaching Torigni-sur-Vire.

They stopped on the outskirts of the town and the staff from II Fallschirmjäger-Korps entered to take up their quarters. ‘Papa Meindl’ had already been there for several hours, organising his units. Vehicles loaded with wounded soon appeared, carrying men from I/726 who had been fighting near Bayeux. In the mean time, those who could filled up their flasks with tea and Schnapps. A sergeant major, who had been decorated with the Iron Cross First Class, the General Assault Badge (*Sturmabzeichen*) and Close Combat Clasp (*Nahkampfspang*) told them that he had lived through the terrible winter in Moscow and had witnessed the retreat from Stalingrad, but would rather return to Russia than relive the [Normandy] invasion again. As the men listened to the terrible stories of the bombings, the rockets and the naval guns, they all became pensive. After leaving Torigni, they headed for the nearby town of Saint-Armand, where General Schimpf had set up the command post for 3 FJD. They then headed north-east along the D34 to La Forge au Pas, with its hilly landscape and apple orchards.

It was now 9 June and although still night, a silver line appeared on the horizon. It was the Front and the light they could see were the explosions. They passed through the village of Vidouville and by dawn had reached Saint-Germaind’Elle, where 1st Company moved in to the empty village.

Lieutenant Moser's 1st Company (1/8) vehicles spread out and camouflaged themselves, forming a 'hedgehog position' (*Igel-Stellung*). Individual positions had to be well-camouflaged against aerial observation, as everyone dug down into the Normandy ground for the first time. The wheel tracks that led into the village were swept with branches, as the rumble of noise from the front reached their ears. The sentries took turns to keep watch and even the tone of the commanders also changed. Orders that had previously been given in a bright and energetic voice were now whispered in an almost fatherly-tone by the section leaders to the young paratroopers. Around noon, a P-38 Lightning flew 50m above the village, before the men received their first hot meal at the Front.

Dawn on 10 June was very cold; everything was covered with dew and the young paratroopers were frozen stiff in their jump suits. Luckily, they had thick, Italian woollen gloves that kept their hands warm, but they would have to get used to the weather in Normandy, where the mist often doesn't rise until after 9am. For those soldiers near the Front, the day would once again be quiet, as their units gathered together in the sector between the edge of the Cerisy forest and the western-side of Caumont-l'Éventé. The young paratroopers explored the farm nearby, finding lots of thick, salted pork slices and cream, stored in large, clay pots. They also found smaller terracotta pots that contained the famous Calvados, which brought tears to their eyes as they drank far too much than was good for them. They also noted that in Normandy, the fields are partitioned by hedges, whereas in Germany, the fences were usually barbed.

In the mean time, their leader, Lieutenant Moser, attended a meeting of the KG Alpers company commanders at their headquarters, several kilometres to the north. He travelled there in the afternoon, in a BMW motorbike and sidecar, with his driver, Corporal Arthur Hummel, from Brandenburg. At the meeting, Major Alpers informed them that the front line had been established with very little trouble and proceeded to give out his orders. As Moser headed back to his men, this time he had the pleasure of driving the motorbike himself, with Hummel sat beside him between the bike and sidecar, on the spare wheel. At one point, Moser stopped to check the map; he was 3.5 km north of Berigny, between Saint-Georges-d'Elle and the

hamlet of Lavieille. As he began on his way again, he arrived at a turn, only to see a group of American soldiers on the road, next to a Sherman tank, around 40m ahead. The 'Friends' (the nickname the Germans used for the Americans), were so taken back at first that they allowed Moser to turn around and speed off. However, they soon pulled themselves together and opened fire. Moser heard a cry from behind him, and on turning around, saw his driver lying in the middle of the road.

The bullets flying around Hummel would definitely have killed him, and stopping would have been suicide. There was nothing he could do to help as he risked being hit himself. The enemy was now turning its fire towards him, with bullets flying past his ears. He soon reached the safety of the corner and a few metres beyond, he stopped. Leaving the engine running, Moser slipped back to see Hummel still lying in the road, as the Americans began to advance slowly up both the left and right-hand sides. Staying in a safe place where he could survey the scene, he saw that the Americans soon retreated, along with their tank. Moser continued to wait it out, scanning the area with his binoculars, but there was no trace of Hummel and so he soon set off back to his company. Thus Corporal Arthur Hummel (Serial n° 127-444-6, born 2.3.23), was 1st Company's first casualty.

With the paratroopers of Third Division now assembled, the Front soon stabilised. However, as the Allies still enjoyed superiority in Normandy, both in terms of men and equipment, as Zetterling rightly reminds us in his book, *Normandy, 1944* (J.J. Federowicz Publishing, Winnipeg, 2000), this superiority primarily increased in the four days from 6-10 June 1944, with certain areas seeing extremely rapid increases. On 1 June, the Germans had a total of 880,000 men in France and Belgium, but many of them were not sent to the Normandy Front. By 25 July, the Allies totalled 1,452,000 men (812,000 Americans and 640,000 British), while the Germans had only sent 490,000 men, of which only 380,000 were on the front line. By this date they had suffered 116,836 losses, with only 10,078 reinforcements (see Zetterling, p.32 and 34).



1. A German paratrooper's equipment: a helmet, camouflaged jump suit and an MG42.
(Private collection/ Heimdal)



2. One of the bends in the road to the north of Saint-Georgesd'Elle, in the Lavieille sector, where Corporal Hummel was killed. (GB)



3. Erwin Schmieger was a machine gunner in 3/9. Although only 18, he was one of the first to arrive at the Front. (*Drawing by Nathalie Sandron*)

On 6 June the Allies landed in Normandy with 156,000 men (Zetterling, p.105). At Omaha Beach, 352 Infanterie-Division had 12,734 men (*op.cit.* p. 278). According to Ziegelmann's report, the division lost around 1,200 men on that day (nearly 10 per cent of the total workforce, with 200 killed, 500 injured and 500 missing). On 16 June, the total number of losses had risen to 3000 men, rising again to 5,407 officers and men by 24 June.

On 10 June, therefore, the division still had around 10,000 men, supported by those from Schnelle Brigade 30 (who lost 1,878 men on 6 June and whose subsequent losses are unknown). Before the paratroopers arrived in the area, it had gradually gotten rid of certain elements, probably around 13,000 men in total. This meant that on the evening of 9 June, when facing the three infantry divisions of V Corps (1st ID, 2nd ID and 29th ID) and other units (mainly from the Tank Battalion), the ratio was 6/7-1 in favour of the Americans. Or to put it simpler: two battalions against one company, although this ratio would later increase even more.

The overwhelming aerial superiority must also be included here. This clear advantage over the first four or five days certainly helps to explain the

Americans' fairly rapid, albeit costly, advance towards the Elbe valley. After the coastal defences had been breached, 352 ID and Schnelle Brigade 30 had no alternative but to fall back to the Elbe valley and await reinforcements. This left a weak point in the line to the east, in the Molay-Littry area, which would benefit the 1st Infantry Division.

For the moment, there were also elements of the reconnaissance group 17 SS-Panzergrenadier-Division 'Götz von Berlichingen' in the area. As a result, on the night of 9/10 June 3/SS-AA.17 bypassed the town of Saint-Lô, which was still burning after the terrible bombings of 6 June that had killed nearly 300 civilians. This company was now a night's march away from 1st and 3rd companies, as it conducted reconnaissance work in the Balleroy area in order to provide cover to the north of Vaubadon, to the north-east of the forest of Cerisy.



The reconnaissance group of 17.SSPanzergrenadier-Division was the first unit from the division to join the Normandy Front. This image shows a *Kübelwagen* from SS-AA 17. (H)



One of the unit's light armoured radio antenna. (HG)



This equipment, all originals from the area, is similar to that used by John Sam Allsup as he took his morning coffee in the hedgerows. (*Private collection/Heimdal*)

Both companies had made contact with the British eight hours earlier, beginning with an attack at 9.30am near Tronquay (the road leading north, towards Littry), north of Vaubadon. The AA.17 suffered its first losses; two

Panzer-Spähwagen, one as the result of a direct hit, the other by fighterbombers. The men retreated in the afternoon of 10 June to the south of the forest of Cerisy, which was subsequently captured by the Americans. On the night of 10/11 June, it took up its hedgehog formation near Saint-Germain-d'Elle, and from 9am on 11 June, passed under the command of the 352 ID.

We can now return to Lt Allsup:



Lieutenant Allsup in his helmet. (*Drawing by Nathalie Sandron*)

It was 4.30am and we were already getting up, although we found it really hard as it had been our first proper night's sleep in nearly five days. The humidity during the night meant that our bodies were painful and stiff, as our waxed coats were dripping with dew on the outside and soaked with our own sweat on the inside.

Everyone was relieved to get some breakfast:

The men lined up, grumbling impatiently, and took out their regulation flasks; simply shaking or wiping them with their fingers to get the dust off. They stretched out their flasks towards Rosie, holding them with three fingers. After the last of my men was served, it was my turn, and Rosie poured me a swig of lukewarm coffee with some good, cold American milk. I had three sugars and a nice slice of bread with jam

and butter. We had to make the most of it as we didn't know when the next opportunity would come! I usually take my coffee without sugar, but it was better to build up my energy reserves in advance.

There was a briefing between the officers where it was announced that they were to receive twenty-five new replacements. The US Army made sure to replace any losses suffered and throughout what was to remain a costly campaign until the end of the war, 100 per cent of the 29th Division's casualties were replaced with new recruits.

Allsup recalled that, 'Our primary target was Saint-Lô, but there was still an awful lot of ground to cover before we got there. First, we had to cross the River Elle and then follow the left-bank of the Vire towards Villiers-Fossard. The hedgerows were particularly thick in this area, which concealed the enemy just as much as they offered protection for us.' 'A' Company took the lead, as usual, and one hour later they arrived in the Airel sector, near Lison train station. There was chaos all around, caused by the shelling and explosion following the collision of two German trains the day before. The men rested for a while, answered the 'call of nature' and dozed before setting off on another hour-long march, arriving at a small farm nestling at the foot of a hill, covered in apple trees. They stopped here and then worked their way to the top along a very thick hedge.

Keeping lookout at the front were Chico Romano and another GI, with the other men watching the flanks. Suddenly, Chico cried out to Allsup, 'Hey Sam! I gotta go... and I can't hold it!' Allsup told him to go against a tree while the others covered him.

He put his gun up against the trunk and dropped his pants, but the slope was so steep that he had to hold onto the tree with one hand. It was quite funny to watch because Chico was pretty shy and even though he was embarrassed, he had no other choice. He was in full flow when a Kraut chose that exact moment to fire on the hill and the tree with his 9mm! Chico grabbed his rifle and rolled down the hill with his pants around his ankles. The enemy must have doubled up with laughter looking at him, it was so funny. We had all dived down to the ground when we heard the first shot, but everyone smiled when we saw poor

Chico roll down the slope in his pants. Luckily, he wasn't injured, but his pride certainly was. The Kraut didn't fire anymore - thank God he had a sense of humour!

Despite this funny moment, however, it was certain that the German was not alone; there would be others in the area. Allsup decided against taking a chance by going up the hill and instead went around the back of the farm, along a gravel road. After a bend in the hedges, a sudden burst of machine gun fire ripped through the leaves and branches, blowing the helmet off the GI at the front. Luckily, despite the impact and damage to the helmet, the GI himself was unharmed.



The situation on 10 June: The Vire formed a barrier to the west and was controlled by the 175th RCT. To the south, units were taking positions north of the Elbe Valley, which was a bigger obstacle than the Aure Valley, while the German reinforcements made their way up to the Front. This map shows that six days after the landings, this little known campaign was certainly no cakewalk and that the worst was still to come... (*Heimdal*)

As we'd all done, he'd put his chinstrap around the back of his helmet [*contrary to the orders of General Gerhardt!*] rather than under his chin. It saved his life. Instead of penetrating the metal or breaking his vertebra, as would have been the case if the chinstrap were worn properly, the bullet just bounced off the helmet. This is why we never wore the strap under our chins.

Two or three men crawled forward under the bullet fire to try and destroy the enemy bazooka, but a bullet hit one of the men's rockets. As it started to smoke, the soldier unbuckled the bag and threw it away, but fortunately it didn't explode. 'If the damn thing had exploded, it would have taken half the section out with it.' Meanwhile, Pop's group had climbed the hill but upon reaching the place where the German guns had been, they found only empty cartridges; they had probably stopped due to lack of ammunition.

Without its 'K' Company, 3rd Battalion (3/175) advanced ahead of 1/175, on the left (east). 'We thought that everything seemed to coincide to help us advance towards Villiers-Fossard, but in reality it was quite different.' 'A' Company arrived at a wood (probably the one to the south of Poterie, south-east of Lison).

The slope in the wood slowed us down. Suddenly, shouts rang out behind us and as we turned our heads we soon understood why: it was the regiment's deputy officer, Colonel Radford Williams [*it was actually Colonel Olie W. Reed*]. He was perched on a bicycle, riding down the slope with no helmet on! He yelled to us: 'Give it to them boys!' as he bounced along the bumpy ground. In the other direction, a column of twenty German prisoners, hands on their heads, were descending the hill. One of them had what looked like a bayonet wound to his left shoulder and I shouted, 'This man's injured!' but the colonel replied, 'It's none of your business. This bastard will get what's coming to him.' Any regard I had for this officer disappeared after that and subsequent events would show that I was right to think so. The thought of having to follow orders from such a low-grade officer made me sick. I certainly didn't like the fact that it was men like him who ran the show!

By late afternoon, Lieutenant Allsup's section arrived in a fairly big orchard, where Captain Mueller told them to dig their foxholes, with two companies from 2/175 in front of them. Behind them was evidence of the recent skirmishes, as many German corpses were lying near a small farm (probably the Maison Neuve). Suddenly, a barrage hit them, 'The projectiles exploded in the trees and hot flashes rained down on us. Several GIs were immediately hit and the cries of the wounded pierced the machine gun fire and mortar explosions. Then, just as suddenly, the barrage stopped and we knew that a Kraut attack was imminent.'



The helmet of Lieutenant Pete Muchmore, 29th Division, and a cartridge belt. The symbol of the division can be seen on the helmet under the mesh net. (*Private collection/Heimdal*)

Captain Mueller reacted quickly and got the men ready for combat, as did Sam Allsup, who noticed a civilian stood in the doorway of the farmhouse

opposite. Jumping over the chicken droppings and dodging the bullets, he heard a baby crying:

I couldn't believe my ears! What was a baby doing here in the middle of a battle?! Murphy couldn't send his boys forward, nor could Tommy, whose men were also in range of the machine gun. The baby's cries seemed to be coming from a shed right in front of me. At that moment, Tommy's men and the Krauts opened fire against each other and I took the opportunity to race towards the pile of wood under the shed, where I found the baby and its mother. I couldn't speak French so I shouted in English 'Put the baby under you!' and mimed what I was asking her to do. She understood and after settling the child down, covered it with her body to protect it from the fire. The Kraut machine gun was no longer firing, perhaps because Tommy and his men were continuing to fire on it. I heard Murphy's group pass near me and charge the German positions. I rose to my feet and followed them, with Slim still on my heels, but when I reached the other side of the fence, the Krauts had vanished.

As this position was known to the Germans, the US soldiers headed west and found themselves in a small farm enclosure, with hedges on three sides while the fourth opened out onto the road to the farm. They were all worried because, 'in that kind of landscape, a German might have been on the other side of the hedge without us even knowing it - right until you got a grenade on your nose!'



The Chief of Staff's map showing the KG Alper's engagement area, after arriving by the road, to the south. It shows La Richardière, to the west of Montrabot, and les Haies, above, and Saint-Germain-d'Elle. Also note that the terrain is rugged, with many woods.

3.

Crossing the Elle, 11-13 June

Sunday, 11 June

At the dawn of this new day of fighting in the hedgerows, we return to the German paratroopers of the KG Alpers. The men of 1st Company had spent the early part of the night in their village, but as night drew in, they climbed back in their camouflaged trucks as each company left for its respective sector. They travelled to another village about an hour away, and once more had to camouflage their vehicles and dig their foxholes. But how long would they be here for? They had to face the same problems as their American counterparts, and as day broke, they set off, alert and fresh, for their new position at La Richardière where 1/9 were to be placed in reserve (west of Montrabot). The infantry that had led the paratroopers took their leave, as they left to go and find reinforcements.

As for the 29th Division, after crossing the Aure, they then had to navigate yet another stream. However, this time, instead of marshes, it was a deep and narrow valley. On the previous day, the batteries of the 110th Field Artillery Battalion (with 105mm howitzers) had arrived at La Communette. Despite their relatively small numbers, German planes had attacked the bridgehead (a squadron of Me109s had destroyed nearby trees in the afternoon) and, for safety reasons, the protection perimeter around the battery was reinforced with eight 40mm Bofors and eight half-tracks equipped with quadruple machine guns. V Corps was now getting ready to take Saint-Lô and Caumont, but the River Elle remained the primary obstacle between the Vire and the forest of Cerisy. What's more, patrols had revealed that the Germans had already taken up positions along the banks on the other side.

To the west, 175th Regiment were being held in reserve. However, at 4.30am, Lieutenant Allsup's section were up and about. The Germans

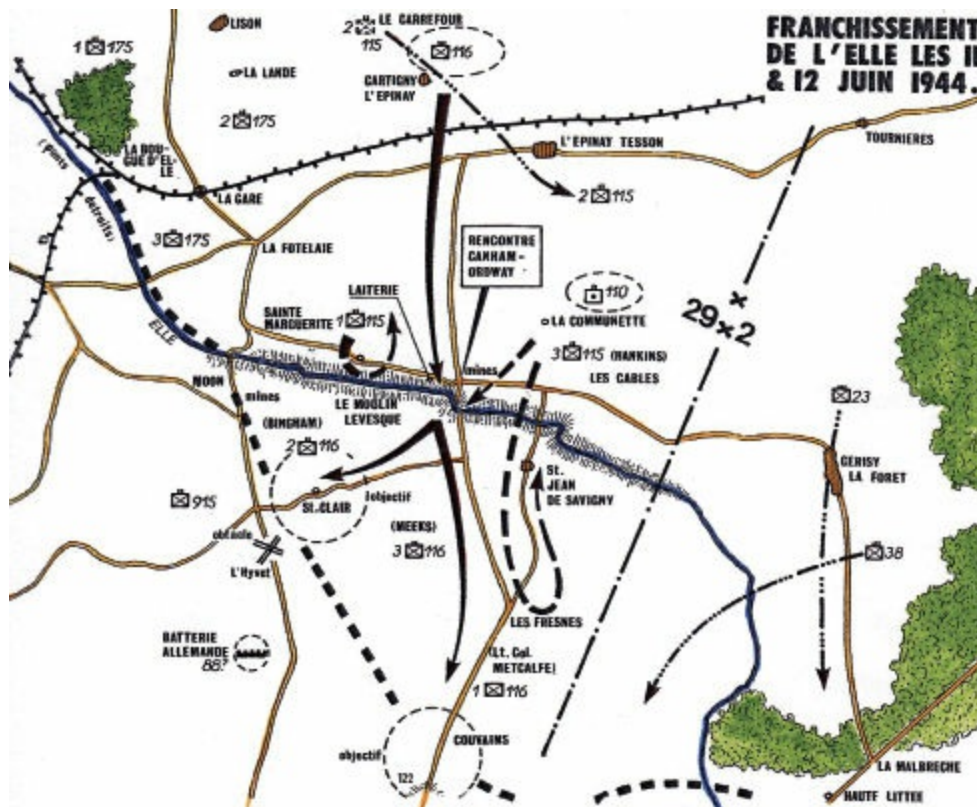
seemed to have disappeared from the area, with only the odd sniper fire or mortar shell suddenly breaking through. The men were nervous: 'We had a strange feeling that the enemy knew we were in reserve, and were taking pot shots at us just to stress us out.' Consequently, 1/175 were ordered to halt, but Sam Allsup and his men still followed the evolution of the battle:

Stevens, Slim and I found ourselves in a natural, deep ditch at the foot of a hedge. All of a sudden we heard the woouuuusshhh woouuuusshhh of 105mm shells passing over our heads on their way to their target ahead. We knew they were 105s because the woouush sound was shorter than that of the 155mm. Then they started to come more rapidly and a moment later, an avalanche of explosions landed all around us. I'd just raised my hand to scratch my nose when a piece of shrapnel flayed my right glove. Fortunately, it was at the end of its flight and there was no harm done. It was never quiet, even there behind the front line!

The following two days were the same: walk, stop, start, stop, and 1/175 would not take part in any direct combat until 14 June.

Monday 12 June

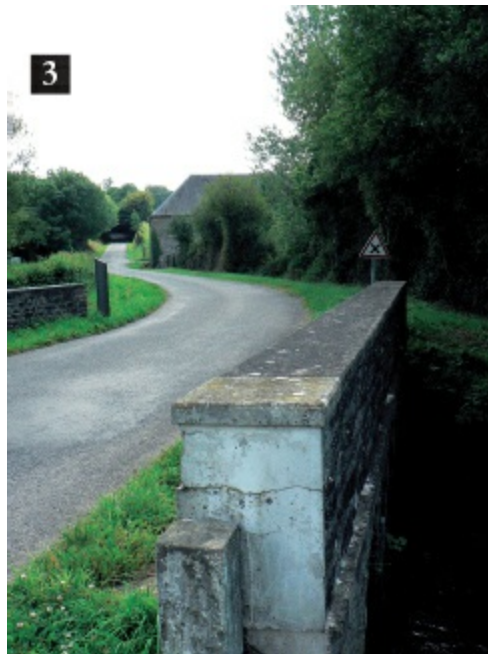
Today was the baptism of fire for the men of KG Alpers. The 1/9 regrouped at a crossroads, east of Saint-Germain-d'Elle and their sector included the village of Haies, as well as the areas around Montrabot, Vidouville and Sallen. MG42 machine gun bursts and the impact of artillery shells could be heard through the morning mist. Just after 6am the roar of an aircraft was heard overhead as fifteen shells landed around the crossroads, but no one was injured. A liaison officer arrived around 7am asking for the company commander, Lieutenant Moser. He was told that they were to go and support 3rd Company, as the Americans had broken through their lines and so the paratroopers loaded up and set off to help their comrades. A few minutes later, Rudi Frühbeisser and his friends passed by a burning farm, and could hear the cattle crying in the stables. As they arrived at a sunken road, red sheaves of high explosives 2m high suddenly rose up in front of them. To their left was one of their 8.8cm guns from Captain Holz's battery.



The crossing of the Elle (12 and 13 June). On the top left can be seen 1/175 at the Bougue d'Elle wood, heading for the station at Lison. It also shows the attack on Saint-Marguerite by 1/115 and 3/115 on 12 June, which would end in failure. Finally, it shows the successful attack on Saint-Clair by the 116th on 13 June, with Couvains as their next objective. Also note the attack of the 38th as it crossed the Elle by Le Moulin des Rondelles, in the 2nd Division's sector. (Map A. Pipet/Heimdal)



1 & 2. The church at Saint-Jean- de-Savigny dominates the valley (to the left). The road between the church and houses is that used by 3/115. (GB)

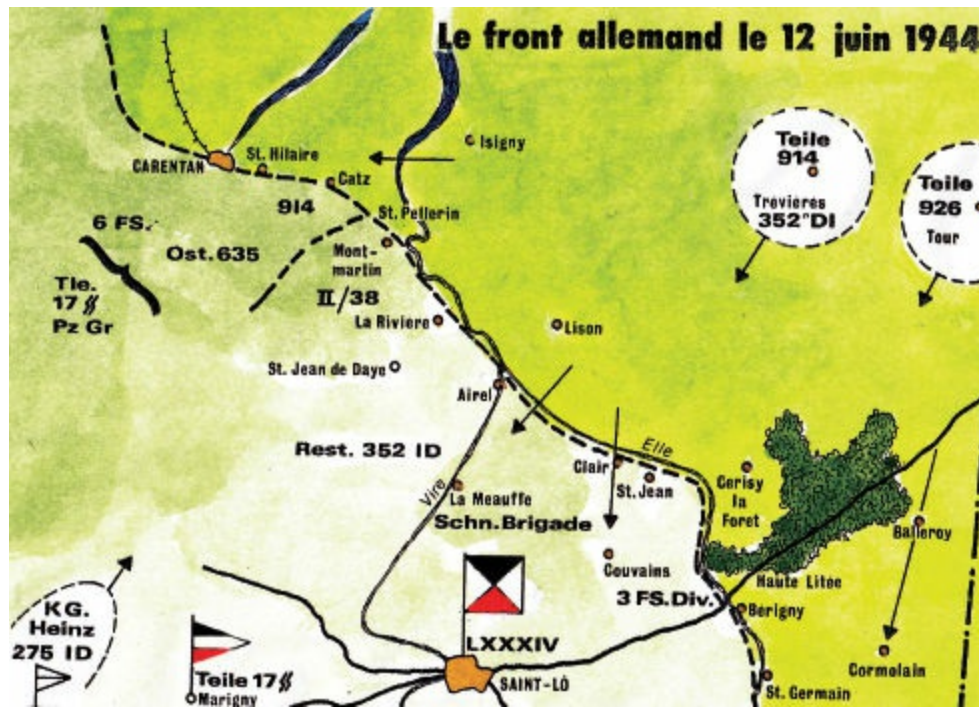


3. One of the bridges across the Elle, south of Sainte-Marguerite. (GB)



4. The medieval church at Saint-Clair, the objective for the attack on 13 June. (GB)

At a fountain by a fork in the road, they saw two wounded soldiers. One of the men was Lieutenant Schlömann from 3/9. His head and face were covered with bandages and his jump jacket was soaked in blood. The other was Second Lieutenant Schröder, from the same company, who had been shot through the arm. After seeing to the injured, the men set up their three mortars by a wall and received orders from their platoon leader, Sergeant Egger, to 'Fire at will!' Their first shots hit a house and a shed about 120m away. The Americans had to be in there as that was where the machine gun fire was coming from. A fourth shell pierced the roof and another ten shots were fired afterwards. As the roof caught fire, they could see through binoculars that there was a large hole in the wall from where the machine gun had been firing.



A map according to German reports. You can see the units in retreat (914 and 926 : Teile means 'unit') and those that made up the front line: the paratroopers of von der Heydte (6 FS), elements of the 'Götz' advancing (Teile 17 SS and II/38), Ost-Bataillon 635, elements of the 352 ID (914 and Rest. 352 ID), Schnelle Brigade 30, 3 Fallschirmjäger-Division (3 FS-Div.) and the advance of KG Heintz. Note also the Elbe and Vire valleys, the forest of Cerisy and Montmartin, where Colonel Paul Goode was captured. (*A.Pipet/Heimdal*)

The mortars were now quickly pointed at another target. A motorcycle liaison officer arrived to tell them that fresh mortar shells had been deposited at the fountain, 40m away and so three men went off to find them. In the mean time, another enemy machine gun was spotted at the opening of a sunken road, 70m away; four shells were enough to silence it. As the men arrived back with fresh ammunition, they were ordered to take up a new position: 200m on the right, near a farm. As they settled in, a fire storm descended on their previous position: they had been spotted.

As the newly wounded arrived, they gathered together near the village. Some of the paratroopers had been wounded in the stomach and were in a terrible state.'This was the war we had prepared for,' remembered Frühbeisser, 'we knew now why we had been taken on such terrible training exercises. The veteran paratroopers hadn't been kidding!' The company's liaison officer, Corporal Kölker, soon gave the order to march in his

Westfalien accent. After two hours of fighting, the hole in 3rd Company's line had been closed. As well as severely injuring several Americans, they had also managed to take some as prisoners.

The company now had to advance along the Elle valley towards Saint-Germain'd'Elle. The help they'd given 3rd Company probably corresponds to the same time the Americans arrived at the cemetery in Saint-Germain, as described by Erwin Schmieger (see later). Now 3/9 had 4/9 in support as it headed for the hamlet of Perron (east of Saint-Germain, north-east of Haies. See map). There was a slope to the left, along which stood a row of houses. Suddenly, Corporal Stalforth, originally from Garmisch, ran back down the slope he'd just climbed; there was a sniper in a tree up ahead on the left and he'd been shot in the left arm. Back on the road, Corporal Feibicke was hit by machine gun fire in his left cheek, finger and shoulder. The American artillery started firing even harder, no doubt to stop their advance and block the road. Corporal Vortmann, from Osnabrück, was hit by shrapnel as the enemy fire was finally stopped. By nightfall, the KG Alpers had taken up their positions. The sunken roads had all been blocked off with barbed wire as the men enjoyed a hot meal. However, the *Kampfgruppe* had suffered heavy losses as the result of this first engagement: fifty-eight men in total, including eleven killed, forty-five injured and two prisoners. Those who were the first to be killed were buried that evening near La Richardière, which would later become the KG Alpers military cemetery.

This day was also when the Americans launched their re-offensive. To the west, the 29th Division attempted to cross the Elle. With the 175th in reserve on its right flank, near the Vire, the 115th attacked, supported by three artillery groups after patrols had reported that the south-side of the Elle was held by the Germans. Sporadic shelling hit the towns of Saint-Clair, Saint-Jean-de-Savigny and Couvains and after a twenty minute barrage, the 115th attacked Saint-Jean-de-Savigny, with 'K' Company leading 3/115, while 1/115 attacked Sainte-Marguerite to the west. Unfortunately, 1st Battalion was quickly blocked by mortars, machine gun and anti-tank fire, and it was impossible to move forward in the open.

Lieutenant Barnett managed to destroy a Panzer 50m away from the 3/115's advancing line. Meanwhile, up in front, 'K' Company was broken up

by closerange fire as Captain Hille and thirty-two men were killed. However, by 8.30am the head of the battalion had reached Fresnes (south of Saint-Jean-de-Savigny), before being brutally assaulted by long bursts of machine gun fire. The battalion's flanks, which stretched out along the road south of the Elle, were exposed. German trucks and armoured vehicles from Couvains had come up from behind and, after cutting the column in two, surrounded them behind the hedges. By 11am, the battalion had been cut off from the regiment. It had little ammunition and was being crushed under enemy fire. Captain Whitehead was killed.

The 110th FAB immediately directed six artillery groups to provide covering fire for the retreating Americans, with extra support from the 111th FAB. Under the orders of Captain Hankins, 1/115 retreated to Câbles but suffered heavy losses: 66 dead and 164 wounded, a total of 230 men! At 7pm, the Germans launched a counter-attack, pushing the Americans back to the north of the Elle. It was a major disappointment for the GIs, who now found themselves back where they'd started from.



1. FJR9 suffered severe losses on 12 June and a military cemetery was established at La Richardière. (RF)



2. Major Friedrich Alpers, wearing his Knight's Cross around his neck, questions an American prisoner near Saint-Germain d'Elle. Born on 25 March 1901, he was a lawyer then senior officer in the SS, before joining the paratroopers in February 1944. He was close to his men and took command of the FJR9 after the death of Major Stephani. He was severely wounded on 3 September, near Mons, and was either shot or committed suicide.



3. The grave of General Erich Marcks. His death on 12 June left the corps leaderless. (NA)

To the west meanwhile, General Gerhardt was eager for 1/115 to re-launch its attack and around midday sent two tank platoons into Sainte-

Marguerite. Three Shermans were destroyed and once more the attack failed. In the middle, the 2nd Infantry Division, 'Indian Head', had more success as it committed two of its infantry regiments to the attack. The 23rd faced little opposition and made quick progress, passing Cerisy-la-Forêt and advancing along the valley while providing support to the 29th Division. It managed to reach Bérigny, to the west of the forest of Cerisy, which by now was empty of Germans. To the east, the 9th reached Litteau, south of the forest, towards Montrabot. However, as the units arrived at their premier objectives, they realised that there was still strong German paratrooper activity in the area: the KG Alpers. The 23rd Regiment had received orders to take Bérigny and Hill 192 (see map), but as it left Cerisy-la-Forêt, 1/23 was attacked on its flanks, while 2/23 was crushed under fire from both mortars and machine guns. It was now impossible for the battalions to cross the Elle.

To the east, the 1st Infantry Division 'Big Red One' had managed to advance much quicker and deeper. The Germans here no longer had the famous hedges to provide cover that the paratroopers at the Front had used. The 18th IR advanced on the right and made contact with patrols from 2nd Division, who were coming from Planquery, in the Drôme valley. While the 16th IR remained in reserve, the 26th IR arrived on the northern edge of Caumont in the evening. Two German companies, supported by tanks (probably the first elements of 2 Panzer-Division reconnaissance group), were on the line in the Caumont/Villers-Bocage area, to the west of the Panzer-Lehr-Division. This armoured division, which was raised in Austria, had been in the Amiens area on 6 June, after leaving the Eastern Front in December 1943. It had been put on alert for possible action in the Pas-de-Calais region, but on 9 June had received orders to join the Argentan-Sées sector, in Normandy. It had had to travel through Paris, the bridges over the Seine having been bombed, and then work its way up to the Normandy Front by road after the railway junctions had also been destroyed. By 12 June, the divisional headquarters were installed in Lignou, south of Briouse, in the Orne. The different units then moved north to take up their positions, meaning that by this time, there were only a handful of armoured reconnaissance groups in Caumont.

It appears that there were also elements of 3/9 around, including

paratroopers such as Erwin Schmieger, who was present during the American attack and the German retreat. During its first attack, 'F' Company (26th IR) was vigorously pushed back, but with the support of the 743rd Tank Battalion, the American infantry finally managed to clear out every house in Caumont, even managing to get their hands on an 88mm in the process. At the top of the hill, which was well deserving of its name (Caumont-l'Éventé means 'bald windy mountain'), a vast panorama spread out before them. They were at the southernmost tip of the Allied Front, which was already 22km south of Omaha Beach.

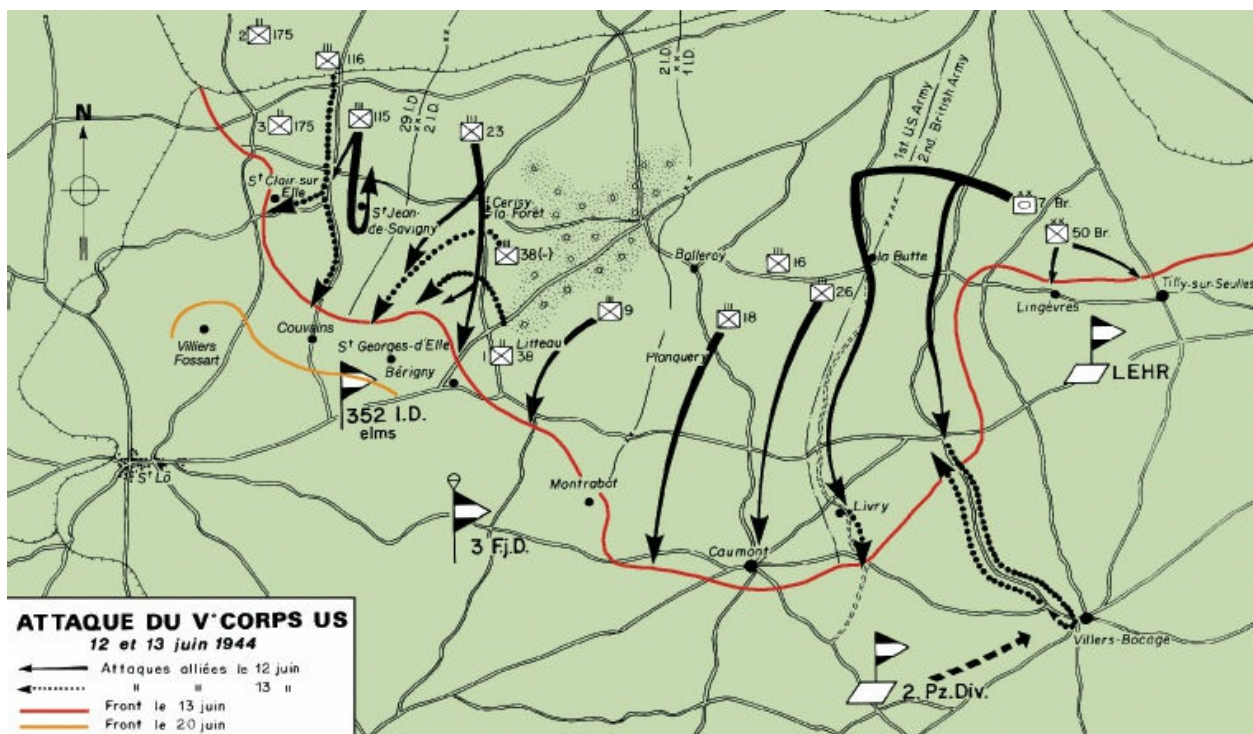
Also of note on this day was the death of General Erich Marcks, who was killed in Hébécrevon. The army corps had been decapitated at a critical time.

Tuesday 13 June

Taking advantage of this advance by the 1st US Infantry Division, on the previous day the 7th British Armoured Division had advanced as far as Livry. On 13 June it continued towards Villers-Bocage, where it was stopped by the Tiger tanks from s.SS-Pz.-Abt.101, commanded by Michael Wittmann (see H.Marie, *Villers-Bocage*, Heimdal). On the other side of the town, to the west, the 17 SS-Panzer Grenadier-Division 'Götz von Berlichingen', launched its counter-attack on Carentan (see G. Bernage, *Objectif Carentan*, Heimdal). The Germans made it as far as the station, before being pushed back by the CCA2 (Brigadier Rose) of 2nd Armoured Division. This meant that on the same day, on both flanks of V Corps, two attacks were pushed back using tanks; one British, one German. What's more, the reason that the 175th IR had been kept in reserve on the western flank of the 29th Division was due to the threat posed by the 'Götz' to the west of the River Vire. The Germans now had to go on the defensive, under pressure from VII Corps and General Collins.

In the 29th Infantry Division's sector, General Gerhardt re-launched his attack after their failure to cross the valley the day before. At 4.30pm, the 116th IR was put on alert to support the 115th. Lieutenant Colonel Smith had to reorganise the hard-hit 3/115, which was committed to the rear of the 116th's left flank. At 8.30pm the engineers cleared the Moulin-l'Évêque bridge (over the Elle, south of Sainte-Marguerite) and colonels Canham

(116th) and Ordway (115th) joined forces, while Lieutenant Colonel Cassell attacked Saint-Clair with the 2/116. As they pushed through the German lines, three tanks were lost at Mesnil. By midnight, Cassell was able to confirm that Saint-Germain had been taken, and the four other battalions set up camp at Mesnil (south of the bridge, at the junction leading west towards Saint-Clair). Private Coleman of the 110th FAB was signalled out for his bravery, after reorganising a battery under heavy fire as the men crossed the river. He was awarded the Silver Star and was seriously injured at Percy, in August 1944.



This map shows the progression of the three American divisions as they advanced from the Front. On the right, 1st Division has got as far as Caumont; the furthest of all the Allied advances. You can see 3 FJD between Saint-Georges-d'Elle and the west of Caumont. Although it was only the equivalent of a large regiment and faced far superior numbers, it managed to block any further offensives here, turning the Front into a stalemate. Further west, where the Elbe had finally been crossed, 352.ID also managed to block any further American advance. (*Heimdal*)

At Caumont, the Germans continued to harass 1st Division's position with organised patrols, often supported by artillery. Two companies from 2 Panzer-Division's reconnaissance group managed to block the advance for

nearly two months.

In the sector belonging to General Robertson's 2nd Infantry Division, the 1/38 crossed the Elle at Moulin des Rondelles and advanced towards Saint-Georges-d'Elle and Hill 192, before being ordered to stop. They were 2km from Saint-George and were at risk of a German counter-attack. Over 12 and 13 June, the 1st ID lost 92 men at Caumont, while the 2nd ID had lost 540! The 29th ID would attack Couvains the following day, but with the arrival of the German paratroopers, the battle entered into a 'stalemate' that would last for nearly a month and be even more terrible than before.


Military Records of two soldiers from II.Fallschirm-Korps

The first book details the military career of Otto Wilhelm, who was born on 1 April 1912 in Neuhaus am Rennweg, a district of Sonneberg, in Thuringia. He was married and worked as a glass worker, while his father was a porcelain painter. He presented himself to the recruiting board in Coburg on 21 November 1933 and enlisted on 1 December 1941, taking his oath on 13 December. His weapon was a Karabiner 98K and he held a military driving permit, working at an aviation training unit (8./ Fl.Au.Div. 32) in Paris. A year after he joined the army, he was made a lance-corporal on 1 December 1942, then corporal on 1 March 1944.

The second document is the *Wehrpass* of Karl Höynck, born 20 July 1908 in Cologne and recruited on 12 February 1940 (aged 31) in his hometown. He enlisted on 1 April 1942 (taking his oath on 20 July) and joined a glider unit (LS.-Abt. Nr26). From 1 April 1942 to 1 October 1942 he cleared the debris from damaged roads in the Rhine-Westphalia area after air strikes. From 12 October 1942 to 18 November 1943, he was assigned to the staff of III.Flieger-Korps. His weapon was a Belgian rifle and he too owned a driving licence. He was made a lance-corporal on 1 April 1943 and assigned to the General-Kommando of II.Fallsch-Korps on 19 January 1944, then promoted to corporal on 1 April. His journey would take him to the end of the war, as he was awarded the KVK II.Kl. (War Merit Cross, 1st Class) on 6 January 1945. He served on the front in Normandy from 6 June 1944 to 31 August, and then on the Home Front from 1 September 1944.

2



Otto Wilhelm

(Eigenhändige Unterschrift des Inhabers — Rufname, Familienname)

3

I. Angaben zur Person

| | | |
|---|--|--|
| 1 | Familienname | Wilhelms |
| 2 | Vornamen <small>(Vorname, Nachname)</small> | Otto Wilhelm Louis |
| 3 | Geburtsdag, -monat, -jahr | 1. April 1912 |
| 4 | Geburtsort <small>(Geburtsort, Ort, Kreis, Reg. Bezirk)</small> | Leuhaus a. d. Burg Lomburg Thüringen |
| 5 | Staatsangehörigkeit <small>(nach Staatsgesetz)</small> | Preussisch |
| 6 | Religion | ev. |
| 7 | Familienstand | verh. 31.5.41 |
| 8 | Beruf <small>(nach Berufsstand)</small> | schlichter ausgeübt Glaszer Glasverarbeiter |
| 9 | Eltern | <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> <div style="width: 45%;"> <p>Vater Otto Wilhelm <small>(Geburtsort, Geburtsdatum)</small> Porzellanmalter <small>(nach Berufsstand)</small> geb. 1915 <small>(Geburtsort, Geburtsdatum)</small></p> </div> <div style="width: 45%;"> <p>Mutter Wilhelms <small>(Geburtsort, Geburtsdatum)</small> Fahne <small>(Geburtsort, Geburtsdatum)</small></p> </div> </div> |

1. Pages 2-3 of the Wehrpass belonging to Obergefreiter Otto Wilhelm.

2
3






Karl Höymek

(Eigenhändige Unterschrift des Inhabers — Rufname, Familienname)

| I. Angaben zur Person | | | | | |
|--|--|---|--|--|--|
| 1 | Familienname <i>Höymek</i> | | | | |
| 2 | Vornamen <small>(Namen nach Geburtsort)</small> <i>Karl</i> | | | | |
| 3 | Geburtstag, -monat, -jahr <i>20. 7. 08</i> | | | | |
| 4 | Geburtsort <small>(Ort, Kreis, Reg. Bezirk)</small> <i>Köln</i> | | | | |
| 5 | Staatsangehörigkeit <small>(auch Bürger)</small> <i>D.</i> | | | | |
| 6 | Religion <i>Kath.</i> | | | | |
| 7 | Familienstand <i>verh.</i> | | | | |
| 8 | Beruf <small>(nach Berufsverzeichnis)</small> gelernt <i>Christophlepper</i> ausgeübt <i>Fährlepper</i> | | | | |
| 9 | <table style="width: 100%; border: none;"> <tr> <td style="width: 50%; vertical-align: top;"> Vater <i>Wilhelm Höymek</i> <small>(Vorname, Familienname)</small> </td> <td style="width: 50%; vertical-align: top;"> Mutter <i>Luisa Höymek</i> <small>(Vorname, Familienname)</small> </td> </tr> <tr> <td style="vertical-align: top;"> Eltern <i>Modellverwalter</i> <small>Beruf (nach Berufsverzeichnis)</small> </td> <td style="vertical-align: top;"> <i>Flümming</i> <small>Nachname</small> </td> </tr> </table> | Vater <i>Wilhelm Höymek</i> <small>(Vorname, Familienname)</small> | Mutter <i>Luisa Höymek</i> <small>(Vorname, Familienname)</small> | Eltern <i>Modellverwalter</i> <small>Beruf (nach Berufsverzeichnis)</small> | <i>Flümming</i> <small>Nachname</small> |
| Vater <i>Wilhelm Höymek</i> <small>(Vorname, Familienname)</small> | Mutter <i>Luisa Höymek</i> <small>(Vorname, Familienname)</small> | | | | |
| Eltern <i>Modellverwalter</i> <small>Beruf (nach Berufsverzeichnis)</small> | <i>Flümming</i> <small>Nachname</small> | | | | |

2

2. The same pages of the *Wehrpass* belonging to Kwarl Höynck.

[illegible]

3. [Page 12](#) of Karl Höynck's *Wehrpass* detailing his assignments.

The image shows an open notebook with two pages. The left page is numbered 32 and has the heading 'nach IV. Aktiver'. Below this is a table with the title 'Im Kriege mitgemachte Gefechte, Schlachten, Unternehmungen'. The table has two columns: 'Tag, Monat, Jahr' and 'Ortsangabe, Truppenteil etc.'. Handwritten entries include:

- 1.4.42 bis 11.10.42: Einsatz zur Sicherung der Verkehrslinien in der Rheinisch-Westfälischen Industriegegend infolge feindlicher Luftangriffe.
- 26.7.44: Einsatz in den Hs. Westgebieten.
- 5.8.44: Einsatz am Frontal. Normandie.
- 7.8.44: Einsatz am Frontal. Normandie.
- 1.9.44: Einsatz am Frontal. Normandie.

 The right page is numbered 33 and has the heading 'Wehredienst'. It also has a table with the same title as the left page, but it is mostly blank.

4. [Page 32](#) detailing his successive engagements: road clearing, engagement in western territories, the Invasion Front in Normandy and the Home Front in Germany. (*Heimatkriegsgebiet*)





1 & 2. These six photographs were taken for the same article (BA 1011/582/2106) by a *Kriegsbericht* (KB), meaning a war correspondent, rather than a *Propaganda-Kompanie* (PK) as is often written. Images 1 & 2 show a machine gunner on the lookout. He is positioned in a hedge and the photographer has made sure that the symbolic oak leaves can be seen in shot. His weapon is lightweight (10.6kg) and effective (1,500 rounds a minute). It was the best machine gun of the Second World War and is still manufactured in Germany today!



3. The mortar was an ideal weapon for use in the fields and hedgerows, thanks to its arched trajectory. Here, three paratroopers load an 8cm Granatwerfer 34. Three men were need to operate this weapon, which could fire up to thirty missiles a minute. The panoramic sight (Richtaufsatz 35) helped set the range and, according to regulations, while machine guns were to be positioned on higher ground (for firing horizontally), mortars were to be positioned in depressions in the ground.



4. Armed with binoculars, an observer studies the enemy's position and gives the relevant coordinates for the machine guns and mortars in case of attack. His camouflaged helmet even has a strip of cloth on the chinstrap to help keep him hidden.



5. Another observer, this time without a camouflaged helmet, also watches the ground ahead with his binoculars. A captured US field telephone is on hand to alert headquarters in case of possible enemy incursion.

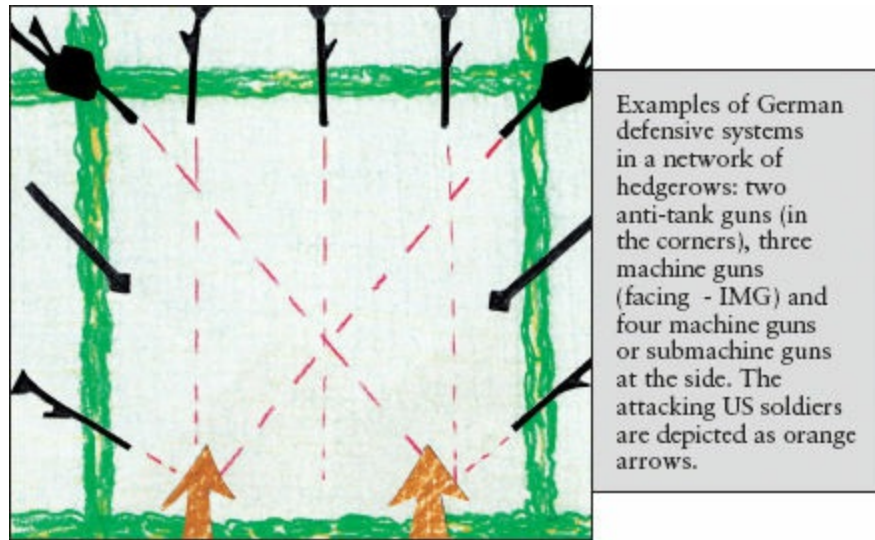


6. The KB took some excellent photographs, and here shows paratroopers relaxing at the end of the shoot. The unshaven man on the right can also be seen firing the mortar in image 5. According to Rudi Frühbeisser, they were always looking for any opportunity to get clean, even resorting to setting up a bathing station in a stream, where they would wash quietly at night. (*Photos BA*)



1. Safely installed behind a hedge where they have built shelters and lookout points, these German paratroopers are seen scrutinizing the hedge opposite, no doubt as the result of an

enemy attack, as evidenced by the American corpse in the foreground. (BA)



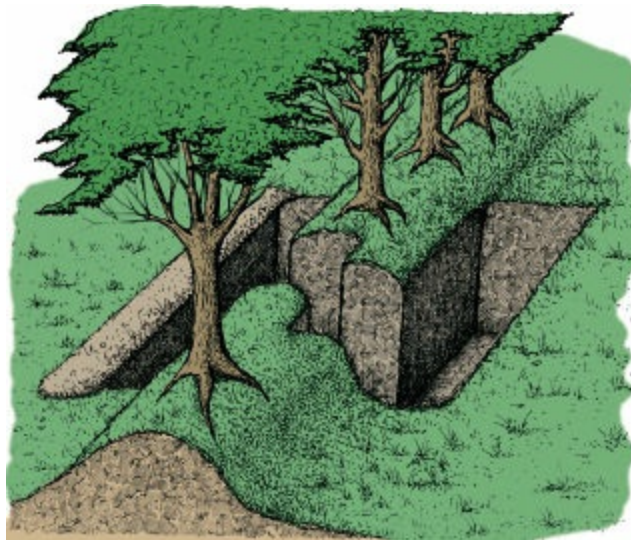
2. Another image from the same article, once more taken after an engagement: various bits of debris, including the carriage from an American machine gun, litter this sunken road. (BA)



3. This image shows two paratroopers digging a hole behind a hedge, either to provide shelter, or a machine gun/mortar position. Another paratrooper is in the hedge keeping a lookout. (BA)



4. Crouched in a hedge waiting for an attack, a paratrooper has a submachine gun on his shoulder. It is an MP40, very effective in close combat, with a 32-round magazine that was capable of firing 500 rounds a minute. (BA)



5. A sketch showing a typical German dugout in the countryside around Saint-Lô. A chicane cut through the hedge so that the firing step could face the opposite hedge. Here,

the field on the right is held by the Germans, while the Americans would attack from the left. Former German paratrooper, Rudi Frühbeisser, explained in his memoirs that the chicane was closed up at night with barbed wire. (*A.Pipet/Heimdal*)

Trévières, 10-15 June 1944



1. This small village is located south of the RN13 road and the Omaha Beach area. The 38th Infantry Regiment (2d Infantry Division) fought hard throughout 9 June to take the village, although they only arrived in the evening. The Germans pulled back during the night and the Americans were in Trévières by the morning of 10 June. This image show the central square, looking north-east.



2. This mutilated monument to the dead, recalls the destruction suffered by the village.



3. This plaque commemorates the four days of fighting required to reach the village, which is located only a few kilometres from Omaha Beach. *(DF and EG/Heimdal)*



4 & 5. This photograph was taken on 15 June in the market square, opposite the Hotel Saint-Aignan, which managed to avoid destruction. The corpse of a German soldier has been left lying there for five days...



6 & 7. These images provide a close-up of the destroyed buildings (and afterwards reconstructed), to the right of the hotel.



8. The butchers, shown on the left of Image 4, suffered serious damage.

Trévières, 10-17 June 1944





1 & 2. Houses damaged by bombs were at risk of looting and so the US authorities put up posters warning that looting was punishable by death.





3 & 4. The village soon became a hub for those heading for the front. Here, William H. Brennan, from Kingston, Pennsylvania, directs the traffic through the rubble.





5 & 6. The 2nd Infantry Division continued its advance south towards the forest of Cerisy on 17 June. The remains of German vehicles can be seen at the sides of the road. (5394) *(NA and EG/Heimdal)*



7. A bulldozer at work on 17 June, clearing the rubble between the ruined buildings, west of the market place.

13-20 June



1. 2nd Battalion, 116th Infantry Regiment, 29th Division, captured Saint-Clair-sur-Elle on 13 June. This is an aerial shot of the town, which has clearly suffered artillery fire. The road to Isigny is on the right, while the road to Saint-Lô is on the left, by the church. This image was taken on 7 July at an altitude of 400ft. (9536)



2. In Saint-Clair-sur-Elle (taken on 21 June), an MP, Private John Walters, inspects an office that had previously been used by the German 352. Infanterie-Division. The roster is still on the table: at Pont-Hébert were Sergeant Maurer and Corporals Bäck, Bauer, Netzel, Liebig, Himal and Weinzierl; at Saint-Clair was Staff-Sergeant Graf; at Saint- Martin-des-Besaces were Corporals Bernsen, Dingel, Ernig, Fischer and Lauger; at Roucamp, were Corporals Engelhardt and Pfeifer and Lance-Corporal Berger, while Corporals Sendler and Lattwein had been taken prisoner. It was possible to read these names using a very powerful magnifying glass! Nine days after the area's liberation, the portrait of Hitler is still hanging on the wall. (5648)



3. The church today, taken from a similar angle but at ground level. The houses to the right of the square can be seen on the aerial photograph.



4. This bar was also present in 1944 and can be seen in the top-right of the square in the aerial photograph.



5. The monument to the 29th Infantry Division in Saint-Clair-sur-Elle.



6. At Sainte-Marguerite- d'Elle, north of Saint-Clair (the river separates the two villages),

two GIs from the 29th Division (probably the 115th Infantry Regiment), read *The Stars and Stripes* and a letter from home, whilst sat in a trench on 16 June 1944. An individual foxhole can be seen in the background.



7 & 8. An abandoned 4.7cm Pak (t) Panzer-Kampfwagen 35 R (f), less than 15km from the two previous locations, west of Littry, near the oratory. It was actually a Czech gun mounted on a French Renault chassis - an incredible piece of 'DIY'. It belonged to the Schnelle-Abteilung 517. Image 7 was taken on 20 June and as can be seen in Image 8, which was taken by Bernard Paich in February 2004, the location remains intact. (NA and DF/Heimdal - current photos: St-Clair (EG) and Littry (BP))

12-13 June, the 38th Infantry Regiment's assault on the Elle Valley at Moulin des Rondelles.

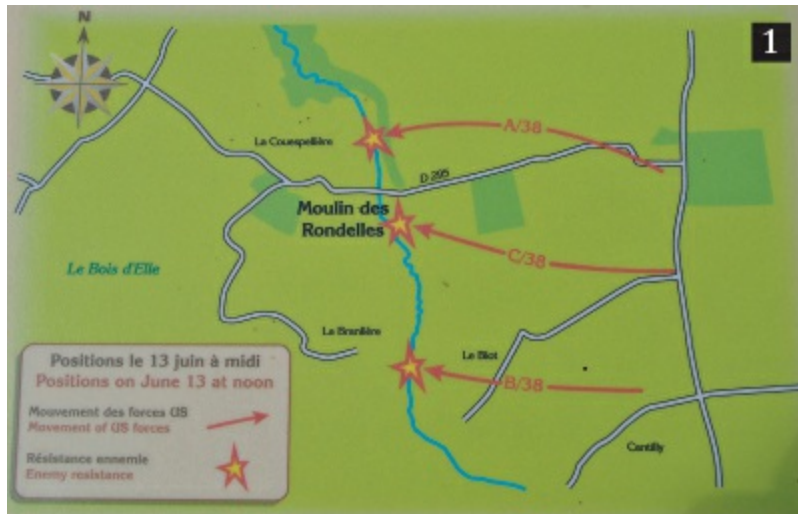
The 2nd Infantry Division was ordered to cross the Elle river on 12 June. They had managed to advance quickly over the previous five days, but upon reaching the eastern shore had encountered strong German resistance, primarily here at the Moulin [mill] des Rondelles. Although the 'river' was really only a large stream, the sides of the valley were quite steep and wooded, making it difficult to cross, and the division's first attempt was

halted from the outset by German machine guns and mortars.

On 13 June the men from 'C' Company (38th Infantry Regiment) received orders to cross the road in front of the mill. Their first attempt in the morning failed, while their second attack in the afternoon was still blocked by machine gun fire and the fact that the Germans had now readjusted their mortars to focus on the GIs. Among them was 23-year-old Private First Class Theodore K. Mister, from Baltimore, Maryland, who had celebrated his second wedding anniversary just five days before, on 7 June 1944, and had a 3-year-old daughter. Realising the gravity of the situation and seeing that the mortar shells were falling closer and closer, he urged his comrades to get going and move forward. On his own initiative, he ran towards the river shouting 'Come on, follow me!' He charged the German positions at the top of the slope and was mortally wounded in the process. Encouraged by his example, the men of 'C' Company advanced, but suffered heavy losses, with ten soldiers killed on this day alone: Second Lieutenant Alfred F. Py Jr, Staff Sergeants Theo J. Master and Lloyd I. Naugle Jr, Sergeant Robert W. Bogar and Privates First Class Charles L. Barls, Paul A. Brown, James Facciolo, Theodore K. Mister, David C. Peterson and Private Henry H. Milton. Twenty-three others were injured and the total casualties for 2nd Infantry Division on 12 and 13 June were 540 killed, injured or missing. These idyllic places [in Normandy] are now marked by history.



Theodore K. Mister, aged 23, who was killed on 12 June 1944 at Moulin des Rondelles.



1. A map of the operation displayed on the monument, showing the w38th arriving from the east to cross the Elle at Moulin des Rondelles, which is to the north of the road, above the inscription indicating its location.



2. The memorial to the south of the road, facing the mill (moulin). It includes an explanatory panel and an area of the battlefield.



3 & 4. Moulin des Rondelles c.1900 and today.



5. The German positions, west of the river.



6. The Elle Valley looking south, with the mill behind you. The attack came from the left (east), while the Germans were positioned in the woods on the right. Saint-Quentin (as told in one of Erwin Schmieger's stories, see later) is upstream, in the background.



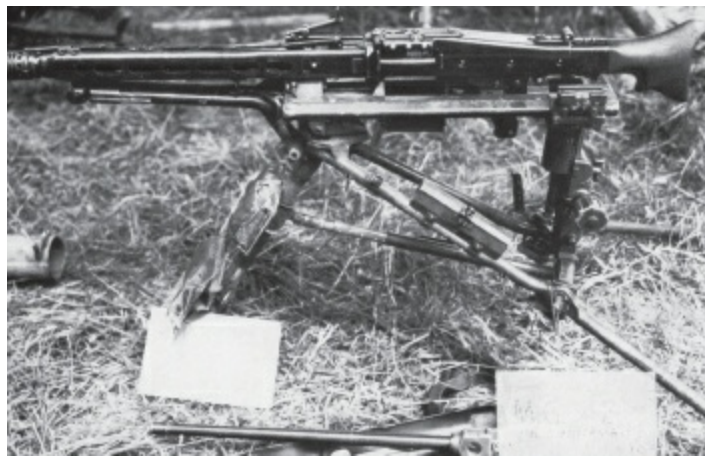
7. From the road, an old gateway provides access to the former German positions.

(Photos Erik Groult and Stephan Cazenave/Heimdal.)

Captured German arms and equipment



Samples of German weapons taken from the battlefield by the Americans. This particular image shows eight 75mm Pak 40s. You can also see the projector, the remains of two 88s and a 20mm DCA. The Pak 40 was a formidable German weapon, whose 75mm shell could pierce 98mm armour plating at 2,000m and had a maximum range of 7,680m. According to the Americans, the Germans placed these guns at crossroads or in villages.



The famous German MG42, mounted here on a tripod in a machine gun version ('s.MG' as opposed to 'l. MG', which is the 'FM' version but without the tripod).



An 80mm German mortar, the *Granatwerfer 34*, which had a maximum range of 2,400m.



S/Sgt John O'Brien, from Hyattsville (MD), showing how to use the rangefinder on a DCA. Behind him are observation telescopes for the artillery.



Various weapons and equipment, including a rangefinder, a *Panzerschreck* (German bazooka) and several rifles.



This GI is holding a rare weapon: a *Fallschirmgewehr 42*, which only belonged to German paratroopers.



Examples of mines and grenades. All of these weapons were collected for the photographer on 23 June 1944 at Saint-Clair-sur-Elle (the command post for the 29th Division), except those in Image 1, which were photographed on 13 July. (*Coll. Heimdal*)

Hell in the Hedgerows



The battle in the fields and hedges was fought by the US infantry; it was a confusing form of combat that never seemed to end. Here, an American patrol have already surprised a German group of soldiers, who had to abandon their MG42 in their attempt to get away. The GIs now had to neutralise the enemy, who continued to hide in the hedgerows. One of the soldiers tries an old trick of raising his helmet on the end of his rifle, so that the Germans will fire and reveal their positions.



A group of American infantrymen have been surprised by a German sniper. After taking shelter, they prepare to return fire with rifle grenades.

29th Infantry Division





Two men from 29th Infantry Division (the division's insignia can be seen on the helmet) advance along a hedge, with bayonets fixed. The bodies of two other American infantrymen can be seen lying at the side of the road, by the opposite hedge.



An American gunner armed with a Browning automatic rifle in position above Saint-Lô.
(7161)

(Photos: Heimdal)

Saint-Lô Sector



1. A frontline observation post in the Saint-Lô sector.



2. Captain William Bouton aims his pistol out of a captured German position that has been well-camouflaged in the hedges. Positions such as this, which were below ground level, could only be taken in hand-to-hand combat using grenades.



3. These American infantrymen have just advanced past another hedgerow, and leap to find shelter in foxholes previously dug by the Germans.

(Photos: Heimdal)



4. A group of US infantrymen advance along a road, trying to flush out German snipers, which was often a costly operation. In the foreground a sergeant looks through a gap in the hedge, with the body of a dead German at his feet; you can see the MG42 ammunition box that he was carrying before he was killed. (8116)

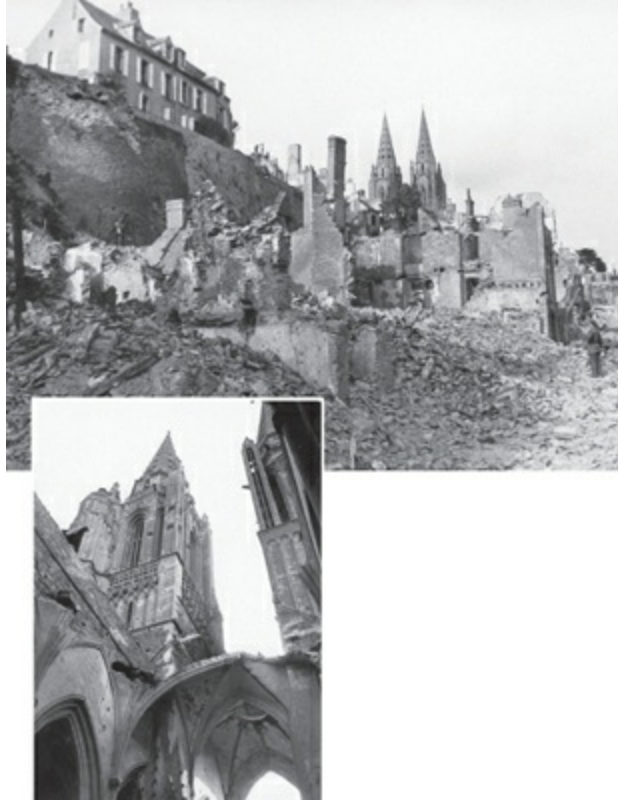


5. Soldiers leap from their jeep and take cover in a ditch after coming under fire from enemy machine guns and mortars. They will then advance towards their next objective: Saint-Lô.



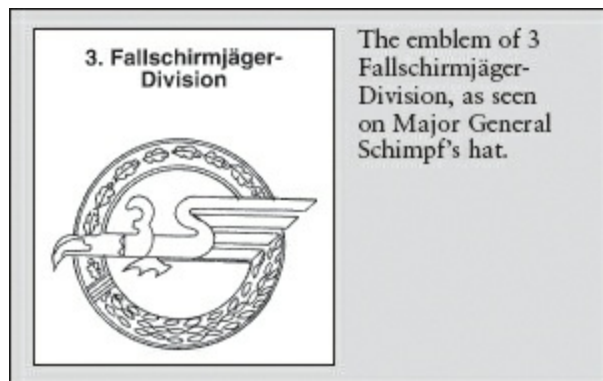
6. Just north of Saint-Lô, US army medics treat the wounded. They sometimes had to work non-stop under heavy fire and one of their first problems was distributing plasma, which arrived in large quantities each day from England.

Saint-Lô Sector



In the ruins of Saint-Lô, the two spires of Notre-Dame church remain intact, although the vault of the nave had collapsed under the Allied bombs. These photographs were taken by a German war correspondent just one week before American troops entered the town.

(Photos: Bundesarchiv)





Major General Richard Schimpf, commander of 3 Fallschirmjäger-Division, receives a report from a captain under his command. The general is carrying a *Fallschirmgewehr 42*, a weapon unique to German paratroopers, but only used in limited numbers.



This soldier wears the blank stare of a *Fallschirmjäger*, marked by the tense atmosphere of combat. With a few branches on his helmet, his face covered in mud and a rain-soaked jump jacket, he stares intently at the area he has to defend. He is probably a non-commissioned officer in charge of a platoon, as evidenced by the MP40 cartridges, gun case and the binocular strap underneath his gas mask case.



In the shelter of a trench, a corporal writes a quick letter to his family.

German paratroopers around Saint-Lô



A reconnaissance motorbike and sidecar from a paratroop unit (wearing their characteristic

helmets) drives through the ruined streets. The passenger points his Beretta submachine gun - a souvenir from Italy - towards a phantom enemy.



A patrol reaches a burning farm before stopping to observe what's ahead. At the corner of the building, the platoon leader, his P-38 pistol in hand, glances cautiously around the wall in a scene that was clearly staged for the photographer.



A severely wounded soldier is transported back to the aid station on a makeshift stretcher made from a simple wooden door. Most of the paratroopers are wearing their helmets and boots, with only their jump jackets distinguishing them from the other Luftwaffe soldiers.



During their daily manoeuvres, 3 Fallschirmjäger-Division's military police scour the sky for enemy aircraft, whilst sat in their camouflaged *Stöwer*, which has been covered with branches.

(Photos: Bundesarchiv)

Erwin Schmieger, paratrooper, 3 Company, Fallschirmjäger-Regiment 9, 3 Fallschirmjäger-Division



Erwin Schmieger as a young paratrooper in the 3/FJR 9. (*Private Collection*)

A local amateur-historian remembers:

In the summer of 1988, my neighbour and friend, ‘Joseph’, asked me if I could take him to his timber merchant, as his truck had broken down. I thought that I was going to have a very pleasant afternoon - and I wasn’t disappointed!

He often told me that I was the only left who called him Joseph, as everyone else who did was dead. I first knew him in 1950, when I was six and he was twenty-five. He had just been released from a PoW camp and at the time, all of his Norman friends called him ‘Joseph’ because they found it easier to pronounce. His real name was

Erwin Schmieger and his youth had been like that of many young men who had enrolled in the military at the time, but he was the only one who could tell me stories about life on the ‘enemy’ side. What he told me over the years has had such an effect on me that, even today, I can still recall his exact words as he described it all to me.

Erwin Schmieger was born on 4 April 1925 in the Sudetenland (near Karlsbad), which had been annexed by Germany following Hitler’s invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1938. In March 1943, aged eighteen, he joined the Wehrmacht and was enlisted in 3 Company, Fallschirmjäger-Regiment 9 on 5 May 1944 as an MG42 gunner.

On 6 June 1944, his regiment was stationed in the Monts d'Arrée region in Brittany. After a long, forced march to Normandy, they arrived to the east of Saint-Lô on 10 June and his company were put into action at Saint-Germain-d'Elle, 'There were 117 of us in the company and when I was injured on 4 August, there were only 17 of us 'veterans' left. The rest were all new recruits.' This shows that Erwin had remained on the frontline all the time and, along with his company, was involved in all combat east of Saint-Lô, before retreating south, where he was hit by shrapnel in the thigh on 4 August at Neuville, near Vire. He was evacuated to the main first-aid station and then treated at a hospital in Germany, thus managing to avoid the slaughter of the Falaise pocket. After his convalescence, he returned to fight in the Ardennes counter-offensive, before being taken prisoner by the British on 7 March 1945, at Köberla.

As a prisoner of war, he was sent back to a sorting centre at Fleury-sur-Orne, in Normandy, and was ordered to help clear the rubble from the bomb-damaged cities. The irony is that he was actually sent to the Vire and thus had to help repair the destruction that he had helped to cause. One day, the owner of a local sawmill came in search of lumberjacks and Erwin, who was tired of picking up stones, raised his hand to volunteer. His new employer was happy with his work and instead of bringing him to and from the camp every day, asked if he could keep him on site during the week. He had some sympathy with the young prisoner, and vouched that he would answer for him if he tried to escape. On 30 September 1947, Erwin was officially released from the camp and was able to work as a free man.

As the Sudetenland was now occupied by Russia, Erwin decided against returning home and instead found work at a joiners in Bayeux. After learning the trade, he became a successful cabinet maker and after marrying a local woman, settled down not far from my parents' home. This is how I came to know him in 1950 and despite our wide age gap, we remained close until his untimely death in 1995, aged seventy, following heart problems. His wife told me that he had only spoken about his war record with me because I was so young, although I also

think it was because I was the only one who asked him about it.

He never wanted to take me back to the area where he fought and always made up excuses that he was too busy. So, after he had met the timber merchant on that day, I was determined to take advantage of the fact that he was in my car and finally take him to all the places that I had subsequently worked out where he must have served.

He was unhappy at first, but as we approached the end of the forest of Cerisy, he calmed down and became quite happy with my plan. I headed first to a place called Saint-Quentin, which was on the right of the Bayeux/Saint-Lô road, because he had told me about a small stream at the bottom of Hill 192 (the furthest point of their advance towards the forest): 'We could see it from a distance', he said 'but we could never get there!' He then stopped suddenly and pointing to the stream exclaimed, 'It was so hot that I drank from this. I headed upstream for about 100m and saw a cow this deep', raising his hand about 80cm from the ground, 'buried in the middle of the creek, its body all swollen from the sun, and then I threw up all the water I'd just drank!'



The Elle Valley near Saint-Quentin, looking south. It was here, where the river is

only a brook, where Erwin Schmieger drank from, and where he found a dead cow further upstream. (SC/Heimdal)



Souliare Wood on Hill 192, where Schmieger passed a terrible night before retreating south of the Saint-Lô/Bayeux road on 11 July.



Fontaine l'Evêque Wood, where 3/FJR9 retreated to on 11 July. (Erik Groult/Heimdal)

Saint-Germain-d'Elle



1. From the top of the cemetery can be seen the gate described by Erwin Schmieger, as well as a funerary chapel studded with missile impacts.



2. Detail of the impacts on the chapel.



3. A shell-marked granite tomb.



4 & 5. A old tomb that was riddled by bullets, as can be seen on the iron railings. The fighting must have been very intense; hence the reaction of the veteran paratrooper (*EG and EC/Heimdal*)

We then climbed up to Hill 192. We could see the wood on the right where Erwin had experienced his greatest fear during the war, which was not only intense, but lasted an entire night. Whilst watching him work in his studio, I had once asked him if he remembered when he had been most afraid during the war and he had answered without hesitation:

It was at Hill 192, near Bérigny. For a fortnight we were told to guard the frontline along the edge of a wood, each of us in a hole in the ground 50m apart, as the rest of the company headed down the road to Saint-Lô at night. Opposite us were madmen with Indian heads...

He tapped his left shoulder indicating the place where the men of the US

2nd Infantry Division had sewn their insignia.

There were no rules ... everyone had their daggers drawn ... we were soldiers! Suddenly, in the night, there was a noise. It was a friend who thought he had seen someone go down. A few moments later we heard a cry that went straight through me; they had slaughtered him! I could hear them crawling towards me through the leaves and I spent the entire night in my foxhole trembling with fear. I had other fears, but nothing like that. I'd only just turned nineteen. When we took roll call in the morning, there were only half of us left.

I parked the car at the side of the road and he got out. After looking at the wood for a moment in silence, he got back in and I could tell he was emotional. I knew he didn't want to go up to the wood. He also didn't want me to carry on towards Saint-Lô, where I hoped that he would maybe recognise the area that he had talked to me about so long ago in his stories, when I had asked him that most difficult question: in all of the fighting, did you ever actually kill anyone?

You know, we fired so much from a distance that you never really saw the enemy and never really saw the exact consequences of what you were doing. When they [the enemy] fell silent, you assumed your shots had succeeded. I remember two occasions, once on a canal in Holland, the other here in Normandy, on the hills around Saint-Lô. One night, two of us were patrolling along a hedge, each of us advancing alternately at 2m intervals ahead of the other, so that one could keep watch as the other advanced. As it was my turn to move forward, I came across a barrier. At that moment, there was a great light in the sky that suddenly illuminated everything and right there standing behind the barrier was some guy. I fired a quick burst and we ran back like crazy. Luckily, we weren't hit, but we were scared.



A few months later and the young paratrooper has already become a veteran.
(Private Collection)

Although I regretted not going further on towards Saint-Lô, I didn't want to force him and so we headed for Saint-Germain-d'Elle. He had told me once about how he'd fought in a cemetery, by a wall that ran down to the road where there was a small iron gate with some steps. I'd found the place that I thought he was describing and as we approached he said, 'Yes, that' it! You've found it, damn it, you've found it!' Once more he was visibly moved. The fighting must have been really bad as even the church had been razed then rebuilt nearby.

We entered the cemetery and walked along the sandy path towards the small gate, which was still there. Suddenly, he stopped a few metres from the entrance and I was frozen with shock: this man, who was so still and calm, suddenly began to scream and beat his arms on the ground. 'I was here, right here, lying with my MG waiting for the American!' After a moment's silence, he realised my agitation and said, 'I'm sorry. It was too much. I can see it all happening as if it was only yesterday.' We were both taken over by the emotion of it all.

Back in the car, and still a little emotional, he said to me, 'Go up there' and pointed to a road leading from the church square up to the right.

I'll show you a place where I had a narrow escape! A little further up, near the crossroads, there should be a farm with a cider press. It was now my comrades turn to carry the MG and we had stopped to rest at the press. Putting the gun at an angle, he kept a lookout through a small window, while I sat by the door and rolled a cigarette. All at once there was an enormous explosion and I found myself out in the yard, with nothing in my hands and no clue as to what had just happened. Without hitting anything, a shell had come through the window and then gone out of the door, with the force carrying me outside with it. My comrade was still crouched in the corner by the wall, speechless. Once more we were afraid, but then we were afraid every day, often several times...



A little further to the north-east, near a crossroads, is the site of the old cider press where Schmieger was thrown outside by the shell blast. (SC/Heimdal)

Arriving at the crossroads we saw that the farmhouse, which must have been completely destroyed, had been rebuilt after the war. He had never told me this story before. As evening approached, I discreetly lengthened our journey back to Bayeux and passed Caumont-l'Eventé, so that he could once more tell me the story about his adventures at the

church there. It must have taken place while he was on the frontline, on 12 June, when the 1st Infantry Division 'Big Red One' had conquered this strategic point.

He had taken up a position in the embrasure of a first-floor window, in a house facing the church door.

An American tank approached from the west and immediately pointed its gun towards me, no doubt alerted to my position by the locals, who had seen me enter the house. The tank fired and after an enormous blast I realised that the wall in front of me had vanished and there was nothing but a void and a lot of dust. By some miracle I was unharmed, but my comrade had been blown backwards and broken both of his knees. He cried out to me, 'Don't leave me! Don't leave me!' I hesitated, but then pulled him up over my shoulders and turned to go down the stairs, which were luckily still there. In my panic, I came out into the street and walked right past the tank. It didn't fire at me; perhaps out of pity because I was carrying my screaming friend on my back. I ran to the shelter of the church and then retreated until, exhausted, we happened to meet a motorbike and sidecar that was already laden with wounded. I tied my friend to the only spare place, the spare wheel on the side, using belts. I can still see him driving away, with his legs dangling in the space behind the motorbike. I never saw him again.

Today, the only reconstructed facade in the road opposite the church is that of the *Crédit Agricole* bank.

As expected, I had had a wonderful afternoon and it was even more memorable for me after being able to share it with Erwin. I'd like to think that it was the same for him. A few years later, I met the president of the veterans who had fought at Caumont, who told me that he knew the story, but obviously from the 'other side'. At a ceremony to mark the 50th anniversary of the invasion, a veteran tank commander with the US 1st Division recounted that he had let a German carrying a wounded man pass by him. Unfortunately, we were not able to get in touch with

this man as he did not give his name.

Caumont-l'Eventé



1. The American tanks arrived down this road from Torigni, to the west.



2. Looking east, you can see the church on the right and the reconstructed *Crédit Agricole* building [with the green signs], where Erwin Schmieger was hidden, to the left. When he left the building, he headed south (to the right), past the tank and behind the church. (SC/Heimdal)



3. Erwin Schmieger (centre) in hospital in Germany, after being injured in Normandy. (*Private Collection*)



4. His grave in the cemetery, near Bayeux, bearing his name and the dates 1925-1995 (*EG/Heimdal*)



5. Eriwn Schmieger towards the end of his life, in 1993. (*Madame Schmieger*)

4.

The Bloody Hill

Wednesday 14 June

After crossing the Elle, Saint-Lô appeared to be within easy reach. At 5am, Lieutenant Allsup remembers how, ‘everything was wet through; the leaves and the grass were all dripping with dew and we were soaked. Before eating their rations, the men all answered the call of nature, and were soon surrounded in a halo of steam. They took out their K rations from their raincoat pockets and washed them down with a swig of water.’ Captain Mueller assembled his platoon leaders to give them their orders; including an announcement that would shock them, just as much as it had shocked him: ‘Gentlemen, we have lost Colonel Goode (Allsup used the name Harkins in his memoirs). We found his helmet with a hole in it, although we didn’t find a body, so there’s a chance that he may have been taken prisoner. He had been carrying out an attack over the Elle, from Neuilly-la-Forêt, when he came across a group of SS soldiers.’ Command of the 175th now fell to the regiment’s former executive officer, Lieutenant Colonel Alexander George (Redford Williams in Allsup’s memoirs). The officers were furious.



The attack itself had taken place at 5pm on 12 June and included a small Task Force, commanded by Major Anthony Miller and composed of ‘C’ and ‘E’ Companies from the 175th with mortars and machine guns, who had

crossed the Vire on boats with the 121st Engineers. The group was accompanied by General Cota and Colonel Paul Goode, commander of the 175th. Coming under fire, they managed to reach Montmartin-en-Graignes using the drainage ditches north of Saint-Lambert, but despite several attempts, failed to progress any further. However, after being joined by seventy men from the 327th Glider Infantry Regiment, Major Miller finally managed to take Montmartin, before taking shelter in an orchard southeast of the town to rest overnight. General Gerhardt (commander of the 29th ID) was still frustrated by their limited successes, and sent the following message to the Task Force during the night: 'We are all entrenched in an orchard and 150 Germans have just entered Montmartin'. Unfortunately, the message was incorrectly deciphered and head office received a report that '150 German tanks had just entered Montmartin!' The 29th immediately informed V Corps, with the message having the same effect as a bomb exploding: 150 panzers were on the attack between Carentan and Isigny! Under orders to destroy the two bridges, Colonel Goode stayed in his position, before crossing the Vire at midnight at the head of 'G' Company and what remained of 'E' Company, and heading south along the west bank of the river. At a place called Le Ray, 800m north of the canal bridge, they came across a German camp and fierce fighting broke out in the darkness; only thirty soldiers from 'G' Company would survive, while Colonel Goode was taken prisoner. At dawn on 13 June, tanks were sent to the headquarters of Colonel Harper (commander of 327th GIR) at Saint-Pellerin, in order to face the 'phantom' 150 panzers. However, their retreat was ordered before there was any danger of them being surrounded. Brigadier General Cota joined the American front line, near Auville, at midnight on 13 June, along with 4 officers and 110 men. A great number had been killed in this recent fighting, as well as 57 wounded, 89 taken prisoner and 122 missing. Meanwhile the bridges remained intact.



Lieutenant John S. Allsup, known as 'Sam', platoon leader in 'A' Company, 175th Infantry Regiment. (GB)

After giving the bad news, Captain Mueller gave the orders to continue the advance south, with first platoon (Allsup) at the front. They then proceeded to walk for two to three hours through hostile territory, on dusty roads with no hard surfacing. The only enemy they encountered were snipers, who were quickly taken care of as they perched up their trees. Lieutenant Allsup describes one story:

One of the guys in the company once said that he would never shoot a Kraut, but instead would crush him to death with his bare hands. The man was nicknamed 'the Gorilla' and he was all muscle - you'd certainly want him on your side rather than against you! On this occasion, the Gorilla saw a German sniper in a tree and then rushed up to the trunk, shaking it like a coconut tree until the man fell to the ground. The Gorilla grabbed the German's gun and then broke his spine with his bare hands, leaving him stone dead. Another sniper saw what happened and couldn't believe his eyes. He got the Gorilla in his sights and put a bullet in his head. When we arrived on the scene, the Gorilla was already dead, but was still holding on to his prey. Thank

God we only had one Gorilla in the company, although that was still one too many for the US Army!

After heading south-east, the men stopped for a rest in a field less than 2km from Villiers-Fossard.

Suddenly, a shell exploded, quickly followed by others. The men rushed to find the nearest shelter, but it was too late for some of them, including a man in Lieutenant Red Ferris' platoon, who was hit by an 88. The shell itself didn't actually explode, but blew an enormous hole in his chest, dislocating his entire body. The shelling lasted for ten minutes, although it must have seemed like an eternity. When it finally stopped, the sound of the shells was replaced by the heart-rendering howls of the wounded. Captain Mueller ordered the men on again, with Allsup once more by his side at the front. They could hear more 88s close by, and so Mueller signalled to Allsup to head left, in order to capture them. With a sick feeling in his stomach, Allsup automatically lit a cigarette to calm his nerves and turned to speak his men: 'Let's go guys! Let's stuff the shitty bastards!' They crossed a small pasture at a run and found two prisoners behind a small shed, one of whom was a Georgian. Private Orlafsky, who had Russian heritage, acted as the interpreter as the Georgian prisoner explained that he hated the Russians and claimed that 300 Germans were occupying the nearby village; a claim that would prove completely false...

To be able to approach the village without being seen, we had to go around the hill on which it was built. The hill itself was about 115m high and it took us fifteen minutes to reach a ravine at the foot of the climb. This natural trench provided excellent protection both front and back, and we also discovered a kind of shelter or cave that had been dug by a villager for his family. They waved to us as we passed by before Captain Mueller led us through a cornfield in order to join one of the roads leading up to the village.

The Germans had set up a communications network to the village, involving at least thirty telephone lines, so the men were ordered to be as quiet as possible and to hold their fire. Six Germans came down the road on bicycles, with MP40 machine guns attached to the handlebars, clearly intending to

repair the telephone wires. Despite their orders, one of the US soldiers opened fire with his Garand M-1, killing a German. One of Allsup's men was injured and his comrades had to improvise a stretcher from tree branches, which were passed through the sleeves of two buttoned up raincoats. The prisoner had lied; the Germans had sent no reinforcements here and there were really only a handful of men.

However, Lieutenant Colonel White (Blanding in Allsup's memoirs), commander of 1/175, decided to abandon the attack on the 88s:

We were to stay west of Villiers-Fossard and move on towards Saint-Lô. We had made good progress south, but it wasn't fast enough for the regiment. So be it! We were actually no more than 5 or 6km from Saint-Lô, and given what we had come up against so far, our objective should have been easily reached. In fact, there were only two villages that needed clearing out before we reached the town: Mesnil-Rouxelin and Saint-Georges-Montcoq. Piece of cake, huh? Well, not exactly. No one can blame Captain Mueller for what was to happen. After all, he only knew what the regiment and battalion saw fit to tell him. We were going to put our asses right on the line and no mistake!

Now came the tedious and dangerous advance through the hedges, with snipers a constant 'scourge'. The man responsible for the bazooka in Allsup's platoon was Charlie Foster, who despite being 6'3 and 17st, was as blind as a bat. Luckily, he was a great shot, thanks to his very thick regulation glasses. Suddenly, during a ten-minute rest along the next hedge, a huge explosion put everyone on alert. Foster wasn't moving and his bazooka had a hole down its side, like it had been ripped open by a 'giant can-opener'. He came to and it appeared no one else was wounded; it was a miracle! Everyone thought that a German must have set off a mine somewhere in the distance, but it remained a mystery. Charlie Foster no longer had a bazooka, but was instead given a rifle by Lieutenant Allsup, who himself managed to get his hands on a Garand M-1, which he actually preferred.

Re-enforcements then arrived to make up for their losses. Lieutenant Lawrence took over command of a platoon, which in the mean time had been looked after by Sergeant Major Rutledge. 'Lawrence was a nice guy. He was

quiet and discreet, medium-sized and rather thin, with his glasses permanently on the end of his nose, which made him look like a studious teacher. We all slept with one eye open that night.'

Thursday 15 June

Despite the lack of sleep, most of the men were awake before dawn:

We didn't feel safe in the hedges; we were like rabbits waiting for the hunters. The arrival of the replacements had reassured us, of course, but there was still something there that stopped us from feeling comfortable. Red Ferris (one of the platoon leaders from 'A' Company, 175th) had just sent two of his men to recon the ground ahead. Those damned hedges were really deadly and we never knew what was waiting for us on the other side. Everything was quiet. Almost too quiet. Even the birds were silent. We had tried various methods of advancing through the network of hedges; two guys up front, as we did now, or a platoon running from one hedge to the next, with another platoon hidden in the undergrowth behind to provide covering fire and so on and so on.

As they crossed a small field with a gap in the hedge opposite, a large tree hid another gap on the left-hand side:

Johnny Shepard was standing near me, near the tree, and Jack Roberts had joined Red Macken, who was keeping a lookout, when a machine gun suddenly fired in front of me. Shepard collapsed; he had four bullets in his head and his right eye was completely blown away. It was too late for him. Everyone threw themselves to the ground and I called for a medic. White, who had been away from the front for the last four or five days, ran up and crouched over poor Shepard's body. 'I can't do anything for him, Sam,' he said, 'he's gone.' Nevertheless, he instinctively took out a packet of sulphonamide and daubed it on Shepard's wounds, as if that was somehow going to make a difference!

Suddenly, Lieutenants Colonel George and White arrived. Allsup turned around to see someone getting an M2 mortar into position, after being ordered to by the two 'bigwigs'. Allsup screamed that the distance was too

TOWARD St.LO
14 et 18 June 1944

--- Forward positions ,evening 14 June
— Positions reached ,evening 18 June
German units as of evening 18 June

Kampfgruppe
275th Inf.Div.
(Heintz)

Bd as of 16 June

Rennais 352d Inf.Div.

KG 353d Inf.Div.

3d Parachute Division

Saint-Lô

Contour interval 10 meters

0 1 2
MILES

0 1 2
Kilometers

These are the previously unpublished photographs from a soldier, Tech 5 Barry, from the 29th Signals Company. These exceptional images are able to convey the daily life of the soldiers better than the clichés of war correspondents.



1. An exhausted Private Simmons has fallen asleep on the ground. The badge on his helmet is clearly visible. (*Heimdal*)



2. Sergeant Thonssen, right, enjoys an object shown to him by one of the men. (*Heimdal*)



3. Siesta time. Walt and Cal, whose full names are unknown, are profoundly asleep.

(Heimdal)



4. Tech 5 Barry sitting on the back of his Dodge workshop. He was so shocked by his appearance that he wrote on the back of the card 'The Horror of Normandy. You could frighten a child with this picture.' *(Heimdal)*



5. The back of Tech 5 Barry's truck. The radios and boxes are for spare parts. *(Heimdal)*



6. Tech 5 Barry repairing a radio. (*Heimdal*)

‘Have you ever fired this stuff without a base and tripod? No? Well pass me the tube and get out of there. I know what I’m doing. Remove all the propulsive relays on the tail except one, and when I tell you, shove the torpedo in the tube!’ I placed the tube between my legs, aimed it as best I could, and then yelled like a rodeo cowboy, ‘Let go!’ The charge drove the base of the tube 15cm into the ground, but the piece of shit went 50m past the target. I banged the tube with my bare hands to try and straighten it, ordered the guy to remove all the relays this time, and bang! The dirty bitch went straight into the air - I heard someone yell ‘Get down!’ - before it nose-dived and exploded on the other side of the hedge - our own hedge! It gave us all a shock: I could have destroyed the entire company, battalion and regimental staff all at once! I straightened the tube again and shouted, ‘Right, all the relays, go!’ The shell went up in a perfect arc and landed right on the Kraut, even blowing off a piece of his arm up into the air. Now that I had the right angle, I fired a second shot, which landed in exactly the same place. They men let out a cheer of approval; the training at Fort Benning had clearly paid off.

Although they’d managed to destroy the gun, Lieutenant Colonel George now ordered five of Allsup’s men to go and finish the job. However, upon reaching the gun an unscathed German emerged with a grenade in his hand. When the colonel threw it back, there was an explosion, then another and then a third, resulting in injuries to the poor colonel.

Macken pulled the little colonel up onto his shoulders and trotted back.

The others followed, coming back under sporadic fire after more Krauts had opened fire. Lieutenant Colonel George was unconscious and transported back to the aid station by Red Macken. Once there, Red was shocked to hear the regimental commander (Colonel Ollie W. Reed) tell Lieutenant Colonel White (commander of 1/175) to recommend Lieutenant Colonel George for a medal. George would receive the Bronze Star for his 'heroic action', which consisted of destroying a German machine gun that he had already seen being blown up a few minutes earlier. As for Macken and his men, of course, they didn't even get a thank you!

While a Bronze Star was being recommended at headquarters, back in the field, the fighting continued. A German dressed in camouflage gear suddenly emerged from behind the hedge, waving a white handkerchief and shouting '*Kamerad*'. However, Allsup could see two grenades sticking out from underneath his jacket and knew that it was a trick.

Without hesitating, I fired a quick round from my M-1. I was less than two metres away and killed him there on the spot. I could see the surprised look in his eyes as the bullets ripped into him. He was a tall, blonde guy, only nineteen or twenty. In case there were any more, we hurled some more grenades in the direction that he'd come from. This was war and you had to treat them like wild beasts.

This brutal anecdote reveals the truth about what it was like to fight in the fields [of northern France]. There were no Waffen-SS in the area, but the paratroopers and soldiers of the *Heer* also wore camouflaged uniforms. The young German soldier had obviously wanted to surrender, but had forgotten to empty his pockets. Everything had happened very quickly and the situation was so tense that the man pulling the trigger had little time to think. The act of surrendering was always very dangerous, especially when there was so much hatred between the adversaries.

Next follows another brutal anecdote, when Captain Muller ordered Allsup to clear the hedge and advance through. On the other side, Allsup saw a German corpse:

He may have been pretending. I couldn't see any wounds from the grenades and there was no blood. I pushed my bayonet into his spine. I didn't care if it was in his back, it didn't matter to me, and pulled the trigger. As I pulled the bayonet out, his body lifted up and underneath him was his MP40. He had just been laying there playing dead, waiting for us to pass by. One burst from his machine gun and it would have been curtains for some of us.

Others appeared but after exchanging fire, the Germans fell back. After a few dozen metres they entered an orchard on their left; the largest they had encountered so far. As the sun shone down, they suddenly came under heavy shell fire from German 88s. They had to try and dig foxholes for themselves, but it wasn't easy in the rocky ground. 'I wish we'd gotten \$10 for every foxhole or trench we'd had to dig since Omaha,' says Allsup. In the middle of this hell, he dispatched orders for mortar support. He sent Orlafski with a message, but as he would find out later, Orlafski was attacked by the same German that Allsup had bayoneted and shot, but who had not yet died. Orlafski finished the job off and killed him, but not before being injured himself and ending up with one leg shorter than the other for the rest of his life.

After such a hectic day, the night of 15 June passed relatively quietly for the men of 1/175, although there was once more heavy dew in the morning. As for the rest of the 29th Infantry Division, Colonel Canham had had plans to attack south and ordered the 116th IR to extend its right flank towards Hôtel Castel. On the other side, the 175th IR, whose 1st Battalion we have been following, had advanced over the Elle in the west, capturing Ariel and Moon. Its support group, the 224th Field Artillery Battalion, were encamped at Sainte-Anne, while the infantry were coming up against strong resistance at La Meauffe.

Friday 16 June

The attack was launched in the direction of Saint-Lô and Hill 192 (east of the town). There would be a push on both flanks in order to make the Germans withdraw troops from Lison/Saint-Lô road, which ran from north to south. On the left (east), the 116th IR were to attack La Blotrie and Saint-André-de-

l'Epine, while on the right (west), the 175th had to capture Mesnil-Rouxelin. The 1/116 would be stopped 1km north of Saint-André, along the Le Chêne Loup - Les Hauts Vents line. On its right, 3/116 made its way into the Bois de Bretel wood and at the centre of the 29th's advance, 2/115 managed to overcome a roadblock at Hivet, just west of Saint-Claire. During the night, 1/115 would come from Epine-Tesson and pass through Saint-Claire, in order to reach the village of Foulons.

As for the 175th IR, they would cut off the road between La Meauffe and Saint-Claire, which is where we now find 'A' Company and Lieutenant Allsup. That morning, Stevens had brought some bad news: The captain had sent out a patrol during the night, led by Lieutenant Lawrence. Bob Rutledge had been with him and at one point, Bob went to scout ahead and got entangled in some barbed wire. Lawrence thought it must have been Krauts and so opened fire. Poor Bob took two bullets in the back and what's more, there wasn't a single German in sight. The men brought Bob's body back with them, but the lieutenant was completely distraught.

Allsup replied with his usual sharpness: 'Hell, he would have been f***ked anyway. All I know is that Rutledge was one of the best soldiers I ever had. He was a good friend too.' Yet the situation wasn't exactly rosy here, either. Allsup needed support and a captain, especially since some of his men, including Macken, were still missing after the lieutenant colonel took them with him during his 'exploits'. Allsup exploded: 'You know what, Stevens? If that bastard of a colonel George hadn't wanted to destroy a machine gun that was already in pieces, then those guys would be with us now. What was the f***king asshole trying to prove?'

'All this stupidity amazes me, Sam', Stevens replied. 'I've never seen a staff officer act the way he does. In fact, he was already that pretentious back in England. With Goode and now George out of the picture, I get the impression that the rules of this game have changed.'

The arrival of the captain put an end to their discussion. He confirmed to Allsup that with the bigwigs out of action, the situation was now a lot more difficult, and so he consequently wasn't able to grant him the mortars, machine guns and cannons that he had requested. They would have to destroy the enemy guns with whatever they had. The captain ordered Allsup to pull

back, and they found themselves on the other side of the hedge. But hell was about to be unleashed:

Suddenly, the whole ground exploded. An 88 had fallen less than 10m to my left, propelling me against the hedge. The blast from the shell left me so shocked that it took me several seconds to regain my breath. I crouched down very low behind the hedge, with the left leg of the GI next to me resting on my right shoulder. A voice was complaining to my right, so I made an effort to try and see who it was. It was the man next to me; his torso had been ripped open from his shoulder down to his stomach, while his right leg had been torn off and was now around his neck! Nearby, the 'Arab' was moaning softly, his eyes rolling around in their sockets as he clutched the bloody stumps of his legs with both hands. Both of his feet had been blown off and he was trying to stop the bleeding by squeezing them. The sight of the guy sitting in his own guts, which had also splashed onto the hedge, and that of the Arab clutching his two torn off feet stunned me for a moment. I remember telling the Arab to hold on while I went for help, but as he swayed back and forth, I suddenly felt myself go. I remember being in front of these two dead men, but then nothing until Lieutenant Lawrence arrived and slapped me. Had it been a few minutes or a few hours? It was obviously only a few minutes, as when I was coming to, Al asked me what had happened. I told him that the 88 had hit us bang on and that the Arab had lost both of his legs and needed urgent help. Al nodded to one of his men, who went to check on the Arab. He soon came back to say that they were all dead, including the Arab, who had died trying to fire on the gun emplacement with his Colt 45.



1. L to R: Kemp, Coffey, Rhode, Mower and Gilbert removing the waterproof covering from the radio truck. (*Heimdal*)



2. The 'Signallers' at rest. Private Rhinehart waves at the camera, while the man in the centre carries an M13 knife on his belt. (*Heimdal*)



3. Stack and Shives make a quick meal under some camouflaged netting before going to bed. (*Heimdal*)



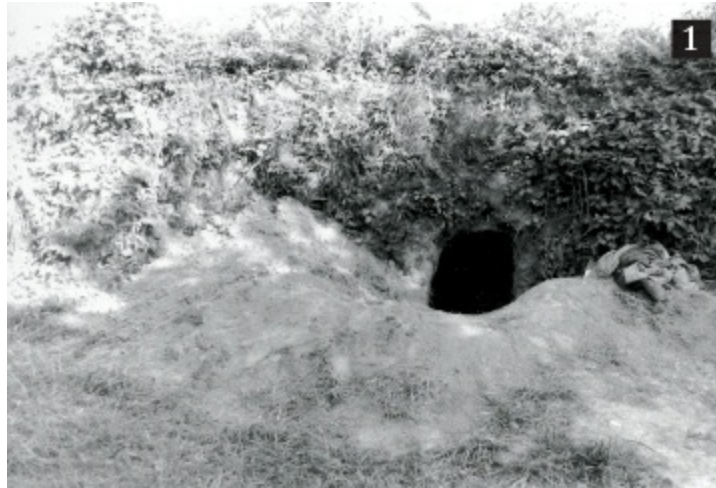
4. L to R: Whisset, Krueger, ?, Shives and Barnett resting. Their helmets can be seen on top of the crates. (*Heimdal*)



5. Gilbert and Cramer repairing radios near Couvains. (*Heimdal*)



6. Whisset, Krueger, Pucci and Dike pass the time playing cards. Corporal Whisset (far left) had painted his Tech 5 grades directly onto his shirt. He is wearing a Tool equipment TE-33 on his belt, which contains a clamp (TL-13) and a knife (TL-29), as well as a screwdriver and knife blade. (*Heimdal*)



1. This foxhole provoked the admiration of the 29th. The caption at the bottom declared 'It was a good foxhole, but full of insects.' (*Heimdal*)



2. A single foxhole dug by a Signaller. He has stretched his half canvas over the hole to protect him from any possible meteorological precipitation. (*Heimdal*)



3. The 29th Division approaching Saint-Lô. Cramer and Kemp have recovered some wood, in this case a fence gate, to reinforce their foxhole. (*Heimdal*)



4. This GI is comfortably installed in his wellbuilt shelter, which had been captured from the Germans - it even had electricity. Next to him is a pitcher containing cider. This image is not part of Tech 5 Barry's collection, but was taken by a war photographer. (*NA/Heimdal*)



5. Lieutenant William Besen in his tent. His case shows his serial and unit number (42960). Note his helmet showing the division's logo and his glasses. (*Heimdal*)



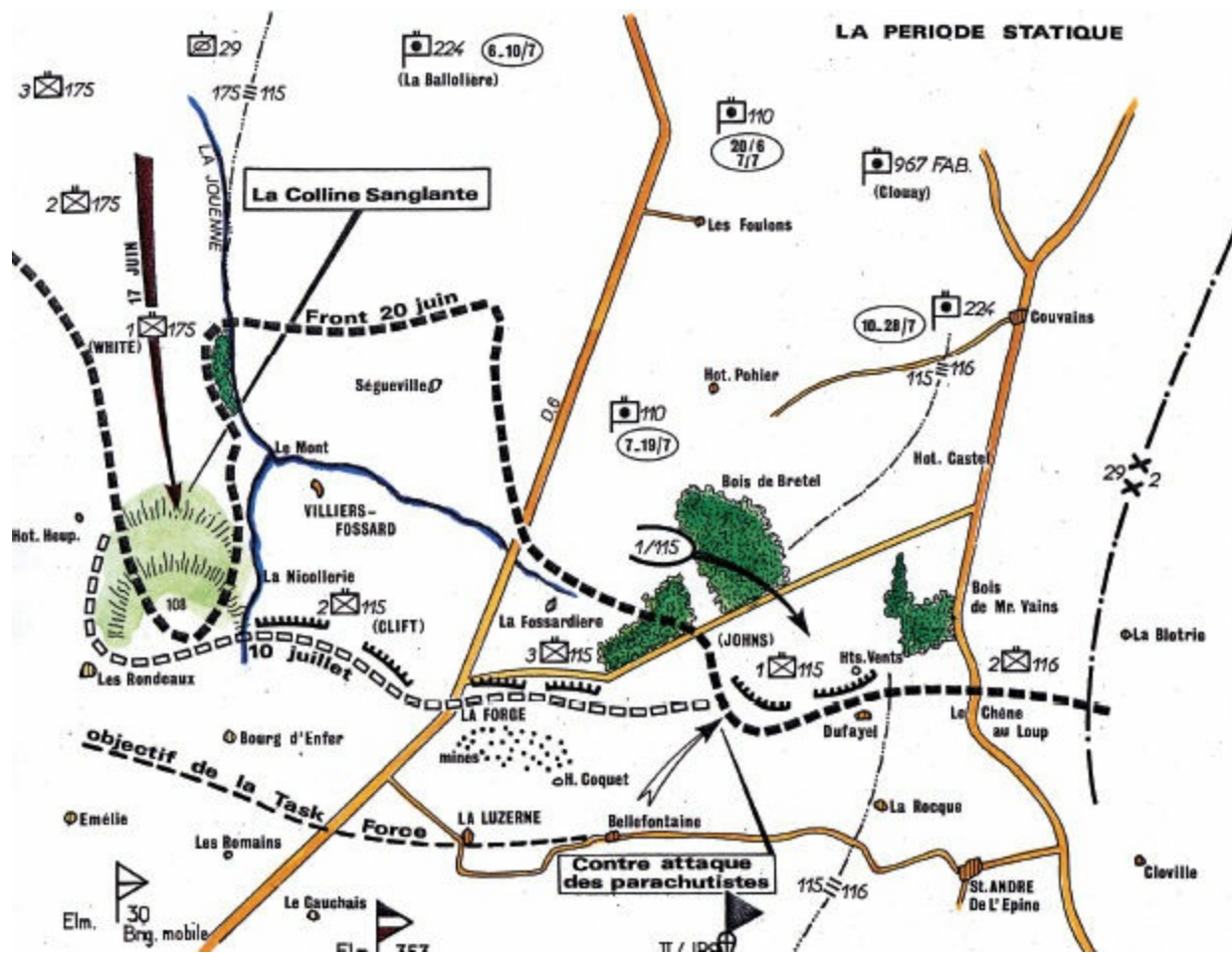
6. A soldier from 247th Engineer Combat Battalion washes a bowl at a farm pump. Note the thatched-roof of the building in the background. The 247th arrived in Normandy on 14 June and from 21 June were in the Cerisy sector, close to the Couvains sector where the 29th Signals Company were located. (*Heimdal*)



7. Lieutenant William Besen, 29th Signals Company, is surprised by his men while washing. (*Heimdal*)



8. L to R: Corporal Whisset, Barnett, Lieutenant William Besen, Lemberg, Lum and Pucci.
(Heimdal)



Map showing the American advance from 17 to 20 June. Note the forward advance of 1st Battalion, 175th, on Hill 108, where Lieutenant Allsup was wounded. You can also see the advance of Major Johns' (1/115) at Bois de Bretel and Hauts Vents. Couvains was taken on 13 June. (Heimdal)

The captain arrived and demanded an explanation, but did not give the order to pull back. Instead, the men were ordered to dig in, while the German guns remained at the Hôtel au Heup, a farm north of Mesnil-Rouxelin. The men then observed the antics of several planes. First, there was a Spitfire in difficulty, but luckily the pilot managed to eject in time. Then there were two P-47s, one of which crashed with its pilot still clearly onboard. The men watched the show while enjoying three bottles of wine from a local farm. When night came, MacDuff came to find Allsup and drive him a few hundred metres away to a big bush, where the company's assistant officer, Lieutenant Larry Lindstrom, a rather taciturn South Carolina man, delivered some more bad news. Joseph Mueller had been hit by an 88 earlier in the afternoon,

injuring his stomach and legs, and so Lindstrom was now taking command. He asked Allsup how many men he had, to which he replied around twenty-five. Lindstrom told him that that was more than any of the others, meaning that first platoon would lead the attack. They were to start from a place called Les Buteaux in the next ten minutes, before heading right to where 'C' Company was positioned on the right flank, and then attack the hill and destroy the 88.

'C' Company had already been under heavy artillery fire. As they made their way forward, Romano turned towards Allsup but before he could get the words out of his mouth:

Kampfgruppe Böhm

As Lieutenant Colonel Ziegelmann noted in his report to the US authorities, the Kampfgruppe Böhm (pronounced Beum) had arrived on the front line east of Saint-Lô on 16 June (OB West Ia Nr. 4648/44g.Kdos, 16.6.44, T311, R25 F7029598) and launched a counter-attack on 17 June (OB West Ia Nr. oläsligt g.Kdos, 17.6.44, T311, R25 F7029619). The Kampfgruppe consisted of Grenadier Regiment 943 (without its 1st Battalion) and Füsilier-Bataillon 353, under the command of Colonel Böhn.¹ The units were originally from the 353 ID, which had been established in Brittany on 5 November 1943 and by 1 March 1944 had a total of 14,123 men. Each regiment of grenadiers had two battalions: II./953, with fifty-one machine guns and twelve mortars and Füsilier Bataillon 353, with sixty-three machine guns and twelve mortars.² The Kampfgruppe was also attached to the 352 ID. More men arrived in the sector on foot but did not join up with the rest of the division until 27 June. They were positioned mainly to the west of Saint-Lô; the 353 ID being gradually 'broken up' and spread over several other sectors.

A bullet from a Kraut machine gun burst through his cheek, sending broken teeth and the tip of his tongue flying out in a spray of blood. Chico fell to his knees, spitting out more teeth and blood. There were two black marks on each side of his face marking the trajectory of the bullet. I leapt over to help him and called for a medic. Nobody came; the hallowed White was never there when we needed him! This bitch of an 88 and her sisters continued to rain fire down on us, and soon the noise from the Krauts was mingled with the poor guys from 'C'

Company who were being riddled in their foxholes. It looked like the Krauts had their targets precisely fixed on our lines and the whole area was beginning to look like some gigantic slaughterhouse.

Lieutenant Allsup was asked to lead a bayonet attack during the night, which he described as 'suicidal madness'. However, they were relieved to be finally ordered back to their foxholes at 2.30am, where they could at least finish the day with some wine.

Saturday 17 June

1/175 were at the front, to the west of Villiers-Fossard, near Hill 108 (see map), which would come to be called 'Bloody Hill' and it is in this hell where we find Lieutenant Allsup and his men. They hadn't slept much and had been woken at 5.30am. 'When Larry came to join me, I had just finished my coffee, or at least the dreadful liquid that passed as coffee that even pigs would refuse to drink', remembers Allsup. They were given orders to leave in five minutes and to follow behind Lieutenant Ferris, without any artillery support. Allsup knew from this that they were in for a rough time, as they moved up towards Hill 108, ten minutes behind Red Ferris:

We passed the hut where Chico had been hit and crossed to 'C' Company's former position, which was littered with body parts and corpses. We crossed over the next hedge and along another that led to a sunken road, which proved to be a death trap, as the German machine guns hidden behind it suddenly started firing. The bullets were so low that they clipped the top of the hedges along the road and we could hear the cries of the wounded all around us. I quickly deployed my men along the road and, although it was perfectly obvious, told them to keep their heads down. I couldn't see Red, but I could hear him calling for help. It's a terrible thing to hear a wounded man lying there screaming for someone to help him, but there's nothing you can do, you just leave them there in agony.

Allsup climbed up the bank. The road was now a veritable charnel house, with the wounded 'crawling between the corpses'. They were stuck in this sunken road, with bullets flying all around them. The report by Colonel Fritz

Ziegelmann, Chief of Staff of 352.ID shows, thanks to the Kampfgruppe Böhm pushing forward, the Germans had been able to counter-attack at the narrow point of the American advance, between Mesnil-Rouxelin and Villiers-Fossard, which itself had just been taken by another German counter-attack. Ziegelmann added in his daily report:



1. German binoculars with painted camouflage (left) and American binoculars (right). Recognising the difference saved Lieutenant Allsup's life. (*Private Collection/Heimdal*)



2. Crossroads outside Carillon pointing to Mesnil-Rouxelin (south) and Villiers-Fossard (east). (*GB*)



3. The hamlet today, seen from another angle. (GB)



4. The hamlet of Les Buteaux, photographed by Sam Allsup in 1983. He wrote: Captain Renner (Mueller) was wounded near the small pile of grass. The wine came from a ruined building, to the left of the farm, seen on the right of this photograph. (GB)

The Americans were tired, their morale was low and they had already suffered heavy losses. What's more, they certainly didn't expect a German counter-attack after their relatively easy successes over the previous days. The Americans had no knowledge about the arrival of the Kampfgruppe Böhm, which we found hard to believe as they had total control over all aerial reconnaissance. (MS. #B-438)

The massacre in the sunken road continued. Allsup tried to fall back and

retreat to where they had first started from:

One of Tommy's men was pointing a machine gun towards the hedge that we had originally come through. I managed to verify our position by working out that we'd first received Kraut fire on our right, but then saw a GI on the other side of the hedge that we had just crossed. He motioned for me to join him, but I refused and said he should come to me. He adjusted his binoculars and I instantly saw that they weren't as black as ours. 'Watch out!' I cried, 'Krauts on the other side of the hedge!' I gave orders for the machine gunner to clear the area and was firing my own Garand M-1 when one of the Krauts lined our gunner up. 'Lord! I'm hit!' he cried. The bullet had actually grazed him right on the edge of his scalp, under his helmet. It wasn't a severe wound, although the blood was dripping down into his eyes, and he was able to fall back and receive medical attention.

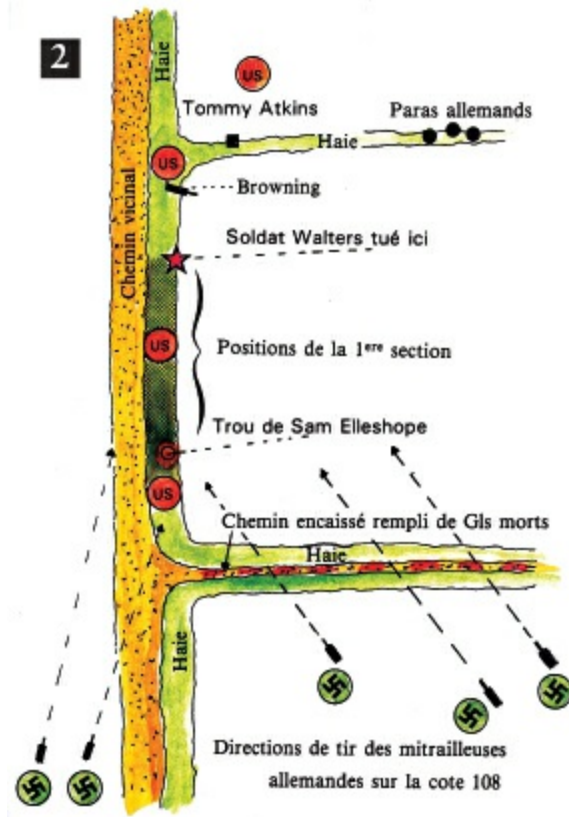
Other guys were now firing on the German positions, but the Krauts managed to slip into a neighbouring field. It was all happening so quickly. It has to be said that from a distance, the German paratroopers' helmets looked very similar to ours, which naturally led to a lot of confusion amongst the vegetation and hedgerows, often with fatal consequences. The soldier I saw with different binoculars wasn't American, but German! It was only the fact that his binoculars were a different colour that made me pull my trigger. The manual probably doesn't recommend shooting in these circumstances, but I wasn't exactly thinking about the manual at that point!

Soon after, a patrol led by Tommy Atkins came out of the hedge that the Krauts had previously disappeared through. I went over and asked if he'd seen any of them during his patrol. 'No, we didn't see anything,' he said. 'They had to fall back really quickly, Sam.' It was f***king staggering! Where the Hell had the enemy fire come from? As I went back to my shelter, Private Walters stopped me. He was a quiet sort; a model office worker, definitely not a warrior, not very tall and wore glasses. I never had a problem with him, but he was a damn good soldier. He never complained and could always be counted upon to pull his own weight.

‘Sam, can you get me out of here? This place is creeping me out!’
‘Walters’, I said, ‘If I do that then everyone will have the right to ask me the same thing. I’m right behind you.’



1. A packet of Lucky Strikes from 1944 and a zippo lighter. (*Private Collection/Heimdal*)



2. A map drawn from a sketch by Sam Allsup. (*Sam Elleshope*)

‘OK’, he replied. ‘I’ll stay, but I don’t like it!’

I continued along the hedge, uttering a few reassuring words to my men as I passed by them. You could still hear Red’s voice crying out, along with a few Krauts as well. I was twenty metres away from my friend and couldn’t help him! Suddenly, one, then another shell came whistling over the road and exploded right in front of me. Good God! My stomach was doing somersaults and I whispered to myself, ‘The bastards! Walters was right!’ I rushed along the hedge to see what had happened. I saw Walters lying on his stomach, his back riddled with holes and another guy covered with his own innards. ‘He’d asked me to transfer him! He knew! Oh, shit. Shit!’

I went back to my foxhole and collapsed. Night descended on us and soon the cries of the wounded became more poignant. We were bombarded sporadically by 88s and the riiip riiip of the MG42s rang out regularly. Our own artillery was practically non-existent in this area. If possible, this seemed to encourage the Krauts even more as

they had almost nothing to fear. We had our bayonets fixed because we knew that if anything did come out of the hedges, we would have to engage in hand-to-hand combat and we were ready for that! For us, 17 June had been long and painful and the night would be just as long and sleepless.

That same day, a little further east, two battalions of the 115th advanced south from Couvains, which had been captured on 13 June, towards the Bois de Bretel. Major Johns and 1/115 were engaged to the north of La Fossardière and had met strong resistance from the advancing Kampfgruppe Böhm. Further west, Kampfgruppe Alpers (FJR6) had also suffered losses: six in total, five wounded and one killed. The German paratroopers had opened fire in the morning, but by noon the heat had become intolerable and their binoculars became unusable due to the light reflecting off them.

An American platoon suddenly attacked and launched grenades through the thickets. Corporal Meier ordered the men of 1 Company to throw them back. Lieutenant Gebel set up an MG42 in a small barn where it could sweep the entire area and under the orders of Sergeant Eckert, who had won the Iron Cross First Class, mortars were installed and the attackers swiftly retreated. Gaps were cut into the embankments for observation and these 'emergency exits' were closed up at night with barbed wire. A wounded American soldier was discovered in one of these 'emergency exits', his face covered in blood and missing half of his chin. Two *Sanis* (medics) quickly arrived to take care of him. He was trembling with fear and his teeth fell out when he tried to talk. An interpreter immediately tried to reassure him. The American had a badge on the top of his left shoulder of an Indian head, which showed that he belonged to the 2nd Infantry Division. These German paratroopers also suffered losses: Corporal Kniggler of 3/9 was killed by a shell burst; Corporal Ludwig (8/9) suffered two head injuries, while paratrooper Hasitschka and Corporal (1st class) Trösch from the General Staff were also injured.

Sunday 18 June

Today, the German paratroopers of the KG Alpers would suffer only one casualty: Corporal Werber, of 1/9, who was killed by a shell. The company changed its position in the afternoon, settling in Richebourg, 2km north of

Saint-Germaind'Elle. Here they managed to set up a proper 'bathing station', by partly damming up a creek and creating a kind of swimming pool, allowing them to wash at night. However, for the past two nights the paratroopers had been watching the curious, noisy rockets that left behind a stream of flames pass overhead, unaware that they were witnessing Hitler's 'secret weapon', the V1. As well as the rocket, they also saw a German Ju88 drop its bombs on the Americans below.

To the west, the battle was still raging on Hill 108. As dawn broke, Lieutenant Allsup woke up, 'ready to face a new day in Hell'. The Germans continued to fire regularly at them, while Allsup deplored the lack of mortar support, half-tracks and artillery: 'We'd suffered big losses and had plenty successes, and what was the result? Nothing but a big wedge of French hedgerow.' As Lieutenant Lindstrom ordered them to quit their positions along the road, the men could no longer hear Red Ferris. Was he dead, or just unconscious? Allsup ordered them to collect as many of the wounded as possible and so they returned to the road to look for survivors:

When we left our positions, I saw Pop leaning against the embankment at the entrance to the road. One of the men told me that he'd been hit by an 88, but that he would be alright so long as we could get him to an aid station. I turned around and saw Staff Sergeant Murphy on the ground, floundering in a pool of his own blood. He had been hit in the neck and although he was pressing a bandage to the wound, it was beginning to leak and the blood was pouring out. I saw one of the men stood at the entrance to the road and signalled to him to come help me. Between the two of us we managed to dress the wound without disturbing it too much. Luckily, the bullet had missed the carotid and jugular arteries and we hoped that by placing ourselves on either side of Murphy, the bastard Krauts would hold their fire. I quickly recited an 'Ave Maria', and no doubt the others prayed too because the enemy fire managed to stop long enough for us to cross the road and throw ourselves into the field opposite.

The hedge that bordered this new field provided protection for both the wounded and non-wounded Americans. The firing resumed and two US

machine gunners collapsed as they crossed the open terrain. One soldier climbed up to the top of the hedge, but Allsup shouted at him to get down unless he wanted to get blown up. 'He smiled at me and answered with an indifferent "OK", just as a bullet hit him right in the head. There was a squirt of blood and brain from his right temple, then the exact same on the left and he slipped to the bottom of the hedge. He was dead before he hit the ground. The other guys buried their faces into the grass as if their armchairs had been whipped out from under them. It was a big mistake not to take this war seriously.'

Allsup moved into the next field and took stock with Stevens: there were only nineteen able-bodied men in his platoon. Out of seven officers in the company, only Lindstrom, Lawrence (newly arrived), Atkins and himself survived. Allsup then saw a wounded sergeant near a tree stump who had been hit by shrapnel. In a great deal of pain, the sergeant called out to him:

I stooped down and gave him two sulphonamide capsules, which he swallowed using water from his canteen. I could see that his wounds were in his groin and the tops of his thighs, but that his stomach was alright, which meant I could give him a drink without killing him! Although he was still suffering a lot, the bleeding seemed to stabilize. He reached into his jacket pocket, pulled out a few faded Lucky Strikes and offered me one. I took out my zippo and lit the cigarettes. Bursting with laughter, the sergeant said 'I see you ran out of fuel too and had to use Calvados!'

'Yeah', I replied, 'It's like trying to find a truck with some petrol in it - it's like pulling hen's teeth! Luckily, the Frenchies store barrels of "zippo juice" (Calvados). It's practical, right? You can drink a shot and use your lighter at the same time!' The sergeant and I had a good laugh about this.

Meanwhile, Lieutenant Colonel White had moved to the other end of the field with his radio operator, in an attempt to request more ammunition and artillery support. However, the Germans heard the radio call and according to Allsup: 'Every time the radio operator opened his mouth, an avalanche of shells rained down on us.' The colonel had to move. The sergeant told Allsup

that two soldiers had dug a double foxhole on the right and had gone off to find more ammunition. A wounded man stood by a tree called out, just as a bright light exploded. The tree sheltered him from the main blast and they realised that the shell had landed right on the foxhole dug by the two soldiers. There were cries all around from other soldiers, interspersed with the sound of exploding shells. Allsup found Lieutenant Lawrence in a foxhole a few feet away and realised that they were stranded between the German lines and more powerful artillery coming from the east of Villiers-Fossard; probably a Russian 120mm gun. Stevens was by a fence near the farm at Hôtel au Heup, and told Allsup that Lindstrom had been hit by a shell and killed instantly. With that, Allsup returned to his own foxhole. They were almost completely out of ammunition.

As night began to fall, the colonel managed to contact the 224th Field Artillery Battalion, and the men finally heard the glorious sound of the 105mm shells passing over their heads towards the German lines. 'A tremendous noise rose from the survivors on Hill 108, as the whole area erupted. The Krauts were running about in the open and they were in Hell. It was a magnificent sight! I learned later that they'd launched an attack, just before the start of the barrage. We'd certainly shown them something!' The colonel, who had been slightly injured, had been told to attack the Germans before the barrage, but had refused. 'As night fell, it was accompanied by the mournful cries of the wounded and the wailing of those in agony. It was every man for himself now. The stretcher-bearers had picked up as many of the recoverable wounded as they could, while the dead were simply piled up.'

Lieutenant Allsup managed to fall asleep, but then woke up again because everything was far too quiet:

All I can remember is hearing a riiip-bang, then the feeling of being thrown against my rifle and an immense amount of pain in my right shoulder. I'd been hit! The shell had exploded in the hole that had been dug by those two GIs. A white-hot fragment had lodged in my right arm, sending successive waves of nausea through my body. I could move my hands and fingers, but not the arm itself. The warm blood seeped through my 'longjohn' jersey and shirt, as the 88 continued to pound our position, and the cries of the more seriously wounded men

filled the air. I was expecting a massive attack by the Krauts, but it didn't come. Instead, two GIs jumped up near my foxhole. As one of them started to say something, two 88s came whistling towards our position. He asked me if I'd been hit and I told them to get away. They both flung themselves on top of me as more 88s rained down on the battalion. He told me they were from 'L' Company and that some stupid bastard had let it slip that we had no ammo, which the Krauts had heard and now they had been sent into 'this f***king mess' to help. 'Who are you?' he asked me.

'I'm Lieutenant Allsup, from A Company and I'm bleeding like a pig!'

'Shit, sorry to have thrown all that at you, Lieutenant.'

'Don't worry boys. The madder you are the funnier it is!'

The bombardment quietened down a bit, so I asked one of the boys if he would take a look at my shoulder. I rolled over a little so that I could reach my dagger, and asked him to cut my shirt and make a bandage. As I took my sulphonamide capsules, the soldier exclaimed, 'Oh God, Lieutenant. It's really bad and I can't stand the sight of blood!' So I told him that he'd picked the wrong place to come on his holiday! The youngest of the two dressed my wound as best he could and then left me to follow his friend who had since moved on. I called out for Al Lawrence to find out what was going on, only to hear a voice reply that Al had been hit in his foxhole, along with another soldier. I escaped from my shelter and crawled over to where they were: their bodies were so mutilated it looked like someone had slashed them with an axe. The two soldiers in the foxhole next to mine had also been pulverized. The shell had obviously landed in their hole and exploded, killing Lawrence and his room mate and wounding me. A high return for a single shell!

The guys from 'L' Company were now spreading through the area, finally bringing us the long-awaited reinforcements. As for me, my value as a soldier and an officer was now reduced to nothing. My haemorrhage had not stopped and from what I could see, the bleeding hadn't even slowed down. If there was anything an infantryman could

learn from all this, it was that when being forced to live outdoors like an animal and having to depend on others, he had just one friend above all: his gun and his bayonet.

Allsup sat down in the bottom of his foxhole to regain his strength; his right shoulder burning and sticky with blood. He passed out for a minute or two, then was called for by the new commander of 'A' Company, who told him to go back to the aid station and get his wound seen to. Allsup wished him luck, upset that he could not stay and help.

The man was younger than me, and I was only twenty-two! I staggered in the direction of the farm like a drunkard, trying to avoid bumping into the corpses or various scattered limbs that littered the road. In a moment of lucidity, I burst out laughing when I remembered the poor GI who had told me that he couldn't stand the sight of blood. Since he'd helped me at 4.30 that morning, he must have seen enough blood to be baptised in as a result of all this butchery. The world seemed to whirl around me as I crossed the 300m that separated me from the farm. Once I got there, I fell on the edge of a rabbit hutch near the main building. My poor head was swimming and I must have been hallucinating, because I remember thinking that some logs I had seen on a woodpile would provide me with enough protection from an 88 if I attached them to my feet!

A medic arrived and looked at my wound more closely, before squeezing the bandage and giving me a shot of morphine. In a few minutes, a delicious feeling of warmth swept over me and I felt myself floating on air. It wasn't like when you're drunk, because I was perfectly aware of everything around me, but I was very relaxed. It was a strange sensation. While I was lying by the hutch, the whole company walked up in front of me: a captain followed by just twelve GIs. One of the guys was none other than Cas, who called out, 'Hey lieutenant! Take care of yourself and I hope we'll see you again one day!' The young captain added his own good luck wishes, but this was to be the last time I saw any of them. Of 212 officers, non-coms and soldiers there were only 12 survivors. However, we were not

irreplaceable...

And so, like many others in his battalion, John Samuel Allsup fell on Hill 108. After his convalescence, he didn't rejoin 1/175 but the division's military police in the Brest area. Later, while serving in Nancy, he would meet his future wife. His ties with France, along with his wife who acted as his interpreter, prompted him to return to the terrible places where he had lost so many of his men, even though the carnage he had suffered through had deeply affected him. His memoirs were published in 1985, when he was sixty-three and in fragile health. He was still haunted by the sound of the 88s and could still differentiate their whistle from that of the other shells. His memoirs remain an excellent testimony and one of the best on the 29th Division and the fighting that took place in the Saint-Lô area. While the majority of testimonies written after the war are watered down or deliberately censored so as not to shock the reader, Allsup's are characterised by their realism and truth. Allsup's memoir was brutal - like the war - and because he was critical of some of his superiors, he preferred to change most of the names involved. They have been restored here, to the best of our ability, in order to maintain historical accuracy.

Thus, Al Renner is actually Captain Joseph E. Mueller, from Baltimore, the commander of 'A' Company, 1st Battalion, 175th Infantry Regiment (1/175). The regiment was commanded by Colonel Paul R. Goode (Robert Harkins in Allsup's memoirs), who was captured on 13 June and replaced by his Executive-Officer, Lieutenant Colonel Alexander George (Redford Williams). He was wounded on 17 June (although Allsup said 15 June) and was replaced by Lieutenant Colonel William Purnell, who was previously the division's Deputy Chief of Staff, before Colonel Olie W. Reed took over from 23 June to 30 July. Lieutenant Colonel White (Blanding in Allsup's memoirs), commanded 1st Battalion (1/175) and was wounded on 17 June and temporarily replaced by Major Miles Shorey (commander of 'D' Company) until 26 June, before being taken over by Lieutenant Colonel William Terry.

After the two days of terrible fighting on Hill 108, 1/175 advanced east of the Vire and headed towards La Meauffe, where it met with fierce German resistance. Officially, Lieutenant Colonel Alex George was captured while on

patrol on 17 June, although Allsup places it two days earlier. This is more precise as the men were already at Hill 108 by 17 June. The regiment's new commander, Alex George, was seriously wounded in the face and after being evacuated, was replaced by Lieutenant Colonel William Purnell. According to Allsup, the line of advance towards Hill 108 took place at Les Buteaux (east of Carillon). 1st Battalion was stopped by a heavy machine gun fire at 10.40am, while 2nd Battalion halted a German counter-attack and 3rd Battalion captured La Meauffe shortly after noon. By evening, 1/175 was 600m away from its objective and its commander, Lieutenant Colonel White, sent a patrol ahead to locate the German positions.

They discovered that the Germans had dug in along the hedges 200m ahead, and so Lieutenant Colonel Purnell decided to launch an attack. This surprised the Germans, who retreated back into the night and thus allowed their front line to be breached. 1st Battalion continued forward and captured an 88, a 105mm and 20mm gun and fifteen prisoners. The order was given to stop at 11pm; it was pitch black and they were in the middle of the hedgerows. 'B' Company was already close to Hill 108 and so dug in, but on 18 June, the Germans counter-attacked Hill 108 and the surrounding area with 88s, 105s and mortars, forcing 'B' Company to fall back. Private Russell Woodward was left with his machine gun to cover their retreat. His body would later be found riddled with bullets and he was posthumously awarded the DSC. The mortar fire had cut the telephone wires, meaning there was no communication with those in the rear.

At 5pm, the Germans counter-attacked again, this time accompanied by a Panzer and two half-tracks. However, as Allsup's memoirs state, Lieutenant Colonel White's radio had now been repaired and the 24th Field Artillery Battalion had intervened with its 105mm (at about 4pm), blocking the German advance. On 19 June, 3/175 came to relieve the bloodied and exhausted men on Hill 108 and a new German attack was repulsed again. The day before, the 175th had suffered 334 casualties, with Hill 108 now being called the 'Bloody Hill' or 'Purple Heart Hill', after the medal awarded to American soldiers who were wounded in combat. Lieutenant Colonel White was also among the casualties, and was replaced by Major Miles Shorey until 26 June.

1st Battalion, 175th Infantry Regiment would receive a citation for its efforts on 17 and 18 June:

At 06.00hrs on 16 June, 1st Battalion, 175th Infantry Regiment, set out to attack Hill 108, with the enemy's stronghold as its objective. With a temerity and mastery in combat, 1st Battalion pushed the enemy back from its strategic position. The next day (17 June) at dawn, now strongly reinforced (by KG Böhm), the enemy counter-attacked with a savagery never before experienced on the ground. For more than eight hours, 1st Battalion displayed self-control and courage that were examples to all, and fought against a formidable enemy position, yard by yard, without ever yielding ground, in spite of the incessant bombardment of artillery and enemy fire. Helping the wounded was often perilous and it was not uncommon to see, on several occasions, medics deliberately exposing themselves to enemy fire in order to treat those in need.

Towards the middle of the afternoon, thanks to superior numbers, the enemy managed to get through to the battalion commander's CP and ordered him to surrender. The reply to this ultimatum was returned by the wounded commander in such a way that cannot be specified here (according to Allsup it was 'Go f**k yourself!'). His men opened a terribly accurate and murderous fire, which succeeded in pushing the enemy back against the hill, while suffering tremendous losses.

Around 16.00hrs, communications with the regiment were re-established, making it possible to set up an artillery barrage on enemy lines. By refusing to yield and surrender 'Purple Heart Hill', so named by the brave soldiers who fought for it, the 1st Battalion of the 175th Infantry Regiment showed the up-most courage, skill in combat and force of character that was and will remain an example and inspiration for all troops fighting in this sector.

At present, these places are not marked by any historical or commemorative monuments.

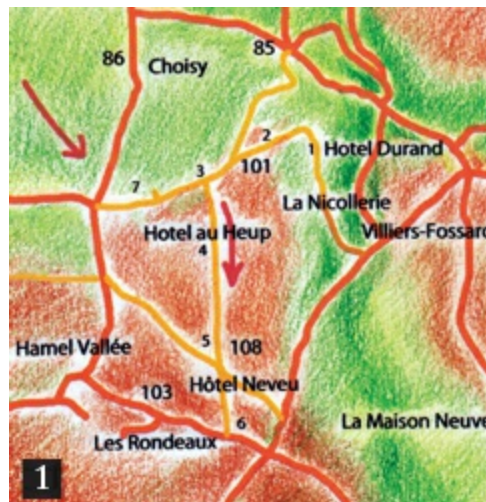


1 & 3. A fence and hedge at the Hôtel au Heup means you no longer get the same view as Sam Allsup, but the buildings to the north of the small road are still recognisable. (GB)



2. Photograph taken by Sam Allsup in 1983 at the Hôtel au Heup. He wrote: 'I was leaning against a hutch by the log pile when the whole company went past me. There were only twelve men and the new captain. It was 19 June.' (*JSA/ Heimdal*)

Hill 108



1. The area around Hill 108, between Villiers-Fossard (to the east) and Le Mesnil-Rouxelin (to the west). The rugged terrain is particularly marked by a deep valley west of Villiers-Fossard (in the small hamlets of La Nicollerie and Hôtel Durand). The terrain regularly climbs from the north (Hills 88 and 85) to the south (Hill 108). The sectors of Les Buteaux and Carillon were very close to each other, as can be seen on the map. The arrows around Hôtel au Heup (No.7) show the axis of A Company's attack (including Lieutenant Allsup's platoon), from Les Buteaux (south-east of La Meauffe and east of Carillon) towards Hill 108. The hill was fiercely defended by the Germans, who counter-attacked the flanks of the American advance by moving the Kampfgruppe Böhm up in a line on the east, and used elements of the 352.ID to the west. The terrain was crisscrossed by a dense network of hedges, with the roads (marked in orange) framing the area. The road network is complemented by an even denser network of 'sunken' roads (yellow). On a north-south

axis, from Hôtel au Heup to Hill 108 (3 to 6), these sunken roads are relatively wide. In contrast, to the east (No.1 and 2) and across the middle (No.5), the sunken roads are little more than ditches that make it impossible for two men to advance side by side. It is this last 'ditch' where 1/175 would experience real carnage. This now-idyllic landscape is soaked in history and there deserves to be explanatory panels along these paths (in yellow), commemorating what took place here. (*Heimdal*)



2. To the east of the hill (No.1 on the map), a sunken road passable by a single man provided an effective communication network for the Germans to attack the flanks of the American 1/175. This is where the men of Kampfgruppe Böhm were positioned. (*GB*)





3 & 4. Evidence of artillery fire can still be found along this tragic road. *(GB)*



5. The path becomes wider as you continue along the east-west axis (no.2 on the map) *(GB)*



6. At the crossroads (No.3) the path to the left climbs to Hill 108, while that on the right leads to Hôtel au Heup. (GB)



7. The sunken road leading to Hill 108. (GB)



8. The view from Hill 108. Villiers-Fossard is to the right, and the central road (No.4) is on

the left. (GB)



9. The sunken road leading east-west at the foot of Hill 108 (left of No.5), where 1/175 would suffer tragic losses. The belongings of men from 1st Battalion 'A', 'B' and 'C' companies have been discovered in this area. (GB)

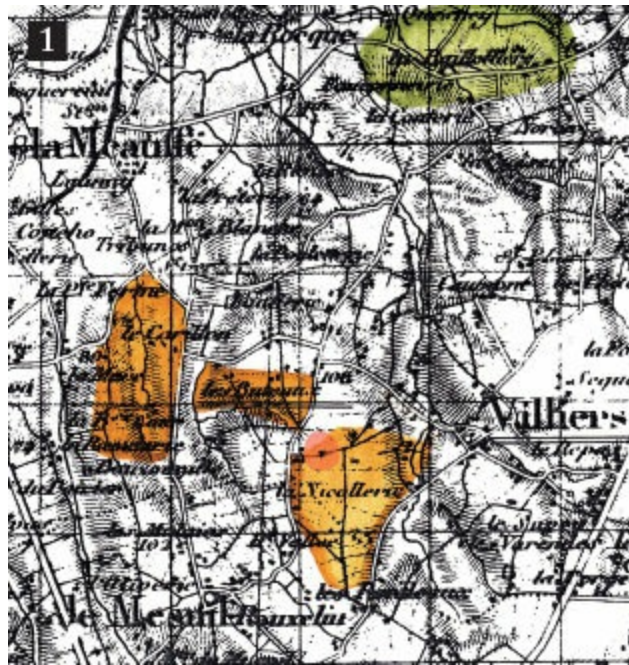


10. This photograph shows German soldiers, probably from 352.ID, progressing up a sunken road similar to that in image 5. It should be noted that the area around Hill 108 was

not controlled by paratroopers (nor the Waffen-SS), as described by Sam Allsup in his memoirs. Instead it was held by soldiers of the German Army (Heer). (BA 1011/584/2152/24.)

Le Carillon

The Germans held a strong position north of Villiers-Fossard, and were able to hold off the American advance for a month before the final attack on Saint-Lô, which was a keystone in the German frontline, to the north of the town. As with Hill 108, the position was on higher ground and provided an excellent panorama to the north, in the direction of the approaching Americans. The position was also arranged at the top of a ring road. To the north, the road comes westward from Pont-Hébert and La Meauffe to the north-west. Further ahead, the D54 links La Meauffe to Saint-Clairsur-Elle. To the south, on the right, the road leads to Mensil-Rouxelin and again to La Meauffe to the north. Holding this position therefore meant controlling the entire road network between Pont-Hébert and Villiers-Fossard.



1. The general situation around Carillon from a period German map, provided by Sam Allsup. Coloured in are the hamlet of Les Buteaux, from where the American 1/175 and Lieutenant Allsup launched their attack on Hill 108, and Hôtel au Heup. In the north is La Ballolière, from where the 105mm guns of the 110th Field Artillery Battalion fired on Hill 108, on 18 June. (Heimdal)



2. Plan of the positions around Carillon, drawn from an American map, showing how the German positions were set up on three lines. To the north: swamps, mines and a line of outposts. The squares indicate shelters with trenches, firing positions and machine guns (several of them). There are also about ten anti-tank guns and mortar positions. (Heimdal)



3. View of the sunken road (on average about 1.6m deep) that descends west, from the small wood down to the crossroads. A deep ditch on the right, before the embankment, provides another line of shelter, as the third defensive line then turns eastwards. (GB)



4. General view from the top of the position, taken at the start of the road (on the bottom right of the map). In the foreground can be seen the reconstructed farm buildings at La Basse Cours, which were destroyed in 1944. (*Heimdal*)



5. An anti-tank gun's position at the top of the small wood, looking towards La Basse Cours. (*GB*)



6. A beautiful building from the late Middle Ages that still exists at La Basse Cours. (*GB*)



7. Along the same road, a machine gun position located at 'La Mare' (see map). This was the second defensive line, in case of retreat. (GB)



8. The hamlet of Carillon was also destroyed; the farmers and their families had been evacuated and returned to find their homes in ruins. This farm belonged to the Laurence family and only this large, beautiful building (dating back to the sixteenth century) was rebuilt. The building lies on the north of the road, furthest west on the 1944 map. (GB)



9. The machine gun's position to the left of the anti-tank gun, on the other side of the

hedge, looking north-east.



10. The crossroads at the end of the road: the one the right leads to La Meauffe, the left leads to Pont-Hébert. There were three anti-tank guns at this crossroads and eight *Panzerschreck* nearby! (GB)



11. A beautiful eighteenth-century house at La Raoulerie, which served as the German CP. (GB)



12. A remarkable American photograph showing a trench and firing post in the hedgerows around Carillon. (*A.Pipet/Heimdal*)



1. Rudi Frühbeisser, who wrote the history of the FJR9, was only seventeen when he arrived on the Normandy front. This photograph was taken on his eighteenth birthday, 22 June 1944, at Cloville. It was to prove a day of rest, but Frühbeisser was injured a week later. (*RF*)



2. A *Sumpftarnmuster* jump jacket. (*Hermann Historica*)



3. The command post of Captain Hake, 14 Company, FJR9 (14./9). (*RF*)



4. Corporal Hans Teichmann of 10 Company (10./9). He had been a comrade of Rudi Frühbeisser at jump school, in Dreux. *(RF)*



5. Jan Moelert of 1 Company (1./9) destroyed several American tanks.



6. Despite the determination and courage of this young machine gunner, the FJR9 would be bled dry at Saint-Lô. (RF)



7. The FJR9 command post on the Bayeux/ Saint-Lô road, south-east of Hill 192. (RF)



These US infantrymen have reinforced their foxholes with bundles of sticks, which provided good protection against any shrapnel. One of the soldiers is sleeping beside two ration boxes, with 'US Army Field ration - Type C' written on them. These oneday combat ration packs were comprised of six boxes of food, and this particular case would have contained eight packs (fortyeight boxes).

The other soldier is eating his food from his bowl. The two men are probably observers, as evidenced by the binocular case. (*US Army*)



The two German armoured vehicles on the right-hand side of the road were destroyed by the 29th Division near Saint-Clair-sur-Elle. The vehicles were comprised of Pak75 guns mounted on the chassis of a Czech tank. The jeep of Lieutenant Jones can be seen on the left. (*E.G. Jones/A.Pipet/Heimdal*)

5.

The Static Period

The terrible fighting at Hill 108 marked the end of the American advance towards Saint-Lô, which was, in fact, only 5km away. All units from the 29th Division were ordered to hold their defensive positions in light of the number of losses suffered and the rise in the number of German reinforcements. The American front line now formed an 'M' shape, with the middle point pointing towards Hill 108.

However, the advance of the 119th IR on the right flank, east of the Vire, somewhat relieved the fragile position of the hard-hit 175th. An attack was launched at the centre in an area where the Germans had already pulled back some of their troops. The 115th IR, which was in reserve, advanced to take up position on the main road between Isigny and Saint-Lô, between the 175th (to the west) and the 116th (to the east), with the objective of capturing the German salient of Villiers-Fossard. The attack was led by 1st and 3rd Battalions, 115th IR, with a battalion on each side of the road, although 1st Battalion only managed to advance 200m, in the direction of La Fossardière. On 20 June, a three-man patrol was sent to Villiers-Fossard, east of Hill 108, but only one man returned... However, on 19 June a terrible summer storm had drastically affected the shipment of supplies, and now everything, including ammunition, had to be rationed. The storm would last until 23 June and thus reduce the extent of Allied operations on the Normandy Front. In the British sector, to the east, the Odon offensive was delayed, while in the west, Bradley decided to defer his offensive south of Cotentin and Saint-Lô in favour of Collins' VII Corps attack on Cherbourg. As Albert Pipet notes, 'The consequences of the storm were so serious that one questioned the possibility of remaining on the continent.'¹ General Bradley, who commanded all US ground troops in Normandy, wanted to make Cherbourg

his main priority, and feared that General Gerhardt might break the back of the 29th Division if he continued to press on towards Saint-Lô. General Corlett's XIX Corps had taken control of the 29th and 30th Divisions on 14 June, and had taken up position in the west, between the 29th and the Vire, at the Vire-Taute canal. Time was now needed therefore to reinforce the 29th Division's right flank. In the east, V Corps was made up of the 2nd Infantry Division (at Cerisy) and the 1st Infantry Division (at Caumont).



Lieutenant E.G. Jones of 29th Cavalry Reconnaissance Troop aboard and LCT 512 on the morning of 6 June 1944. The insignia of the 29th Division and his rank can be seen on his helmet. (*A.Pipet/Heimdal*)



Helmet worn by a colonel from XIX Corps, with his rank and unit insignia clearly visible.

The 29th and 30th Divisions, followed later by the 35th Division, came under the control of XIX Corps on 14 June. (*Private Collection*)

Maurice Jeanne, who was born on 31 March 1929, lived in Cerisy-la-Forêt:

About thirty of us, including my father and my two older brothers, were brought into Couvains in Dodge 4x4s. Bodies of American and German soldiers littered the ground and we were ordered to collect the dead GIs and load them onto the GMC trucks. We were also told not to remove anything from their bodies. I came across two corpses; an American and a German. They were both facing each other, separated by a barbed wire fence, and each with a dagger in his hand. After a while I noticed that they had both been shot in the back and couldn't understand how they had died. Which camp had the bullets come from? Once we had loaded the trucks, they set off for the cemetery at Colleville-sur-Mer. The smell was unbearable in the heat. On our way back we came across a horse-drawn German convoy in a ditch. We took the horse meat and some sacks of sugar and flour to make bread. The GMCs continued to pass through the village on the way to the cemetery, with a foul liquid oozing from the sides of the trucks.

By 20 June, the 115th held defensive positions on either side of the Isigny/Saint-Lô road. From west to east: 3/115 was near Ségueville, 2/115 towards La Fossardière and the 115th by the Bois de Bretel wood. At 5.30am in the cold rain of 21 June, two battalions from the 115th launched an attack. 'K' and 'L' Companies from 3rd Battalion set off behind an artillery barrage laid down by the 110th FAB and the 81st Chemical Mortar Battalion, with armoured support supplied by seven tanks from the 747th Tank Battalion, after sappers from the 121st Engineers had already breached holes in the hedgerows for them to pass through. However, the Germans resisted and still held on to some of the buildings: a first tank was destroyed by an anti-tank shell, and a second destroyed as it attempted to move past the wreckage. Lieutenant Colonel Stuart Fries, commander of the 747th Tank Battalion, tried to provide the tanks with new objectives, but everything was in chaos. The infantry found themselves alone, with no armoured support and so had to resort to using their own weapons. This resulted in heavy casualties for both

‘K’ and ‘L’ Companies as the German mortars now entered the fray. The attack was a failure.



A helmet from the 29th Division found at Couvains, near the Bois de Bretel, shown after cleaning. (*JLC*)



The white bands on the back show that it belonged to a noncommissioned officer. (*JLC*)



Major Johns (second from right) at the head of the 'Big Red Team', 1st Battalion, 115th IR. (*A.Pipet/Heimdal*)



Couvains was captured by the 29th Division on 14 June. Various signs (including a plan of operations and commemorative plaques) near the restored church recall the fighting that

took place. (EG/Heimdal)

At La Fossardière, 1/115 faced a determined German resistance in the woods and after fending off a counter-attack, entrenched itself for the evening. During the attack, Lieutenant Pollarine, the liaison officer with the 110th FAB, ordered the guns to fire through the stone and brick buildings, as well as the woodland, before crawling up to the German positions and reporting back his observations using his walkie-talkie. Unfortunately, he was killed 100 metres away from his position by a burst of sub-machine gun fire, and would later receive a posthumous DSC. Following these two failures, the two battalions were ordered to return to their original positions, marking the end of any attempt to reduce the German salient.



Brigadier General Cota organised the combat training for the 29th Division in the area around Couvains in order to adapt to the conditions of the terrain.

However, General Bradley's orders to put the attack on Saint-Lô on hold were well received. He also wanted to take advantage of this break in order to review the current methods of combat. The Germans had adapted remarkably well to the landscape; transforming the hedgerows into a network of successive defensive lines. Lieutenant Edward G. Jones was the leader of 2nd Platoon, 29th Cavalry Reconnaissance Troop. The CRT were equipped with jeeps (quickly furnished with wire-cutters at the front) and M8 machine guns and were led by Captain William H. Putenney. Jones recalls that:

For weeks and months we were to witness all the horrors of war and in this time there were actually more American than German fatalities. My work as a reconnaissance officer meant that I had to know every detail about the enemy in order to defeat him. I knew what ammunition they used, including the wooden practice bullets, the Panzerfaust and even the communication networks. I learned to read newspapers, captured documents, letters, anything that belonged to the enemy. My role as a platoon leader was to guide patrols and place outposts, while at night we went out on foot to take prisoners.

From the very beginning we had had difficulty advancing through the hedgerows, because the Germans used every method they knew to slow us down, resulting in heavy losses in all the units, including officers. A captain who commanded a company in the morning might be in charge of a battalion by nightfall. On the night of 17-18 June, elements of the 29th Cavalry Reconnaissance Troop, fighting as infantry, took up positions on the right flank of the 29th Division to watch over the Vire Valley, south of La Meauffe. The command post was set up at a farm in Fresnes. Three days earlier, Lieutenant Allan Walker, having received a bullet in the thigh and being only half-conscious, had crashed his Piper Cub in a field nearby. The next day, the enemy launched an artillery bombardment that destroyed all of the telephone lines. This area was very dangerous because on the other side of the Vire (to the west), the enemy was watching everything we did. What's more, on our left (east), the Germans had set up a vast minefield in the open country around a farm called Le Carillon, making it one of the most formidable strongholds on the whole front.

On the night of 21-22 June, I led my men across 'E' company's lines (175th) around 9pm. There were telephone wires hanging all over the roads, so we continued on quietly. As we reached a hedge corner I suddenly heard a click and ordered everyone to get down. We all flung ourselves into the ditch as bullets and grenades rained down on us in the night. The firing stopped after about five minutes and I was terrified of being captured. My legs were hurting and I gave the order to turn back. We managed to avoid several houses filled with Germans

when I suddenly heard a voice cry out, ‘Is that you, Jones?’ It was my corporal, Flexer. We arrived back at the CP at 4am; my legs still in a great deal of pain. I made my report and then went to the infirmary where I was told that I had various bits of shrapnel in my legs, but it was nothing too serious.

On 22 June I was summoned to 29th Division’s HQ along with three other platoon leaders. Generals Gerhardt and Hodges (Bradley’s deputy) congratulated me and awarded me my purple heart for the wounds to my legs. That same day, a surgeon was ready to remove the shrapnel shards, but as just as he spoke about sending me back to England, I ran out of the operating tent and into a jeep, which was waiting to take the men from my platoon to La Meauffe.²



The landscape south of Couvains, looking west. Beyond the hedge can be seen the Bois de Bretel, at the time held by Major Johns’ 1/115. (GB)



Major Johns, commander of 1st Battalion, 115th IR. (*A.Pipet/Heimdal*)

Another testimony provided by Harold S., who was attached to the 115th Infantry Regiment, provides details of the conditions of this war in the hedgerows:

Being a scout in an area with dense hedgerows is possibly the worst job you there is: you crawl forward on your belly, terrified, not knowing where there enemy is because the foliage is so thick. Fighting in the hedgerows is like fighting blindly against an invisible enemy , while you as an attacker are constantly exposed. It really was a strong test of nerves, which were often at breaking point. I carried with me very rudimentary equipment; a rifle, trench shovel, a radio and occasionally binoculars. The Germans were masters of camouflage and they practically melted into the greenery. Their positions were actually inside the hedges, thus guaranteeing them rows of firing lines. They dug trenches like termites, with firing steps, look-out posts and underground shelters to rest in, all covered over with branches and soil. Narrow slits made it possible for them to slip quickly from one field into the next, or to another part of the same underground labyrinth. All of their positions, both above and below ground, were covered up with

clever camouflage that was constantly renewed. To take these positions with a full-frontal assault was impossible; only artillery and mortars had any effect, which explains why so many were used. Aerial bombardment and strafing remained the main fear for the Germans, as the bombers raked the hedges with their machine guns. There was no possibility of returning fire.

Posted in the corners, the (German) automatic weapons had a clear range of fire, meaning they could cover two fields at once. The anti-tank guns remained focused on the roads and paths, as did the mines, which the sappers laid down every night. Since it was practically impossible, even with artillery, to overcome these fortifications, only a tank accompanying any attacking infantry had the power to dislodge the enemy from its entrenched position.³

After the disastrous landing at Omaha Beach, the American troops had been able to advance quickly using the road network, reaching as far as Caumont. However, the Germans had recovered quickly by blocking the roads while they waited for reinforcements to arrive and bolster their front lines. The infantry that supported the tanks saw the tank commanders killed by snipers and then the tanks themselves destroyed in order to block the roads. Now that the roads were impassable, the American infantry were forced to move through the hedgerows in order to keep moving forward.

Knowing the hedges had to be negotiated, the Germans waited for them by placing their machine guns in the field corners, meaning they could operate a sweeping crossfire before the mortars took over. To the north of the Elle river, the terrain was relatively uniformed, with the Elle Valley being the main obstacle. The ground then climbed steadily up to the north of Saint-Lô to Hill 192, which dominated the entire area right up to the sea. From there the Germans could look out over the whole landscape, including the west bank of the Vire, which they still held. This was only a few kilometres south of Carentan, where the German resistance clung on between two marshy areas with the 17.SS-Panzer-grenadier-Division « Götz von Berlichingen ». The German artillery was efficient and precise, even if it was lacking in parts and ammunition and was less powerful than that of the Americans. Crossroads and obstacles were everywhere, each marked on a map.

The terrain was even more difficult thanks to the dense hedgerows, whose small, impenetrable foliage only multiplied the impossible task of getting through it. The hedges were drained by a network of sunken roads, often 1.5m below general ground level. These sunken paths 'irrigated' the landscape and allowed the German soldiers, who were under constant aerial threat, to move around unseen and launch undetected surprise attacks. Finally, the terrain in general in this area is very rugged, with narrow, exposed roads that twist and turn up and down the landscape, rising to 192m above sea level at its highest point.

Each field was a small fortress to be conquered. With machine guns and heavy artillery placed at the corners, the Germans always allowed the Americans to advance to the middle of the field before opening fire on what was essentially a sitting target. The GIs called the middle of the field 'the point of no return' as there was no longer any question of going back. During this halt in the advance, it was therefore necessary to find ways of reducing the number of losses and somehow break the effectiveness of the German defensive system.

Since the corners of the hedges were dangerous, the men had to advance towards the middle and not along the hedgerow, where the US soldiers mistakenly believed himself to be safe. Fire power also had to be increased with the presence of tanks and machine guns on the flanks. Breaches in the hedges needed to be made to allow the tanks to get through, with the sappers from 121st Engineer Combat Battalion being the only ones with the explosives needed to create the gaps in the thick undergrowth. Brigadier General Cota, deputy commander of 29th Division, was given the task of organising the combat tactics of the assault groups. The tank and infantrymen had to act as a team and so to facilitate this operation, a telephone was installed at the rear of the tank. This provided direct contact with the tank commander, who could then direct his fire without him having to leave his turret and expose himself to danger. Unfortunately, for most of the time when a tank appeared it was taken out by a *Panzerschreck* or *Panzerfaust*, and everything had to be started all over again. Improvements were made by attaching two wooden poles the size of telephone poles to the front of the tanks, on which were placed cardboard tubes (used to carry 105mm shells)

filled with TNT. Hedge trimmers were added later, but these were developed under great secrecy and only unveiled during Operation Cobra.

The American soldiers regarded this mysterious country as being rather backward: there was no running water, few tarmacked roads, the fields were enclosed by hedgerows, with many isolated communities and settlements. Units found themselves separated across the countryside, were afraid of being killed at any moment and faced exhaustion in the face of a seemingly endless struggle. Behind each hedgerow was yet another to cross and at every stage they lost more and more of their comrades. The primitive conditions they found themselves in led to many cases of depression and combat fatigue among the American soldiers. The officers who had been trained in '90 days' may have been brave, but they were far less experienced and professional than their German counterparts. The heavy losses they had suffered were compensated by reinforcements, but these green troops, with so little combat experience, were often the first to fall when it came to the next round of action, only for them to be replaced again by yet more inexperienced troops. As Lieutenant Allsup had pointed out, 'We were not irreplaceable...' And as Harold S. reminds us, 'Whether a patrol took place during the day or night, when returning from a mission everyone was happy to get back to the protection of their foxhole, which had been dug into the clay and covered with soil and branches. In principle there were two men per foxhole; one to keep watch while the other slept.'

After the death of Lieutenant Colonel Blatt, 1st Battalion, 115th IR was put under the command of Major Glover S. Johns. His memoirs, *The Clay Pigeons of Saint-Lô* (published in 1958 and reprinted in 1979) illustrate the enormous losses suffered by the 29th Division. From a theoretical force of around 9000 men, it suffered 2,384 casualties from Omaha Beach to the Elbe river, of which 454 were killed. It was during this 'static' period that 300 fresh replacements arrived. After the losses suffered at Sainte-Marguerite-d'Elle and the attack on La Fossardière, by 18 June two companies in 1st Battalion only had ninety men each, with one platoon even down to just five men. By 20 June Colonel Godwin Ordway's CP (115th IR) was established at the northern edge of the Bois de Bretel, near a destroyed Sherman tank. To the west, 2nd Battalion entered the estate of La Fossardière castle, while to

the east, 1st Battalion, 116th IR (Major Dallas), was at the hamlet of Dufayel. 1st Battalion (115th) were in the middle of this sector, with around 600 men surveying a front 800-1000m wide.

In order to avoid being seen by the Germans, the CP was well camouflaged and dug into the ground. Nicknamed 'the Hole' by the major, the CP could hold a folding table and seat ten men. It was 1.5m below ground, 2m wide and covered with logs, soil and branches for camouflage. The staircase down was protected by an embankment 50cm thick and a bench had been cut into the ground to serve as the major's seat during the day and his bunk at night. There was a telephone each per company, with the operators either standing outside or in their trenches, thus allowing the major to contact each company at any time, or Colonel Ordway's CP. There was also a link to the artillery through the artillery liaison officer, Lieutenant Martin. 'A' Company was commanded by Lieutenant John M. Ryan, 'B' Company by Captain Leroy Weddle, 'C' Company by Lieutenant Kenney and 'D' Company (heavy artillery) by Captain George B. Nabb Jr. Each company had three platoons under the command of a lieutenant and a support section (two groups of machine guns and three 60mm mortars). Captain Nabb's 'D' Company had eight A1 heavy machine guns and six 81mm mortars. In addition, HQ provided them with three 57mm anti-tank guns. Private Bein was the radio operator at the battalion's CP and used a SCR300. However, any radio link was dangerous when stuck in a static position, as it did not take the Germans long to decipher any codes, which were sometimes discovered in an abandoned vehicle, and were then quick to uncover any large-scale radio traffic. Once a CP had been identified, it then became the main target for the artillery. Next to Major Johns in the CP was Captain Newcomb, the S3, who was directing operations. Lieutenant Grimsehl, (S2) was in charge of gathering intelligence on the area, which was then immediately sent to General Ordway. The CP was guarded by a security group led by Sergeant Turner, which included a dozen very good marksmen, who also acted as scouts, liaison officers or patrol guides, and were set up in trenches that formed a perimeter around the CP. Major Johns, accompanied by his French-speaking orderly, Private Barbeaux, wanted to remain close to his companies and so 'the Hole' was only 500m away from the front line.



A contemporary map showing the area that was so fiercely contested in July 1944. Note the axis of the Saint-Lô/Bayeux road (left to right) and the road from the north, passing Villiers-Fossard and the hamlet of Bourgd'Enfer (the US objective). To the east of this road is the sector belonging to the 115th, which includes La Fossardière, le Bois de Bretel and Dufayel. South of this sector lies the strategic ridge Martinville ridge, held by the German paratroopers, with the villages of La Luzerne and Belle Fontaine on its northern flank. The hamlet of Cloville (defended by the 1./9) lies on the eastern side of the road from Couvains, along with Le Parc and Saint-Georges- d'Elle, while Hill 192 can be seen between Cloville and Le Soulaire. FJR9's CP was on the main road, at le Calvaire. After the war, the hamlets of Saint-André- de-l'Épine and Cloville were completely rebuilt: a testimony to the violence of the fighting that took place here.

As for the German paratroopers of the KG Alpers, the battle group was withdrawn from the front line on 19 June for twenty-four hours, in order to be reintegrated into the FJR9 and the companies were ordered to rest at Notre-Damed'Elle. During the night of 19-20 June, they were woken up and ordered to start for the Bois de la Roche, near the Saint-Lô/Bayeux road. They then continued to walk through the hamlets of La Saferie, La Taille and La Baroterie, until they reached Saint-George-d'Elle, where 1st Battalion (1./9) assumed its new position on the high ground. Down below, the Elle and Airel rivers flowed through the valley, which would prove to be of great importance. Further north, towards Touze and Le Val, the FJR5 were fighting

under Major Backer. On 20 June they had to dig in their positions, but the ground was extremely rocky and made the task difficult. The men took advantage of the rest to have a proper wash, as well as a shave and a haircut, although in the afternoon the Americans launched an artillery barrage on the German paratroopers. 1st Battalion suffered twelve casualties, 2nd Battalion suffered five and 4th Battalion also five, of which two were killed (the combat secretary, Corporal Forstner and a former member of the Sturmregiment, Corporal Fritz). Meanwhile, 5th Battalion suffered one casualty and there were two on the battalion's general staff. This amounted to thirty-eight casualties in total, with five killed and thirty-three wounded. From now on Fallschirmjäger-Regiment 9 held the following positions: the Airel Valley, Saint-Georges-d'Elle, Cloville, le Parc, Saint-André-de-l'Epine, l'Epine, Bretel, Belle-Fontaine and la Chapelle. The front was 25km long, until it reached 9th Company, which was 9km north of Saint-Lô. The anti-tank group (Panzerjäger-Abteilung) suffered an aerial attack on the Saint-Lô/Bérigny road and lost three pieces of equipment, as well as suffering two casualties.

Shortly before nightfall on the same day, an American self-propelled artillery vehicle came out of No Man's Land and into one of the sunken roads; its crew, no doubt exhausted, scattered. Along with a few of his paratroopers, Lieutenant Kleespiess set off towards it, using the embankment for protection. As they reached the engine, they placed an explosive charge on the side and then watched as the flames climbed towards the sky. The hatch at the front opened up as the driver tried to escape, but it was too late and the machine exploded in a fireball of fuel and ammunition. The wreckage left behind blocked any passage along the road.

At dawn on 21 June, a fine rain turned the ground into a quagmire. However, by midday it had stopped and as the sun reappeared, the Americans once more unleashed an artillery barrage on 2nd Battalion. There were nineteen casualties for the FJR9 on this day; seven killed and twelve wounded. The Americans tried to break through the German positions by attacking in small groups, but were continually pushed back. Captain Ladwig, commander of 6th Company, noted that one of his platoon leaders, Sergeant Max Schüller, had disappeared and so sent out a patrol to look for him. As

the paratroopers cautiously advanced through the bushes deep into No Man's Land, they suddenly saw a group of Americans in front, signalling to them. Was it a trap? The German patrol leader ordered his men not to open fire and to hold up their weapons, while at the same time releasing the safety catches on the P38 and P08 pistols hidden within their jacket pockets. When they reached the bushes, they saw their platoon leader, Sergeant Schöler, lying on a stretcher; he had been hit in the chest and was already dead. His shirt was open and the Americans had bandaged his chest as best they could. One of the German paratroopers, who had been a waiter, spoke English and explained to the Americans that they wanted to take the body back to their lines. One of the US sergeants replied, 'OK, go on Germans!' and told them they could take the stretcher with them as well. As they returned to their lines, their comrades watched and waited for them from the safety of the bushes.

Also on the same day, at La Saferie, 1st Battalion's CP also came under heavy artillery fire. Even though the position had been reinforced with logs and earth, the roof collapsed and everyone desperately tried to get outside and save their skins. As calm returned, a cry went up saying that Second Lieutenant Wagner had been trapped inside. However, he was unable to free himself as one of his comrades had fallen on top of him. It was soon discovered that the new battalion adjutant and former leader of 2nd Company, Second Lieutenant Martin Hess, had been on the roof of the now-collapsed CP and been hit by the incoming shell.

The young paratrooper Rudi Frühbeisser recalls the arrival of Second Lieutenant Heinz Deutsch, a tank commander with the 3rd battery Assault Brigade on 21 June. Deutsch was returning alone from a 'free hunting' mission, his favourite kind of action, and had already been credited with many victories. This brigade of assault guns was the only German armoured force in the Saint-Lô area. It had been formed in January 1944, in the Melun and Fontainebleau areas, and was originally meant to have been made up of four batteries, but the fourth never seems to have actually materialised.⁴ First known as Sturm-geschütz-Abteilung (then Brigade) 2 der Luftwaffe, it was attached to the II.Fallschirmjäger-Korps on 15 June and then renamed Fallschirmjäger-Sturm-geschütz-Brigade 12 (from 26 June). It was

commanded by Captain Gersteuer, with First Lieutenant Horn leading the Stabs-Batterie, Captain Heinrich in command of 1./12, Captain Krall commanding 2./12 and First Lieutenant Mell commanding 3./12. It remained independent of 3. FJ-Division, the organic unit of the paratrooper corps, and soon inflicted heavy losses on the American 29th and 2nd Divisions located in this sector. On 27 June, its men and equipment were placed back with the Sturm-geschütze 11 and on 30 June, ten Allied armoured vehicles were partly destroyed along the main road between Moon-sur-Elle and Saint-Lô by the Sturm-geschütze and the paratroopers from 3.FJD. On 3 July it was busy defending the German position at Carillon, once more inflicting heavy losses on the 29th Division. The most combative of all its section leaders was Second Lieutenant Heinz Deutsch of 3./12, the man Rudi Frühheisser had met on 21 June.

He remembers him appearing radiant after yet another victory, exclaiming, 'Hey, we gave them another grilling! They forgot to get out!' After this brutal remark, he jumped out of his machine, took off his helmet in order to put on his Feldmütze and added, 'Yes. You have to have a nose for it; the tank we destroyed was behind a hedge. He wanted to move but we already had him in our sights and whoever shoots first almost always wins. We fired right at the turret and watched it go up in flames.' Deutsch racked up successive victories, including four armoured vehicles in a single day, then two, then three. The crew's motto was 'Der Laden rollt immer' (The shop continues to roll). By 24 April 1945, Second lieutenant Deutsch was credited with having destroyed forty-four tanks and received the Knight's Cross on 28 April. Two members of his crew received the German Cross in Gold, including the shooter, Sergeant Lapp, who was awarded his posthumously.

On 22 June Rudi Frühheisser celebrated his eighteenth birthday near Cloville, even though he was already a veteran of the war. He was summoned before his company commander who presented him with a bottle of Schnaps and a twentyfour hour break from front line duty, where he found an abundance of food including beef, veal and pork. The paymaster, Sergeant Herbert Schürholz and his friend, Sergeant Höfer, were pleased to see him. Whilst there, Frühheisser learned that his 1st Company had already suffered

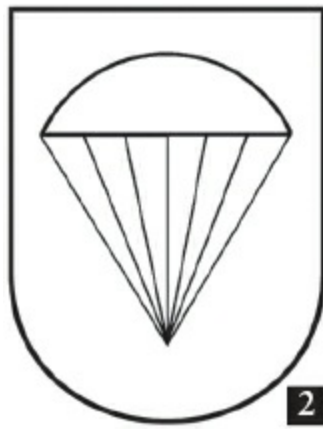
fifty-three casualties since the beginning of their present engagement, including forty-four wounded and nine killed. During his time away from the front line, the Americans attacked again in the afternoon, this time leaving the company with thirty-two new casualties; eight killed and twenty-four wounded. The following day, 23 June, there were only five wounded, although almost all of 4th Company's mortars (or *Zigeuner-Artillerie* [gypsy artillery] as they were called), were destroyed in an attack, resulting in the other three companies having to hand over some of their mortars in order to make up for the loss.



Corporal Rudi Frühbeisser celebrated his eighteenth birthday on 22 June 1944, although he was already classed as a 'veteran' by this time.



1. *Sturmartilleristen* posing with their mascot. The lieutenant on the left is wearing the cross-over jacket of the assault artillery. (NA)



2. Insignia of the Fallschirm-StuG-Brigade 12.



3. An assault cannon from 12th Brigade captured intact on 15 or 16 July near the Bois de Bretel. The photograph was taken by Lieutenant Jones. (A. Pipet/ Heimdal)



4. A StuG from Fallschirm-Sturmgeschütz-Brigade 12 with its crew. The man with the helmet is Second Lieutenant Albert Lappas. (RF)



5. The *Sturmgeschütze* of Major Gesteuer's brigade were responsible for protecting 3.FJD's left flank, near Mesnil-Herman. (RF)



6. Second Lieutenant Ernst Deutsch commanded the assault gun section of 3./Fsch. Stu. Gesch.-Brig.12. He saw plenty of action and would finish the war with forty-four victories and the *Ritterkreuz* (Knight's Cross). (Heimdal).

On 24 June FJR9 recorded twenty-four casualties (twenty-one wounded, three killed), as the Americans launched an attack on 2nd Battalion. There was a violent storm as dawn broke on 25 June, and as the rain continued to fall, it would prove to be an advantage to the Germans, because the American aeroplanes were unable to take off. The paratroopers called it *Adolf-Hitler-Wetter* (Adolf Hitler Weather) and it meant that they could finally be resupplied during this little 'break' in combat. However, when the rain stopped in the afternoon, it all began again and the Americans re-launched their artillery barrage on 2nd Battalion, with 6th Company bearing the brunt of it all.

On 26 June, 1./9 relocated their position and moved to within 200m of Cloville, 2km east of Saint-André-de-l'Epine. To their left was the tiny hamlet of Parc, which consisted of only six houses. However, as soon as they set up their new positions, the Americans once more began to fire on them and so the company then advanced 50m along a sunken road and took up new positions there. There were sixteen casualties on this day (twelve wounded, four killed), while 27 June was relatively quiet, with only seven casualties (three wounded, four killed) and 28 June even better, with only four

casualties for the regiment.

29 June was another hot day and the paratroopers now had an infantry regiment as their neighbours to their left. However, the two units were not linked properly together, allowing the Americans to attack the breach with their own infantry and tanks. This meant that Major Alpers had to counter-attack with 1st Battalion in order to restore the situation. First Lieutenant Moser, commander of 1st Company, was supposed to have been on leave that day in order to get married. However, he now found himself attacking with the rest of 1st Battalion. Each company was provided with anti-tank weaponry, such as *Panzerfäuste* and *Panzerschrecks* and the attack would be launched from Cloville in the direction of Parc. The few houses that made up the hamlet of Roux were damaged in the process, as even the grass burned under the explosions of the phosphorous shells. The paras of the 1./9 met up with the infantry soldiers, who told them that many of their fellow infantrymen were surrounded. The situation was desperate, as the paratroopers now had to head to the right of the Saint-André-de-l'Epine road, which meant crossing No Man's Land. After passing through the final hedge before Saint-Georges-d'Elle, they found themselves in open ground, right in front of the Americans. It was then that 1./9 came under extreme fire, as well as elements of 2./9, who also came under fire from Saint-George-d'Elle. An American machine gun had set up position behind an embankment, blocking any further advance and so Corporal Franz Gretka stepped forward with his rocket-launcher. All at once the machine gun was silent. Firing at such close range had had a devastating effect; the gun was destroyed in the midst of magnesium smoke and all the Americans nearby were killed. The attack was once more progressing well and the German infantry advanced alongside the paratroopers.

Second Lieutenant Gebel's platoon in 1st Battalion reached a sunken road where a US machine gun had been set up, but they managed to get across without any casualties. Suddenly, a Sherman tank appeared from the other side of the embankment and one of the veteran paratroopers, Richard Schmidt, grabbed a grenade and headed for the tank. He was able to get up to the vehicle without being hit, but just as he was about to pull the pin, the turret door opened and the tank commander appeared, pulling out his Colt

.45. He fired at Schmidt, who cried out as the bullet hit him. A German machine gunner, Kurt Rödler, saw it all happen and opened fire towards the turret and the tank commander, who then disappeared. Unfortunately, Schmidt no longer had the strength to activate the grenade; the index finger on his right hand had been blown off by the gun. Corporal Hans Nikobeit arrived on the other side of the tank, but he too was wounded by shrapnel in the top of his left arm. Then came a rumbling as a *Panzerfaust* was fired towards the tank, which consequently exploded. All the while there were other battles taking place nearby, including one that took out another American machine gun. 1st Battalion now took over the infantry's former position and other tanks were destroyed, surmounted by plumes of black smoke. In response, the Americans launched a barrage of artillery and mortars, leading to more heavy losses for the German paratroopers.



This recently discovered photograph was taken in 1944 and shows both German and American medics tending to the wounded at es Roux. This image corresponds with Rudi Frühbeisser's story, and must have been taken on 29 June 1944. (*US Army*)



The hamlet of es Roux today (on the previous map it can be seen north of le Parc), looking south towards Cloville and the frontline held by the German paratroopers, hidden in the hedgerows. The wall on the right, near the gate, is where the previous image was taken in July 1944. The house was largely preserved, despite the fighting. *(EG/Heimdal)*

Roy Cinquemani at Saint-Georgesd'Elle. The village of Saint-Georgesd'Elle was fiercely fought over by the American soldiers of the 2nd Infantry Division and the German paratroopers of FJR9. During a German counter-attack, Private Roy Cinquemani found himself cut off from his men and had to spend three days hiding in a tomb, before being able to rejoin his comrades.



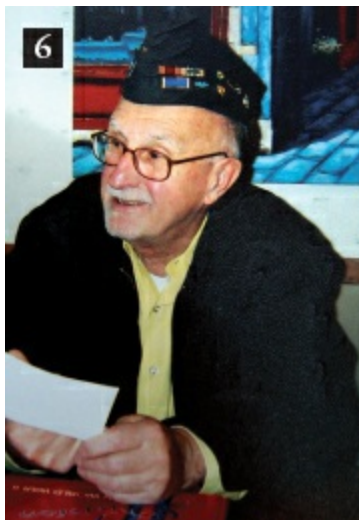
1 & 2. The chevet of the church at Saint-Georges- d'Elle, after the fighting and as it is today.



3. Roy Cinquemani (bottom left) with his fellow soldiers.



4 & 5. The tomb where Roy Cinquemani took refuge, and the same tomb today.



6. At home in the USA, a few years ago.



7. Roy at Saint-Georges, in front of the monument to the 2nd Division. Of Italian origin, his surname translates as ‘five hands’. (*Ledu Collection. Images 2&4: F. Jeanne/Heimdal*)

Once more the rapid fire came from an American tank, which had actually become trapped in one of the sunken roads when its caterpillars had become entangled among the thin tree roots. Even though the crew inside realised that they were stuck, they did not climb out because they feared being shot. The Germans were unable to get to it directly, and so had to call for Corporal Zimmermann and his *Panzerschrecks*. Meanwhile, Corporal Leipold, who had just taken out an American machine gun with his *F-Gewehr* (semi-automatic rifle), was spotted in his hiding position at the top of a tree by another American machine gun. He was shot in the cheek and cried out in pain as he fell to the ground, when First Lieutenant Moser arrived along with Corporal Boller, head of 1st platoon. The latter, a veteran from the Italian campaign, proposed they head for shelter further away in order to take cover from the incoming fire. With that, ‘Jupp’ Boller and his men headed out into open ground, only for him to collapse as they reached an embankment. His comrades rushed towards him but there was nothing they could do; a bullet to the head had killed him instantly. However, Second Lieutenant Kleespiess’s section was progressing well, but although pockets of American resistance were destroyed, their artillery continued to cause problems and Major Stephani sent a motorcycle section into the attack to help reinforce the advance. Second Lieutenant Kurt Widmaier, from 15th Company (Engineers) was seriously injured, while 5th and 7th Companies

(2nd Battalion) suffered their first casualties during the counter-attack.

The number of American tanks continued to increase, meaning more *Panzerschrecks* from 14th company were needed. Two motorcycle groups, which included paratroopers Brogiato and Kozurek, arrived to provide support, but after an hour of fighting, Brogiato was hit in the chest by shrapnel as he approached one of the tanks with his *Panzerschreck*, and died. Now the Air Force joined in the fray, taking out many of the anti-tank weapons, while Kozurek was hit in the face by several pieces of shrapnel. The fighting was so intense that 1st Company were forced to concede ground, and retreated back to take up position in the hamlet. Behind Corporal Hasselwander's section, 10./9 were unable to advance any further and the corporal was hit by a shell. Meanwhile, Corporal Jupp Puchalla, a veteran of the Battle of Crete, was killed by a mortar shell. Further ahead, four Americans surrendered and were sent behind the German front lines, but yet another tank appeared over an embankment and opened fire on them again. Lieutenant Moser and a few other paratroopers tried to escape from the sunken road, but he was hit in the neck and chest, and as he fell slowly to the ground, he continued to fire his MP40. Some of his men rushed to help their leader, but there was nothing they could do. A couple of them wept with rage; Moser was supposed to have flown out after the battle to get married!

The tank continued to fire on the men as they remained with their fallen leader in the sunken road. Corporal Frühbeisser was hit and fell to the ground. When he got up to try and escape, he was hit again, this time in the right knee. As he turned and called out to his comrade, Gottfried Klier, a sudden explosion shook the ground; Corporal Josef Aulbach had managed to destroy the tank, but at the cost of his own life. Frühbeisser wanted to get out of the hellish situation as quickly as possible, but noticed that the sole of his right boot had been blown away, and there was blood pouring out. Where was everyone? He was all alone in the midst of the chaos. He bandaged his arm using a piece of wire, before climbing up the embankment to escape the incessant American machine gun fire. Then; blackness. When he came to, he was surrounded by several of his comrades, as well as the company medic, Alois Bauer, who had just arrived with the rest of the reinforcements. A bloody silhouette appeared in front of him and a voice cried out 'The chief is

dead! The chief is dead!’ Frühbeisser recognised that it was Corporal Willi Egge, the group leader, who had also been hit in the face and arm by shrapnel. As he was tended to by Alois Bauer, the men finally managed to retreat.

The American attack was finally pushed back in the afternoon. The three wounded German paratroopers came across a US medic seated on a stretcher in one of the sunken roads and called out to him in English. When he saw them, the trembling medic also called out and all at once another three US soldiers appeared. Frühbeisser was all set to open fire with his MP40, but soon realised that the three new men were also medics, who treated him while Alois Bauer went to search for more wounded. According to Corporal Egge, 1./9 lost at least ten men, with many more injured. A liaison officer from the battalion arrived and asked to see Captain Boller, from 1st Company. The three paratroopers explained to him that Boller was only a sergeant, but the liaison officer proceeded to tell them that Boller was to report to the battalion CP, because he had just been promoted to captain (Boller had in fact already been an officer during the Italian Campaign). In any case, the liaison offer to was told that he was too late; Boller was already dead. At which point the officer made his goodbyes, turned, and then ran away.

The paratroopers reached the hamlet where the First Aid station was located. Intense activity was going on all around, with many wounded German and American soldiers all mixed in together. The Americans emptied their pockets and shared what they had and one of them, who spoke good German, helped out the medics. A jeep arrived with two stretchers strapped to the bonnet, driven by an American, who was accompanied by a German medic, Eugen Kochler. After the counter-attack by the German paratroopers, the American had clearly made several trips to bring the wounded back from the battlefield. The American prisoners always said that the German paratroopers were ‘famous fighters’ and soon an American doctor arrived to help the various wounded. The building being used as the First Aid Station was only 800m as the crow flies from ‘Mount Calvary’ and it was to become not only FJR9’s main Aid Station, but also its CP. Here the regiment’s chief physician, Dr Schmidt worked tirelessly helping those in need, but supplies of novocaine and other drugs were in short supply and so could only be used

in the most serious cases and many screamed out in agony as they went under the scalpel. Next to Rudi Frühbeisser, his friend, Corporal Grüner, was next to go under the knife; he smoked one of his Camel cigarettes and, like many others, took a swig of whisky and clenched his teeth before the operation began. Afterwards, he was laid underneath a tree in the shade while Frühbeisser took his turn and he screamed out in pain as the blade touched his foot. An ambulance arrived to collect the most seriously wounded and Frühbeisser was taken away along with four other injured men. Progress was slow at first, but improved once they reached the paved roads. However, a sudden explosion tore off the roof of the ambulance and a fire quickly spread through the vehicle. As the wounded lay there screaming, Frühbeisser managed to open the door and fall out, but could only lay there at the side of the road as the rest of the seriously wounded were devoured by the flames. The aeroplane that had dropped the bomb then turned to make another pass, grazing the trees and firing on the ambulance once more, even though the vehicle was clearly identifiable with its giant red crosses. Moments later, a motorcycle liaison officer picked up Rudi Frühbeisser and took him to the 1st Battalion's aid station, run by Dr Reuter. Frühbeisser was the only one from the ambulance to survive and on that day, FJR9 suffered fifty-seven casualties, including sixteen killed, forty wounded and one taken prisoner.

The losses would be even heavier on 30 June, when ninety-eight were wounded and twenty-seven killed. Following the losses from both days, the units were regrouped and moved to different positions. Once more the American artillery opened fire in the morning, no doubt in reaction to the German paratroopers retaking certain positions. The company commanders were summoned before Major Alper's at 1st Battalion's CP to receive their next orders. It was thought that the end of the artillery barrage would be the prelude to a counter-attack, with the GIs of 2nd Division attacking the position of Captain Klepzig's 1./9 around midday. Sections from 13th, 14th and 15th Companies, which had arrived as reinforcements for 1./9, were thrown into the action. The regiment's commander, Major Kurt Stephani, headed for Major Alper's CP by motorcycle in order to take stock of the situation.

Now that 1st Company was commanded by Second Lieutenant Fromut

Kleespiess following the death of First Lieutenant Moser, Corporal Karle Horn and paratrooper Joachim Schäfer met at the company's CP. It was situated in a small house on slightly higher ground because the sunken road where it had previously been located continued to be pounded by shells. However, as the men took shelter, a shell fell down through the chimney and exploded right in the fireplace. The consequences were catastrophic: Second Lieutenant Kleespiess, still clinging to the Iron Cross ribbon he had just been awarded, which was pinned to his shirt, received a heavy blow to the head, as did Corporal Erich Kappus. In the same room, Corporals Oberhäuser, Poten, Lerchl and Schegitz received serious injuries to their head, stomach or back and by the time the firing had stopped, Corporal Horn realised that Joachim Schäfer, who had been stood next to him, had been killed outright after being hit in the head and chest. In the mean time, the rest of 1st Company was also under fire; 3rd platoon was engaged in hand-to-hand combat with the Americans and Corporal Werner Luger was killed by a grenade.



A supply truck from Kampfgruppe Hapke, destroyed on the road to Saint-Lô. (RF)

2./9 also suffered heavy losses, including medic Herbert Dittner, who was shot in the back whilst tending to the wounded. A Sherman tank managed to break through the company's position, meaning those with anti-tank weapons had to immediately step into action. Corporal Franz Czupla, a sharpshooter from upper Silesia, stood with his *Z-Gewehr*, ready to kill the tank commander. Although he succeeded, the tank fired a shell and Czupla was hit in the right shoulder by shrapnel, while at the same time, paratrooper Hertaler

was killed and both Corporals Fialkowski and Christiani were wounded. Corporal Küls, originally from Hannover, proceeded to fire at the tank, but was killed by the tank's machine gun when it fired back at him. Silberling, the *Gruppenführer* (group leader) brought out a *Panzerschreck* and approached the tank, with Corporal Rudi Oeckler, a machine gunner, alongside for protection. They fired the rocket, but the men in the tank had seen what was going on and fired a final shell before being destroyed in a massive explosion. Unfortunately, although the paratroopers shouted with joy at its destruction, Silberling and Oeckler were killed by the shell.

Meanwhile, Corporal Hartmut Pier, who commanded the battalion's assault team, was killed by a bullet to the head during the counter-attack, while Corporal Klitzka was wounded in the stomach as he stood next to him. In 2nd Battalion, 5th, 7th and 8th Companies were also engaged in the fighting, supported by an assault gun from the Sturmgeschütz-Brigade. There were losses in 4./9, 5./9, 7./9 (section leader Second Lieutenant Gerhard Weber was killed, along with three other paratroopers close to him), 14./9 (where another section leader, Sergeant Major Max Petersen, was also killed) and in 15./9.

The fighting quietened down in the evening, although there were still many Americans killed or wounded in this particular area, including three officers. A battle group was formed, Kampfgruppe Hapke, made up of elements from 7th and 15th Companies and a section of tank hunters, under the command of Captain Hapke, commander of 14th Company with First Lieutenant Walter Sachs. Pionier-Bataillon 3, under the command of Captain Beth, was positioned to the right (east) of the regiment. An American strike team had attacked Captain Kurt Ladwig 's 6./9 from the hamlet of Belle-Fontaine (north of Luzerne and Martinville), with the aim of breaking the back of FJR9 and so the Kampfgruppe Hapke was sent there to drive them back, which it successfully did after fighting through the night.

At dawn on 1 July, sixty paratroopers arrived by truck from Gardelegen and Nuremberg and were divided up among the companies of FJR9, who were on desperate need of reinforcements following their heavy losses. Those who had been lightly wounded in combat also now rejoined their respective companies. Even those who had suffered much more serious injuries begged

the doctors to be able to rejoin their comrades at the Front, such was the spirit of camaraderie among this elite group of soldiers. The night before had been calm, although heavy fighting had broken out just before midnight in the area around Saint-André-del'Epine. Fourteen paratroopers from 2nd Battalion were killed, but any American advance was pushed back through German counter-attacks. In 1st Company, Corporal Horst Kooss, who was clearly identifiable as a medic thanks to the red cross on his uniform, was shot in the head by an American sniper while trying to attend to one of his friends on the ground. In his book, Rudi Frühbeisser also recalled that several German ambulances were machine gunned as well. In the afternoon, the Americans bombarded the German paratroopers with shells and 1 July, following the fighting during the night, FJR9 recorded seventy-one casualties, including sixteen killed, fifty-two injured, two taken prisoner and one missing. It would appear that the reinforcements had already been swallowed up...

There were only thirty-three casualties on 2 July (seven killed, twenty-five injured and one missing). The fighting, which soon turned into hand-to-hand combat, continued around Saint-André-de-l'Epine, towards the Barre de Semilly, with the objective remaining the high ground at Martinville. First Lieutenant Werner Kersting, the commander of 5./9 was killed at close after being shot in the throat, while his orderly, Corporal Hartmann, who was standing next to him, was shot in the head. Luckily, the rest of the day and the following night were calm, and 3 July would also bring limited losses for FJR9 (four killed and one injured), thus allowing them to improve their positions. On 4 July, 15./9, whose positions were opposite those of Major Johns' 1/115, near the hamlet of Bretel, came under attack; one of its platoon leaders, Second Lieutenant Johannes Moldehnke died after losing both of his legs. His deputy, Corporal Guhle, came under heavy mortar fire and was wounded as he tried to rescue his platoon leader, aided by Corporals Kokot and Nordhaus. Five men from 8./9 were killed that day through artillery fire and FJR9 would suffer thirty-one casualties in total (twelve killed, eighteen wounded and one taken prisoner). On 5 July casualties totalled twenty men (four killed and sixteen wounded), again by artillery fire, while on 6 July their losses rose to thirty-three (three killed and thirty wounded). This happened when the Americans launched an attack at dawn, without any

preceding artillery, on the positions of 2nd Battalion, but were pushed back through a combination of hand-to-hand combat, supported by mortar and artillery fire. The three dead were Corporal Winkler, from 2nd Battalion staff, as well as Bronkowski and Detjen from 10./9. The following day, 7 July, resulted in eighteen casualties (two killed and sixteen wounded), mainly during heavy fire in the hamlet of Rupaley (southwest of Saint-André-de-l'Epine). After another quiet night, only two paratroopers were killed on 8 July and then only one was wounded on 9 July. However, this unusual calm, perpetrated by the Americans, did not bode well for the men of Fallschirmjäger-Regiment 9.



1. A group of paratroopers, equipped with a *Panzerschreck*, prepare to go and fight the tanks. Note the diverse equipment: the second soldier is not wearing the regular paratrooper helmet. (BA/101/584/2160/12.)



2. A corporal and his 7.92mm Gewehr 41; a semi-automatic rifle that was only produced by Mauser and Walther in limited numbers. Walther's Gewehr 41 was much better and was therefore kept in use. (BA 1011/584/2159/37.)



3. A medic's world was particularly dangerous, although they were clearly identifiable by their red cross insignia. Rudi Frühbeisser recalls several occasions where the neutrality of ambulances marked with the red cross was not respected by the Americans, especially when he had to go and collect his wounded comrades from the front line. Here, the Sanis (short for Sanitäter, 'medic') are using a Zündapp KS 750 motorbike. Once more, the outfits and camouflage are diverse. (BA 1011/585/2193/33.)



1. Often hidden in the corner of a hedgerow, the 7.5cm Pak 40 anti-tank gun was particularly effective against American tanks. Here, the men can be seen adjusting the sight while the soldier on the right (not wearing a paratrooper's helmet), stands ready with a 75mm shell, capable of piercing 32mm armour from a distance of 500m. (BA 1011/582/2120/7.)



2. Camouflaged in an individual foxhole at the foot of a hedge, a paratrooper waits for the American attack with his MG42, capable of a devastating rate of fire. *(RF)*



3. One of the 7.5/40-Pak anti-tank guns after being destroyed by US aircraft. (RF)



4. The paratroopers of 3. Fallschirmjäger-Division conducted vigorous counter-attacks in an attempt to break the Americans, as they did against 2nd Division on 29 June. Here, captured GIs from 2nd Division's left flank do not seem wholly dissatisfied with their fate: for them, the slaughterhouse that was 'hedgerow hell' is over. (BA 1011/583/21119/7.)

11-13 July 1944



1. On 11 July, a Technician 5th Grade brings Private Vincent Lucas, from Braddock, Pennsylvania, to an aid station after he was hit by a mine. The emblem of the 29th Division can be seen on the driver's helmet. (7223)



2. On 12 July, Private Louis A. Mayerski, from Cleveland, Ohio, is engrossed in his prayer book while resting in his foxhole, north-east of Saint-Lô.



3. Medics dress the wrist of another wounded GI.



4. 13 July 1944. Two members of 29th Division's Counter Intelligence Corps (CIC), Allen R. Mitchell (left), from Watertown, South Dakota, and Bryant W. Gillepsie, from Indiana, take shelter in a cellar at Villiers-Fossard. The cellar was all the more pleasant as it was filled with barrels of cider, served here by Mlle Renée Marie.



5. The two CIC men are now comfortably set up in the cellar. At the back, a jacket belonging to one of the men clearly has the emblem of the 29th Division on its sleeve. (7763)



6, 7 & 8. Villiers-Fossard today. Only the bell tower of the rebuilt church remains, while the small cupboard was no doubt left by the German soldiers. (*Heimdal*)

13-14 July 1944



1. 14 July 1944. Near Saint-Lô, medics from the 35th ID carry a wounded man to an aid station. (*Heimdal*)



2. 13 July 1944. Engineers and radiomen lay telephone lines along a sunken pathway.





3. 14 July 1944. The 35th Infantry Division is now lined up on the right of 29th Division, north of Saint-Lô. Here, the men of 'A' Company, 137th Infantry Regiment, take cover from German fire behind a column of vehicles.

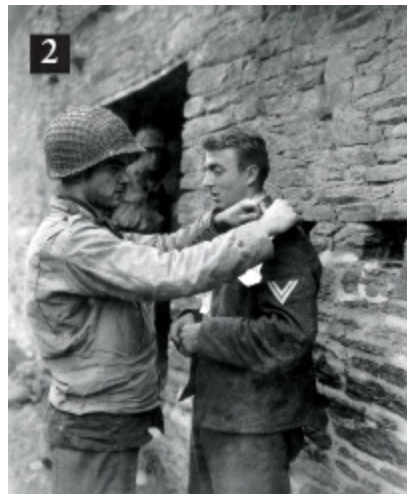


4. On the same day, a mortar team from 35th ID are in action north-west of Saint-Lô. L to R: the loader, Private Wilford Clemens, from Wilson, Michigan; the aimer, Corporal Denzel Strictling and their leader, Staff Sergeant Harold Purdy, from Mont Vernon, Ohio. You can clearly see the care taken in order to protect their position. (7377)

The hell in the hedgerows - 11-16 July



1. 16 July 1944. Private Joseph Battaglia rests in a carefully prepared shelter that has been dug underneath the hedgerow, and decorated with the inevitable pin-ups.



2. Each hedge had to be taken one at a time, and the Germans left few potential prisoners behind. This captured corporal is therefore a good subject for interrogation.



3. In a shelter previously held by the Germans, a GI looks at the small library collected by the previous owner, including a copy of Das Reich.



4. Wrecked German vehicles line the road in the Saint-Lô sector.



5. An even more interesting interrogation opportunity: First Lieutenant Kurt-Lingesleben from Schnelle-Brigade 30, seen here being questioned by Sergeant Efraim Ackerman. The war correspondent, B.J. Calierido, from Signal Corps, can be seen with his camera. Note the edelweiss sewn on the German officer's cap: the Schnelle-Brigade, which was attached to the 352.ID, also incorporated mountain troops. (*DAVA/ Heimdal*)



6. Rubble had to be cleared from the roads in order to continue the advance. The soldiers here are clearing a ruined wall and recovering material that could be used to make a new road. The photograph was taken on 11 July, between Saint-Lô and Saint-Fromond. (7171)

The artillery in action - 16 July 1944



1 & 2. The gunner places the primer in the fuse, which is then screwed to the 155mm shell.
(7611/7615)



3. Nathan Melton, 35th ID (the division's badge can clearly be seen on his sleeve), unpacks a powder charge for a 115mm. He belongs to the 4th Gun Sector, Battery B, 127th Field Artillery, which fought on the right flank of the 29th Division during the Saint-Lô offensive. (7612)



4. The American field artillery hammers the German lines to open up a route towards Saint-Lô; seen here using a 105mm gun (105 Howitzer HM2). (Heimdal)



5. This field artillery's position is firing on the German lines to cover a night-time attack by the infantry. The gun seen here is a 76.2mm (3 inch) M5 anti-tank gun, with the same barrel as that on a Tank Destroyer M10. (7879)



35th Infantry Division

15 - 18 July



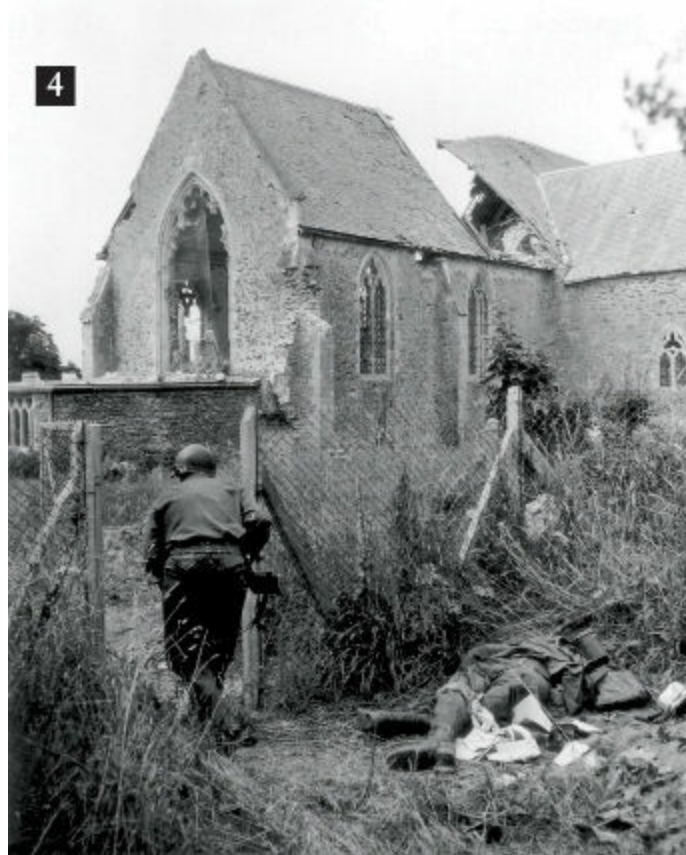
1. Major General Charles Gerhardt near Saint-Lô on 18 July, seen here discussing new assault tactics with Major William W. Bratton.



2. Men from 175th IR digging their positions behind a hedge on 15 July 1944, shortly before the main offensive on Saint-Lô.



3. Major General Charles H. Gerhardt, commander of 29th Division



4. A GI, probably from 35th ID, advances near the church at Saint-Georges-Montcocq (north of Saint-Lô), most likely on 18 July.



5. The same location in 1984.



6. A German soldier killed on 16 July in a well-camouflaged trench, cut into the middle of the hedgerow.



7. 18 July 1944. Medic John R. Hines examines a German hand grenade, with two anti-tank mines on the ground in front of him, near Saint-Lô. *(NA/Heimdal)*



In front of Saint-Lô



1. Soldiers from 29th Division carefully advance and enter a field, where a dead German soldier lies in front of them.



2. Further ahead, a medic examines a German soldier who has been seriously wounded in the face.



3. GIs under mortar fire at the entrance to Saint-Lô. (*Heimdal*)



4. These American soldiers have made a sign to try and force the Germans to surrender. They have written: 'Soldiers, surrender, you are surrounded'.



5. Damage caused by a mine on a small road east of Saint-Lô on 20 July. Two 4x4s were trying to bring ammunition, when the first vehicle struck a mine. The engineers were immediately sent for and now the second vehicle is waiting for the mine-detector to clear the road, while other soldiers search the ground using their daggers around the destroyed truck.



6. The hedgerows and sunken roads had turned the GI's advance into a veritable hell. This image was taken on 17 July on Hill 122, which looked over Saint-Lô, to the north of the town and was a key objective for the 29th Division.

18 July 1944



1. Arriving from the crossroads at Couvains along the road to Saint-Lô, Task Force Cota attacks with infantry and tanks. In a small road, the American soldiers try to protect themselves from German artillery located to the south of the town.



2, 3 & 4. An American patrol carefully approaches Saint-Lô, guided by a French gendarme. These three images are from a report by Richard Boyer.



5. Task Force Cota is 700m away from the first houses in Saint-Lô, as a German soldier surrenders.

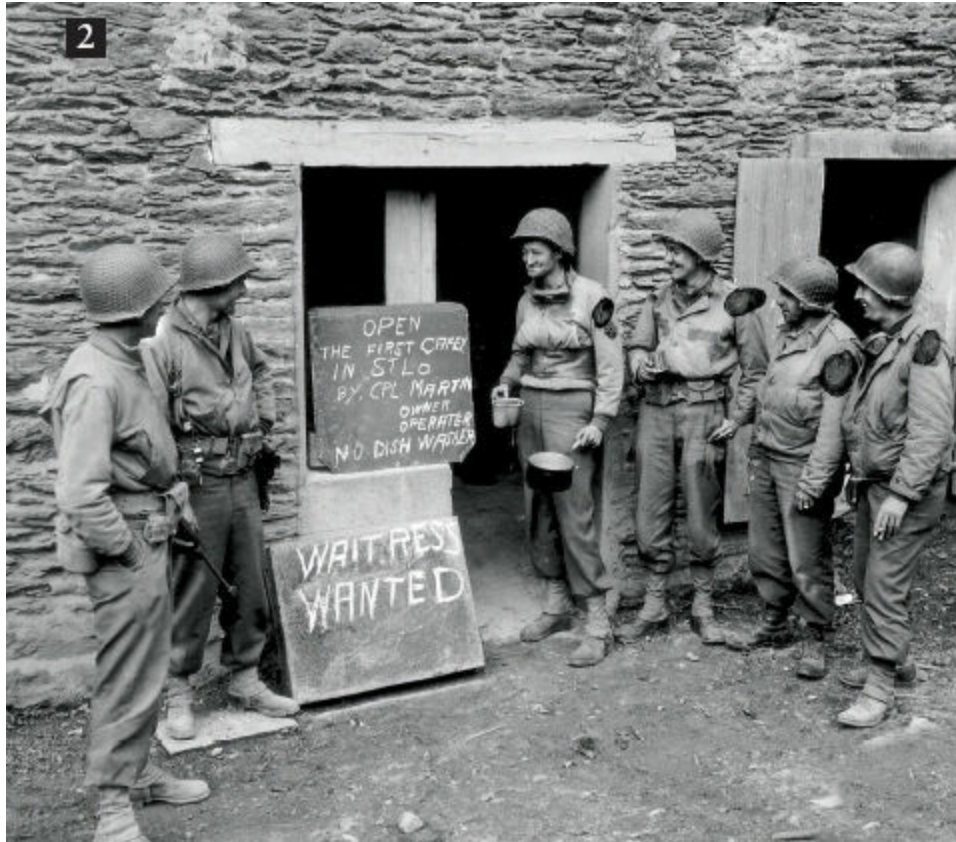


6 & 7. A Military Policeman, Arthur Landbish, from New York, poses in front of a sign indicating the much-coveted town. (*Heimdal Collection*)

Saint-Lô sector, 19 July



1. Mail being handed out to soldiers.



2. After the final victory on 19 July, GIs from 29th Division (the censors have blacked out their badges) opened the first cafe in Saint-Lô. It was run by Corporal Martin, who was apparently in need of a waitress!



3. Bernard Dargols during a ceremony at Omaha Beach on 6 June 2003. (*Heimdal and GB/Heimdal*)



4. A Weasel tracked vehicle from 121st Engineer Battalion, 'C' Company (the C is painted on the right), 29th Division. The unit's rallying cry - 'Let's Go!' - is chalked onto the front of the vehicle, along with 'Saint-Lo Special'. The other inscriptions are 'Essayons' ('let's try') and the Latin, 'Nihil Timemus', which has been translated underneath as 'we fear nothing'. 'Young Jim' may be the name of the driver.



5. While an officer keeps watch, his men emerge from the shelter of a hedge before advancing.



6. Here two soldiers from 2nd Division at Cerisy-la-Forêt (east of Saint-Lô) provide a local woman with fuel. In the centre is Staff Sergeant Bernard Dargols, who was actually a Frenchman living in the USA , where his father had set up a business. At the age of twenty-two, the Parisian joined the American Army and thanks to his knowledge of France, was immediately assigned to Military Intelligence. This particular image would be used on the cover of *Yank* magazine.



29th ID



2nd ID

6.

The Final Battle

It had been more than a month since the Allies had landed, and the progression through the green hell of the hedgerows must have seemed endless. Many of the GIs thought that ‘the damn war would drag on for a century’. The situation was no better further west: after the final battle for Cherbourg from 23 to 28 June, the final German elements surrendered at the Hague on 30 June. The Contentin Peninsula, and the yet to be rebuilt port of Cherbourg, was now an important base for the First Army. After this victory, VIII Corps headed south and fought hard for Mont Castre and Haye-du-Puits from 3 to 9 July, when the area was finally captured. The terrain south of the Contentin Peninsula was interspersed with swampy meadows; VII Corps found the going even more difficult, as they were stuck in a narrow strip of land between two marshy areas and had to face the paratroopers of von der Heydte and the ‘Götz von Berlichingen’ Waffen-SS. General Collins’ VII Corps had pulled back from XIX Corps, which was facing Saint-Lô, and was now positioned directly west of the front line, between this marshy land and the Vire river. As this was an uncomfortable position for 29th Division to find themselves in, 30th Division arrived to provide support on its right flank, along the river.



Shoulder patch belonging to 30th Division.

An attack from the eastern shore was planned, with the objective of clearing the whole area. At 3.30am on 7 July, 2/117 IR from 30th Infantry Division silently crossed the Vire to Airel, opposite Saint-Fromond, an area that had been taken by the 175th IR more than three weeks earlier. The infantry battalion was supported by 113th Cavalry Group and their opposition only consisted of elements from the KG Heintz. Armoured vehicles from 3rd Armored Division were ready to cross on 8 July, but were halted by a small counter-attack by the KG Wisliceny (2.SS-Panzer-Division) and around fifteen tanks from Panzer IV (6./SS-Pz.- Rgt.2). The attack was re-launched again on 9 July, with the Germans forced to suffer a tremendous artillery barrage, and the CCB of 3rd Armored Division successfully reached Hauts Vents (north-west of Pont-Hébert). However, now that 30th Division had managed to secure a bridgehead to the west of the Vire, German command brought in the Panzer-Lehr-Division, which had previously been serving on the front at Tilly-sur-Seulles. It arrived in a line west of the Vire on 9 July and would launch a counter-attack two days later against the American bridgehead, at the same time the Americans launched their own offensive on Saint-Lô.



The 30th Infantry Division crossed the Vire at Airel and Saint-Fromond, establishing a

bridgehead at Saint-Jean-de-Daye and aiding the front line, east of the Vire, which was retreating in that particular area. (*US Army/ Heimdal*)

The attack on Saint-Lô had originally been planned for 9 July, but had been postponed until 11 July due to bad weather, also preventing any aerial reconnaissance. However, it was also delayed due to the German counter-attacks on the bridgehead, west of the Vire, where the situation was still unstable. The objective was to capture Saint-Lô, which as well as being an important administrative centre, was also on the crossroads for the German supply routes to the Cotentin Peninsular and to the west coast, towards Lessay. Saint-Lô had been built on a fortified rocky spur overlooking the Vire, hence its ancient Gallic name of Briovère (bridge on the Vire). The town had suffered a terrible aerial bombardment on 6 June, resulting in the death of nearly 400 civilians, and many survivors refused to consider the Americans as their 'liberators'.

However, as we have previously seen, the terrain from the Elle Valley gradually rises north of Saint-Lô up to the summits of Hills 122 and 192, forming a ridge that the paratroopers from General Schimpf's 3.Fallschirmjäger-Division, among others, were determined to cling on to. The only way to capture Saint-Lô was to climb to the east, along the ridge at Martinville, while continuing to threaten the Germans to the north and north-east of the town. Moreover, General Gerhardt did not want the 29th Division, which had already suffered heavy losses, to be involved in any street fighting. His hope was that the Germans, after being driven back to the Vire and surrounded on their right flank, would retreat further south. The plan of attack was two-pronged: while the 2nd Infantry Division attacked to the east to take the Bois de Soulaire wood and Hill 192, the 29th Division would send in two of its regiments. Colonel Canham and the 116th IR were to break through up to Saint-André-de-l'Epine and then turn 500m south, along the Martinville ridge, towards Saint-Lô. Meanwhile, Colonel Ordway and the 115th IR, on the right flank (to the west, north of Saint-Lô), would attack the Bourg d'Enfer, La Luzerne, Belle-Fontaine sector, thus threatening the front north of Saint-Lô and preventing the Germans from bringing in more reinforcements to the main area of the attack. This meant that the primary weight of the offensive lay, for the 29th Division, on the shoulders of the

116th, while the exhausted 117th would remain in reserve. The attack was later supported to the west by General Baade and the 35th Infantry Division, who had landed at Omaha Beach on 5 July, arriving in the Villiers-Fossard sector on 8 July, and were to act as the link between 30th and 29th Division.

Monday 10 July: German attack on the Bois de Bretel

On 9 July, south of the Bois de Bretel, there was an 800m gap between 1st Battalion (Major Johns' 1/115) and 3rd Battalion, with only a few outposts in the middle: a genuine breach in the American front line. That morning, after a burst of mortar fire, an lookout from 'B' Company, 1/115, saw a German advancing towards them holding up a white flag. He was a medical officer, clearly identifiable by the red cross on his armband, and passed on a message that was immediately sent back to the company CP. Lieutenant George Grimsehl ordered the German to be blindfolded and, after heavy questioning, it was agreed that a truce would be honoured in order to collect the wounded and the dead. The officer was allowed to return to his own lines and for several hours, both American and German stretcher bearers carried out their work. The fighting broke out again soon after, and it would later be said that the truce had allowed the Germans to observe the Americans' positions and work out their weaknesses.

Consequently, shortly after dawn on 10 June the entire area around the Bois de Bretel and Colonel Ordway's 115th IR was subjected to an intense German bombardment, forcing the men to spend the day in their trenches and foxholes. At around 10pm the artillery barrage on the 115th intensified, severing all of the telephone wires and thus losing all communication with the American artillery, although Sergeant Crockett and three other soldiers managed to get through to the 110th Field Artillery Battalion's CP. For the men of the 115th, it was the worst bombardment they had suffered since 6 June, with the fire being concentrated on their left flank at around 1am. Albert Pipet remembers that, 'Each metre of ground was literally crushed and pounded by a deluge of fire. The men in the trenches were bewildered, stunned and dazed by the explosions that shook the earth like hammer blows and knocked out your eardrums.' On the other side, Rudi Frühbeisser noted that FJR9 suffered only two casualties on this day: one killed (Stüwen from

6./9) and one injured Pflug, a machine gunner). He adds that after dawn, the regiment launched an attack 500m behind the American lines to support Operation Bererlein ('Bayerlein'), whereby the Panzer-Lehr-Division would advance in a line on the other bank of the Vire. He also notes that shortly before midnight, a strike team from the company attacked in an operation called Strosstrupp-Unternehmen Kersting, named after the commander of 5th Company, First Lieutenant Werner Kersting, who had been killed on 2 July:



A paratrooper fires a *Panzerschreck* during a night attack. Scenes like this took place in the area around the Bois de Bretel during the night of 10/11 July. (RF)

The strike team silently advanced behind the enemy; no noise, no engines and without meeting any obstacles. After once more crossing another field, they arrived at an embankment and with an animal cry, the whole group jumped over the slope and landed on the other side in a sunken road, right in the middle of the company. Then followed a frightful melee, where it was impossible to distinguish friend from foe, and one could only recognise terrible cries and curses in German, as shovels and other instruments struck American helmets; you couldn't fire your weapon without risking hitting your own comrades. Ziehlke, from 3rd Company, fired a flare directly into the chest of one American who, like a wild beast, ran away as he turned into a burning, screaming torch. Flares began to fall slowly at the end of small parachutes, illuminating the landscape with a whitish glow.

Der Alder, 4 July 1944. This illustrated magazine focused on the Luftwaffe, with this particular edition reporting on the paratroopers from 3rd Division.



1. The cover of the magazine shows Field Marshal Rommel speaking with paratroopers; the 'Green Devils' (*Grüne Teufel*).



2. These paratroopers are watching American prisoners from 2d Infantry Division, who

have just been assembled together. Note the wire on the helmet used to hang foliage from for camouflage.



3 & 4. Two American prisoners from 2nd Division. One of them has been seriously wounded on the chin, perhaps the same one as described by Rudi Frühbeisser, with the Indian head stitched onto his sleeve. The other prisoner is holding his personal belongings.



1 & 2. Two shots of Saint-Lô in ruins. The town had suffered terrible shelling on 6 June, when nearly 400 civilians were killed. The destruction did not prevent the Germans from driving through the devastated town.



3 & 4. The *Panzerschreck* was a very useful tool for the paratroopers when destroying American tanks and would prove to be particularly effective. (JPB/Heimdal)

On the American side:

Under the cover of the barrage (which the Germans had used in order to creep up silently), a company of paratroopers sprang through the smoke and threw themselves onto the men in the trenches along the road. The assault was accompanied by flame throwers and flares. Max Stones' 'A' Company was overwhelmed and cut to pieces. Very quickly, small groups began to fight back and continued to do so until dawn, using rifle butts, grenades and bayonets. In total, 1/115 counted 150 casualties during this night attack in the Bois de Bretel.

According to Rudi Frühbeisser, the paratroopers then wanted to get out of the fateful sunken road and fall back to collect the wounded. However, as they returned to their starting positions the Americans opened fire on them and suddenly the situation was reversed: the deluge of fire cut the German telephone lines and there was no longer any communication with HQ.

Tuesday 11 July: the beginning of the offensive

The attack on the Bois de Bretel is often joined together with the big American offensive, and the threat of the Typhoon fighter-bombers was soon

added to the artillery barrage. In fact, the main American offensive had been launched, but the German strike team's attack on the 115th had completely disorganised the northern wing of the offensive that was supposed to have been launched by Colonel Ordway and the 115th. Indeed, Major Johns declared that the German night attack had been 'magnificently planned and executed'. After the initial barrage (using 88 and 105cm guns), the 115th's outposts had been completely surprised and overwhelmed and in the area between 'A' and 'B' Companies, a 600m gap separated 1st and 3rd Battalion. In order to close the gap, 'A' Company from the 116th arrived, losing thirty men in the subsequent counter attack by the American artillery. The Germans had pulled back at around 7.30am, but 1/115's attack had been due to commence at 6am and there was no way it would take place until Major Johns' battalion had reorganised itself after suffering a hundred or so casualties. That same night, another localised attack took place in 2nd Division's sector by two companies from FJR5. Their aim was to improve the situation near the crossroads at Bérigny, although the attack would not have the same gravity as the one at Bois de Bretel.

To the east, while the 1st Infantry Division and 2nd Armored Division defended the area around Caumont, the 2nd Infantry Division launched an attack on Hill 192. The commander, Major General Walter M. Robertson, was under no illusions: the first attempt to take Hill 192 in June had resulted in 1,253 casualties for the division over the course of three days. The 38th Infantry (under Colonel Ralph W. Zwicker) would lead the main assault, supported by three tank companies and two heavy mortar companies. In the centre, the 23rd Infantry (Lt. Col. Jay B. Loveless) would send a battalion to the east of the objective, with the 9th Infantry (Colonel Chester J. Hirschfelder) providing support from their position east of the crossroads at Bérigny.

The previous night, Colonel Zwicker had pulled back his 38th IR a few hundred metres so as to prevent the regiment from being caught in the air support's bombardment. Unfortunately, the German paratroopers had pre-empted this move and had advanced their positions on the abandoned terrain, thus avoiding the dawn artillery bombardment that was centred on their previously-held position. What's more, there was no aerial support due to the

inclement weather. The artillery barrage lasted for twenty minutes before the 38th IR advanced just after 6am, only to encounter heavy fire from the German paratroopers, who were in position on the lines previously held by the Americans. During the first half an hour, the paratroopers held back the first wave of the battalion's advancing tanks, but the GIs managed to move forward, thanks to the support of powerful and accurate artillery: 20,000 rounds were fired by just one artillery division, totalling around 45 tonnes of explosives! Tanks and bazookas successfully neutralised 12th Brigade's assault guns, while a dozen infantrymen from the 38th IR surrounded a position called 'Kraut Corner' under a hail of grey steel. Fifteen paratroopers surrendered, but three others refused to do so and were buried alive by a tank dozer. General Robertson thus declared, 'We have a battle on our hands!' But the advance was still slow-going; just a few hundred metres here and there. Despite this, the 38th IR took Hill 192 around noon, as the German paratroopers fell back, with only a few scattered groups remaining on the southern slopes of the ridge. When they finally reached it, elements of the 38th established a defensive perimeter along the main Saint-Lô/Bayeux road, while others crossed the road settled on higher ground to the north. By the end of the day 2/38 held the entire line along the road.

The paratroopers of Fallschirmjäger-Regiment 9



1. *‘Mensch, du lebst!’* (‘Mate, you’re alive!’) Happy to be alive after the American attack on Hill 192 on 11 July. (Photo E. Grunwald, RF/Heimdal)



2. Although ravaged by war, it was still possible to find rich food in Normandy; here a paratrooper drinks warm milk from his regulation bowl. (NA)



3. These two paratroopers are planting flowers on the grave of Sergeant Wilhelm Küster, who was killed on 16 June 1944. (NA)



4. A direct hit on a mortar team from 3./9. (RF)



5. At the CP of Captain Engelhardt, commander of 3./9 (Erwin Schmieger's company). Engelhardt (left) was killed in 1945 on the Eastern Front. Next to him is *Oberjäger* Korsikowski, who would die from his wounds. (RF)



6. A group of paratroops from 3rd Company (3./9), including *Objäger*. Korsikowski, in

their individual foxholes, with blackened faces to help with camouflage. (RF)



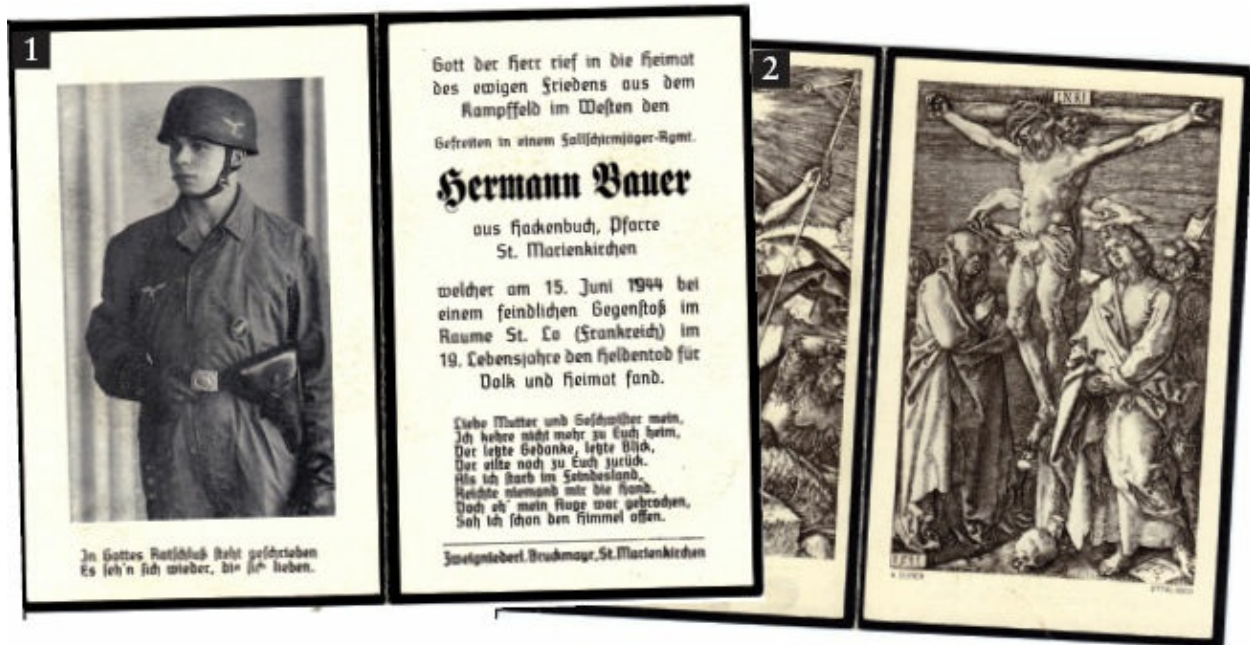
7. Another image from 3rd Company, FJR9. This one shows *Oberjäger* Korsikowski, clearly affected by the fighting, standing at the graves of two of his comrades. (RF)



8. The military cemetery of 1st Battalion, FJR9 (I./9). On the right is the grave of Second Lieutenant Richard Landefeldt, the former adjutant to Major Stephani, commander of FJR9. (RF)

Sterbebilder (obituaries)

In Germany, especially in the Catholic south, photographs were published announcing the death of a soldier at the Front. They were used as a testimony to the soldiers killed in combat, giving them a face, as well as the date of their death. In northern Austria, a sign was placed under a church porch that showed images of the men from the parish who had been killed; a monument to the dead. Here are a selection of paratroopers who were killed in the Saint-Lô area between 15 June and 12 July 1944.



1 & 2. Corporal Hermann Bauer, originally from Hackenbuch, in the parish of St-Marienkirchen, was killed on 15 June 1944 during a counter-attack in the Saint-Lô area. He was 19-years-old. There is a poem on the front, with two religious images by Dürer on the back.



3 & 4. Not only was Corporal Franz Estermann also from Hackenbuch and the same age as Hermann Bauer, but he was also killed on the same day and under the same circumstances. Such similarities cannot go unnoticed and the printer even used the same poem on the front. However, this time, on the back, is a simpler iron cross with the words: 'He who died courageously for his country, builds himself an eternal monument'.



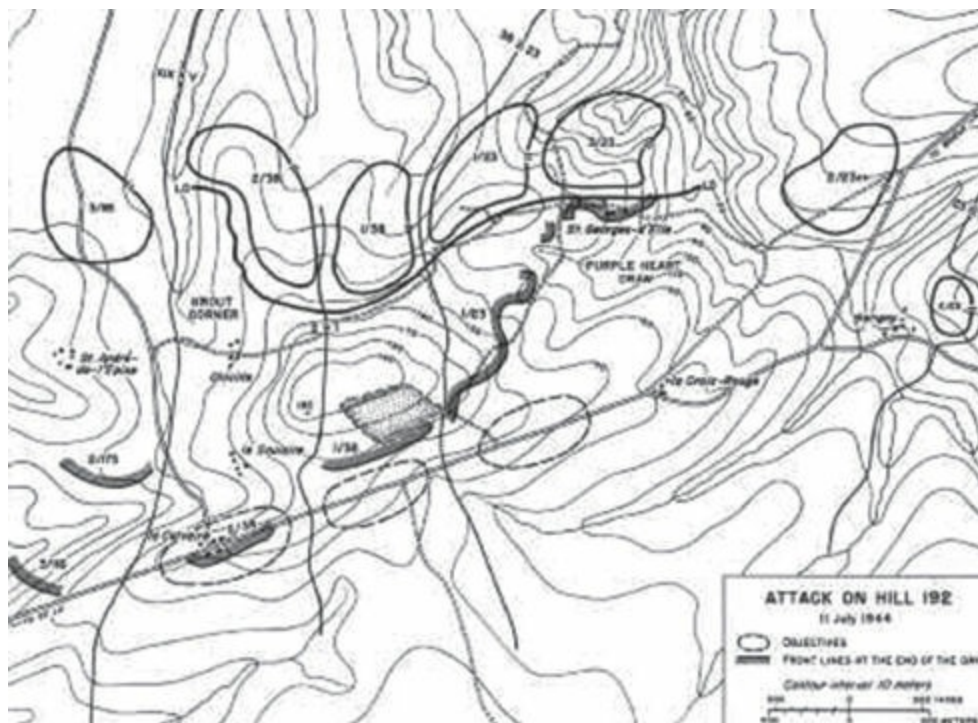
5 & 6. Corporal Andreas Beck was born on 10 February 1919 (he was twenty-five), and killed on 9 July 1944 near Saint-Lô. There is a patriotic poem on the front, while the back shows a cross and helmet with the words: 'Christ is my life, death is my victory'.



7 & 8. Johann Igl, from Salberg (near Furth im Wald, Bavaria) was killed on 11 July (most likely east of Saint-Lô) aged twenty-seven. On the back is a picture of a baroque church.



9 & 10. Johann Kittl, eighteen, was killed on 12 July 1944. His memorial includes a poem and another religious image on the reverse. (Heimdal Collection)



The attack on the area around Hill 192 by 2nd ID in the east, and part of 29th Division on the west. Saint-Georges-d'Elle, the subject of the previous map, can clearly be seen, along with the Bois de Soulaire, in the middle of the map, where paratrooper Schmieger spent a terrifying night before the action was halted. (US Army)



An orientation panel erected near Hill 192. The view from here is exceptional and you can even see the coast. (GB)



Aerial photograph taken on 20 June 1944 showing the strategic crossroads at Bérigny and looking south-west. The church can be seen near the crossroads, with road on the right leading to the main Bayeux/Saint-Lô road. The road on the left links up with the main road to the forêt de Cerisy and Bayeux. The road on the top-right leads to Saint-Lô.

(DAVA/Heimdal)

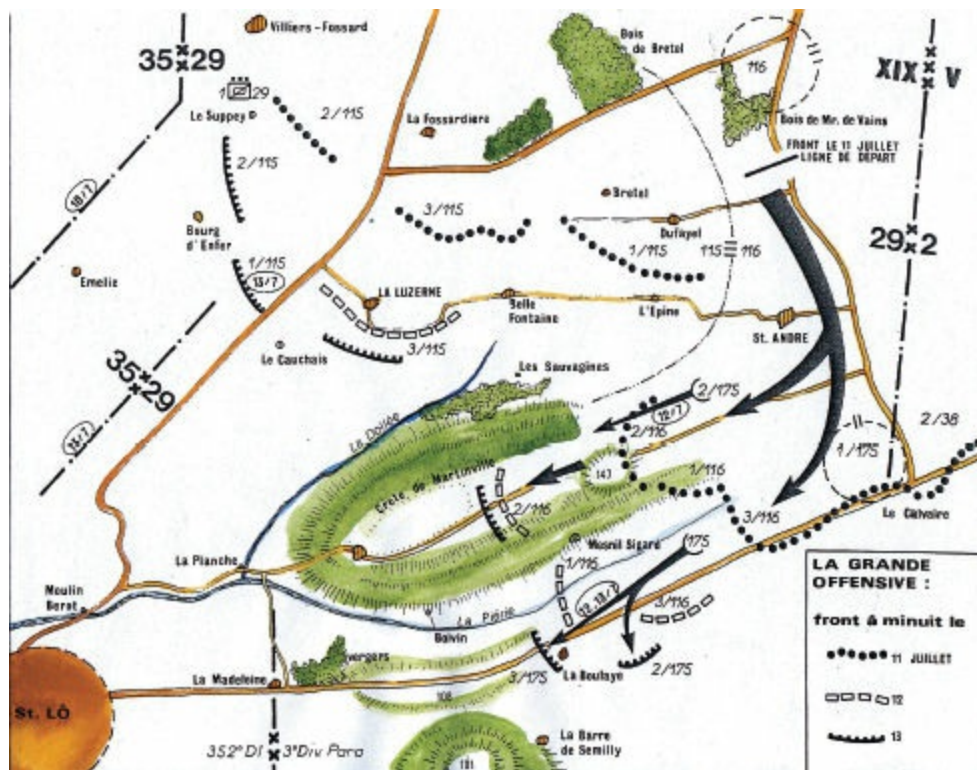
Meanwhile a battalion from the 23rd Infantry (1/23, commanded by Lt. Col. John M. Hightower) arrived from Saint-Georges-d'Elle to make up the attack force on the left flank on the road heading west from the village. This was where the first attempt to take Hill 193 in June had resulted in 1,253 casualties for 2nd Division. To the south, from east to west, a 750m long depression traversed by a creek ran just 200-400m from the battalion. The GIs called it 'Purple Heart Draw': it was deep, impassable for tanks and they were constantly under threat from German fire from the other side. At 6am, 'A' Company (on the left) and 'C' Company (on the right) set off along the road leading to Cloville, which lay 300m behind the starting line, facing little resistance until they reached 'Purple Heart Draw'. Unable to cross the depression due to the steep banks, four tanks lined up 50m behind the northern ridge to support the assault of 'A' Company's 1st Platoon. But the

paratroopers were ready and waited for the men to reach the bottom of the small valley before triggering a barrage of mortars and artillery, which had been carefully set up in advance. In addition, automatic fire came at them from houses to the south of the valley and the situation was a disaster for the platoon. The company's 2nd Platoon then tried to take the depression from the west, while two tanks from 'C' Company, 741st Tank Battalion, advanced to try and neutralise the machine guns positioned in the houses south of Saint-Georges village. But the German paratroopers continued to fight back and so 3rd Platoon was sent in to provide further numbers. This action, and the progress of 'C' Company further west, finally broke the Germans' resistance and the shots coming from the houses were silenced by the two tanks as they fired from a distance of 30m.

Except for thirteen, all the men from 1st Platoon who had reached the bottom of the valley - Purple Heart Draw- were either killed or wounded. In spite of this it was difficult to turn the infantrymen of 'A' Company, who had been fighting to the east along the valley, and send them south, towards the objective of the Saint-Lô/Bayeux road. The leader of 3rd Platoon had been among the casualties, but his place was taken by Sergeant William C. Stanley, who regrouped the survivors of 1st Platoon and led them halfway towards their objective, while also protecting 1st Battalion's flank, which was being subjected to heavy mortar fire. Towards noon, elements from 3/23 advanced to support 'A' Company (1/23), while on the right, 'C' Company was able to progress more easily using rifle grenades to dislodge the paratroopers hidden in the hedges, following the training they'd received the week before. The company maintained contact with 1/38, which had been engaged in the fighting further west, on Hill 192. At the end of the day, 1st Battalion had progressed 1,500m and was entrenched 400m from the Saint-Lô/Bayeux road, although the Germans still held the eastern end of Purple Heart Draw. The eastern slope of Hill 192, which had been taken by the regiment, overlooked the crossroads at Bérigny. Further east, diversionary attacks had been carried out during the day by 3/23 and elements of the 9th IR, in order to block any paratroopers that may have been engaged in counter attacks further west. This resulted in 'L' Company (23rd IR) suffering heavy losses when they attempted to seize a single hedge from the paratroopers

from FJR5, to the east of Saint-Georges d'Elle. Although faced with such fierce resistance from the Germans, the 2nd Infantry Division had packed too much power for the enemy, at least according to the history of the unit.

29th Division's Attack - As we have seen, the night attack by the German strike team had destabilised the planned attack by 1/115, and its assault would now be postponed until noon, when Brigadier General Cota would advance with the words, '29th, let's go!' During the course of the afternoon, 500m metres of land would be gained, although la Luzerne remained out of reach and the hamlet of Belle-Fontaine was still 1km away. Meanwhile the 116th IR, which was on the front line between 1/115 and 2nd Division, had already suffered 431 casualties in the 11 days since 1 July, including 117 killed, 294 injured and 20 missing. It advanced along with the 38th IR (2nd Division), supporting its right flank as it moved along the ridge at Martinville. Since early morning, Major Bingham's 2/116 had been moving north from Saint-André-de-l'Epine, starting from Chêne au Loup, with each company in the battalion being accompanied by tanks from the 747th Tank Battalion. The initial stages of the attack were discouraging: the German paratroopers were well-hidden deep within the hedges and fought back fiercely. After having difficulty passing through the first two hedgerows, as well as a minefield, A. Pipet notes that:



The advance by 29th Division from 11-13 July (A.Pipet/Heimdal)

It took two hours of fighting using tanks in order to overcome a solidly fortified sunken road. Afterwards, the fields behind were strewn with a large number of German corpses and it was the first time we'd seen so many men from the 29th Division. Meanwhile, the tanks destroyed a gun that was blocking the road and by 11am, all six hedges had been negotiated. After 600m, with all resistance having faded away, 2/116 veered right along the ridge towards the objective of Hill 147. At 1pm, 3/116 descended towards FJR9's CP in order to block the Bayeux road and protect the left flank of 2/116, which had advanced 1.5km towards Saint-Lô.

The Germans suffered heavy losses on this first day of the Saint-Lô offensive. Rudi Frühbeisser reports that there were 575 casualties for FJR9 alone (104 killed, 250 injured, 197 missing and 24 taken prisoner), with iron deluge that was the American artillery causing the most damage, including cutting the telephone lines. At the regiment's CP, located around 1km from Hill 192, Major Stephani no longer had any contact with his companies. Following his experiences of fighting in Italy, he knew that it would be

foolish to send out liaison officers under such artillery bombardment: he would have been sending them straight to their deaths. All communications rested on the shoulders of First Lieutenant Herbert Arnold, who was in charge of the regiment's radio operations. The artillery finally stopped around 10.00hrs, only to be replaced by the rumble of tanks. Following this break in the shelling, Major Stephani headed out, along with Second Lieutenant Willi Geck and his motorcycle platoon. In the meantime, the telephone lines were restored. As well as regular tanks, flame-throwers also appeared, which as Rudi Frühbeisser points out, was 'bad news for the wounded who could no longer run [away].' Twin-engined fighter-bombers also supported the attack, and one of 2./9's platoon leaders, Sergeant Major Herbert Beit was wounded by one of many phosphorous shells.

The men of 2nd Division faced tough hand-to-hand combat with Captain Engelhardt's 3./9. At the beginning of the attack, the German frontline defended by FJR9 passed through La Chapelle (9 km north-west of Saint-Lô), by la Luzerne, Bretel, Belle Fontaine, l'Epine, Saint-André-de-l'Epine, Cloville, le Parc, Saint-George-d'Elle, Hue, Ivon, La Saferie, la Taille, and up to la Croix Rouge, which was on the main road near Bérigny. The American advance broke through this line, and among the many losses, 1./9 lost its leader once again. Following the deaths of Second Lieutenant Moser, then Corporal Boller, it was now the turn of First Lieutenant Hans Waitschacker, who had only recently arrived at the front, and who was killed after being shot in the head. The young Second Lieutenant Armin Stoerz immediately took command, only to be killed in the same manner when climbing an embankment. The same cascade of losses among the officers occurred for 2./9: its leader, Captain Klepzig, was killed and replaced by First Lieutenant Frisch, who in turn was killed and replaced by Second Lieutenant Radom, who was then seriously wounded. The 6./9, who were fighting near la Luzerne, lost a platoon leader, Sergeant Major Dichtel, while another platoon leader, Corporal Pölkow, was killed in 7./9. Sergeant Major Leiterhold, a platoon leader in 8./9, was wounded and paratrooper Karl Friedrich Püschel (9./9) was killed as he brought supplies to the paratroopers. The fighting was particularly intense for 10./9: its commander, First Lieutenant Grundmann, was killed after being shot in the head and Second Lieutenant Ingenhofer, a

veteran of the Battle of Crete, was taken prisoner, along with Sergeant Major Reinert, Corporal Kuhl and Corporal Mund. Prisoners were also taken from 11./9, including its commander, Captain Matula, and Ensign Willmes and Corporal Mühlstedt. Those killed in 12./9 included its commander, First Lieutenant Hartmut von Berg, as well as Ensign Heigel and Corporal Johann Böhm, while a platoon leader in 14./9, Corporal Walter Diebrich, was wounded. As we have seen, most injuries were caused by shrapnel and the doctors and medics were soon overwhelmed. Many paratroopers, crouched in their foxholes, began to lose their sanity under the avalanche of steel that fell on them, and many of these elite soldiers cracked under the pressure of the hellish situation. Supplies of ammunition were no longer getting through, although they did manage to destroy several American tanks. In this case, any tank that ventured near one of the sunken roads risked being attacked by adventurous paratroopers, who would throw grenades at the turret until the tank commander appeared, before opening fire with a pistol and then throwing even more grenades inside the tank itself. Their exploits would be rewarded by plumes of smoke from the burning tank. Mortars from 4./9 also took part in the Germans' defensive efforts. These were positioned on a slope near the hamlet of la Taille (east of Saint-Georges-d'Elle and were under the command of *Oberfähnrich* Fritz Pfeuffer.

39th Division enters the battle - The new 39th Infantry Division, commanded by Maj. Gen. Paul W. Baade, had only landed in France between 5 and 7 July. It joined the attack zone east of the Vire during the night of 9/10 July, from La Meauffe to Villiers-Fossard and was supported by 30th Division from the west bank of the Vire (it was attached to XIX Corps). General Baade would use two regiments to attack at the front: the 314th IR would remain in reserve with XIX Corps. Thus, on the right (west), along the Vire, was the 137th, with the 320th on the left, providing the junction with 29th Division. However, the 320th had a problem: given the orientation of the German frontline, its flank was at an angle.

To the west, the 137th IR attacked with two battalions, but its commander, Colonel Grant Layng, was soon injured by a machine gun bullet. Despite some good progress initially, 1/137 remained stuck for the rest of the day in front of Saint Gilles (directly south of La Meauffe, which had been

captured by the regiment). The Germans had established themselves in the fortified church and the outskirts of the village were defended by machine guns positioned in concrete shelters built within the church and cemetery walls. Faced with the failures of 1st Battalion, 3rd Battalion joined in the attack at 6.30pm, but despite the massive artillery barrage, the Germans continued their obstinate resistance. Similar resistance was faced by 2nd Battalion along the German front line and the inexperience of 35th Division meant that it suffered heavily when confronted by the skills of the German paratroopers. As the division advanced, using the hedgerows to protect themselves, the soldiers suffered heavy mortar fire and the 320th IR would endure the same painful experience as the men of the 137th.



Major General Paul W. Baade looks at a map with one of his officers. His 35th Division had come to provide support on 29th Division's right flank. (*US Army/M. Chan*)



Infantrymen from 1/137, 35th Division passing in front of a ruined church. (*US Army/M. Chan*)

Wednesday 12 July

The successes from the previous day's attack lay with 2nd Division, who had captured Hill 192, aided by the 116th's advance along the Martinville ridge. The German front line had been pushed back and the main road had been reached in places, but was not fully controlled yet, as the advances made in the north were not as strong. This new day would prove less decisive, reflected by the German records which count 'only' thirty-four casualties among FJR9: seven killed, twenty wounded and seven missing. Most of these losses affected 14th and 15th Companies, who took part in a counter-attack that allowed them to gain higher ground near la Rocque, 400m in front of l'Epine, meaning that the paratroopers were able to strengthen certain positions.

The 115th captures La Luzerne and Belle Fontaine - On the morning of 12 July, after an artillery bombardment that had lasted for forty-five minutes (according to the Germans), 2/15 advanced on Bourg d'Enfer, but failed to get beyond Emélie (which had been the objective when Lt. Allsup was hurtling towards Hill 108), after a German counter-attack disrupted the American companies. To the east of the Isigny/Saint-Lô road, 3/115 encountered a minefield at La Luzerne and had to avoid it by turning left towards Belle Fontaine, where it came across several corpses of paratroopers. At La Luzerne, the smell of dead animals was overwhelming, but the GIs had been accustomed to such smells for months and so were keen to carry in and take the village. The Germans were hidden in the hills at Cauchais and so

made any American advance even more difficult. On the left, Major Johns and 1/115 captured Belle Fontaine and established themselves there for the night. Facing this whole area, from west to east, were elements from the Schnelle Brigade's 353.ID and FJR9.

The ridge at Martinville - After the successes of the previous day, the advances made on 12 July were very disappointing. General Gerhardt had planned to push 1/116 along the main road towards la Madeleine, while ordering the 175th to attack further south, thus completely isolating Saint-Lô in the east. In fact, Major Bingham and his 2/116 went beyond Hill 147, along the ridge, gaining only a few hundred metres, after which Colonel Capper set up an observation post on the hill. On the left flank, Major Dallas' 1/116 descended into the valley further south and were confronted by a German counter-attack led by three tanks and three assault guns. Two tanks were destroyed by American artillery and the battalion reached La Boulaye at midday. South of the main road, 3/116 were unable to reach the ridge due to German fire that was coming at them from Hill 101. The Germans even managed to tap into the American radio system, adding to the confusion already created by the German artillery. In two days 29th Division had lost around 1000 men, 500 of them on 12 July as a result of artillery and mortar fire and the units were now all mixed together. The 175th Infantry could not get going due to the reorganisation of the German forces carried out during the night, establishing a defensive line in a circular arc that straddled the Martinville ridge.

On the whole, 2nd Infantry Division's advance was weak: in two days it had gained the best observation post in the entire sector and captured 147 prisoners, but at the cost of 405 casualties, including 69 killed, 328 injured and 8 missing. At the end of this disappointing day, Generals Corlett and Gerhardt decided that their primary objective was henceforth Hill 122, as well as capturing the remainder of the ridge in one day by deploying a massive aerial bombardment.

Thursday 13 July

After not reaching their objective further north, Major Johns and 1/115 moved west to replace 2/115 at Bourg d'Enfer and battalion command passed

from Major Maurice Clift to Major Asbury Jackson. Following the capture of La Luzerne, to the east of the road, 3/115 were able to advance no more than 300m before coming under fire from the Germans positioned on Hill 115.

In the south, Colonel Reed's 175th Infantry was ordered to take Hill 101, south of the main road, but were prevented when bad weather stopped any aerial support and the tanks themselves ran out of gasoline. After experiencing another heavy German artillery bombardment, the regiment set off with 3/115 advancing 500m and establishing themselves near 1/116. On the left, 2/175 only progressed around 100m south of La Boulaye. In this area, command of 3/116 passed from Colonel Meeks to Major Howie, who we shall encounter later. During the night, XIX Corps realised that the offensive was making no further progress in this area, and so passed the task on to the 35th Infantry Division, which had also been fighting since 11 July.

As for the Germans, their losses on this day were relatively similar to those on 12 July: forty casualties in total, including six killed, thirty-two injured and two missing. They even received messages from the Americans inviting them to surrender. By now, 1./9 was positioned at Saint-Pierre-de-Semilly and further north, 15./9 were still south of Bretel and were the company from FJR9 facing 1/175. The commander of FJR9's 3rd Battalion, Captain Karl Meyer, died during the night of 13/14 July. His liaison officer had gone to wake him during the night and after receiving no reaction from his commander, woke his deputy, only for them both to discover that a piece of shrapnel had gone through his eye, penetrated the back of his skull, and was now encrusted in his helmet. Born in Munich, Captain Meyer was buried at Heldenfriedhof Stephani, grave 153, fifth row on the right and given full military honours, including a three-gun salvo, despite the difficult conditions of the front. In a letter to his widow, sub-lieutenant Kunzmann said that the military cemetery 'Stephani 2' was created south of La Barre de Semily, 5km east of Saint-Lô.



A photograph of the ridge at Martinville taken after the fighting. (*US Army*)



1 & 2. These photographs are from a report made shortly before the end of the fighting, taken north-west of Saint-Lô, near La Luzerne, where the Germans faced the 115th Infantry (BA).

Friday 14 July

This new day was to prove relatively calm for the section of the front manned by 2nd Division, and was devoted mainly to reorganisation. The 175th Infantry took complete control of the area around La Boulaye, thus freeing 1/116 and 2/116 along the ridge at Martinville. A. Pipet notes that ‘By the time it came to move on, 1/116 came under such intense fire that the men were forced to move in groups of five. Afterwards, 2/116 went to take a few

hours' rest at Saint- André (de l'Epine). 125 men arrived as reinforcements, but as the Americans were already at 60 per cent off full operational force, this was certainly not enough.'

In the north-west (along the Isigny road), further efforts had to be made, with Hill 122 (situated further west, south of Emélie), in the 35th Division's sector. Between this and the sector containing the Martinville ridge, south of La Luzerne, 3/115 were still trapped under German fire 3km from Saint-Lô. The defence was centred in an orchard, where the automatic weapons had been placed in trenches dug under the apple trees. Partly masked by the branches, the positions were also protected by a curtain of woven foliage that rose about a metre from the ground. Major Johns and 1/115 were positioned west of the road and advanced on the orchard from there. At around 10am, the 35th Division extended its area of the front line towards the Isigny road, with its 134th Infantry (previously held in reserve until now) joining 1/115 and 2/115. However, the weather was so bad on this day that both sides focused their efforts on improving their defensive positions.



1. Another image from *Der Adler*, published 15 August 1944, showing Captain Meyer, commander of I./9. (Private Collection)



2. Captain Karl Meyer was killed during the night of 13-14 July 1944. (RF/GB)

To the west, Major General Baade's 35th Infantry Division now aligned its three infantry regiments from west to east, in the difficult terrain between the Vire and the Isigny road. This involved the 137th IR (Colonel Grant Layng), the 320th IR (Colonel Bernard A. Byrne) and now the 134th IR (Colonel Butler B. Miltonberger). After a forty-five minute artillery bombardment, 3/137 had managed to capture the fortified church south of Saint-Gilles on 12 July, although there were no prisoners taken as all of the Germans had been killed. They then captured a chateau that had already been pummelled by artillery the night before, but their progress was limited on 12 and 13 July, especially regarding their position at Carillon, where 1/320 managed to gain a small foothold on 13 July.

The inexperience of the men in this division, along with the difficult terrain and the solidity of the German positions were mainly to blame for such a feeble advance. On the other hand, the progress made by the 30th Division on the west bank of the Vire, at Pont-Hébert, allowed them to provide covering fire for the advance of 35th Division. This meant that thanks to this new support, on 14 July the 134th Infantry (now commanded by Colonel Harold R. Emery) could advance along the Vire, through the rain and the minefields. The regiment lost 125 men, 11 tanks and took 53 prisoners from 352.ID, who were defending this particular area. In order to communicate between both sides of the river, the Germans had built a submersible bridge at Rampan, south of Pont-Hébert. However, now that they had been forced out of the area, they had to build another one north-west of

Saint-Lô.

While the progression of the US infantry may have been limited, its artillery had had devastating effects: 840 Germans were wounded in this sector during the first two days of fighting. The collapse of Kampfgruppe 352.ID led to the Germans losing Hill 122 and their withdrawal from the high ground north of Saint-Lô. Faced with this threat, while the Carillon sector was held by Kampfgruppe Kettner, General Meindl rounded up KG 266.ID and the rest of the Schnelle Brigade.

Saturday 15 July

Colonel Miltonberger re-launched the attack at dawn with his 134th Infantry, who advanced along a narrow, muddy country lane leading from Villiers-Fossard to Emélie, parallel to the road from Isigny, further west. The hamlet of Emélie consisted of a few farms and was located behind Hill 112. Progress was difficult, hampered by thick hedgerows with the occasional fire bursting forth. By noon, the hamlet was in the hands of 35th Division, but only after heavy losses. Encouraged by this success, Major General Baade spoke with his deputy, Brig. Gen. Edmund B. Seabee, and decided to set up a task force to take Hill 122. The 134th IR would be reinforced by two companies from the 734th Tank Battalion, a company from the 60th Engineer Battalion and a platoon from the 654th Tank Destroyer Battalion. The task force was ready by the evening and at 20.30hrs, aeroplanes began bombing the German positions north of Saint-Lô. The 29th Division began its attack in order to help that of 35th Division, which began at nightfall on the northern slope of Hill 122, reaching it around midnight following an intense artillery bombardment. The task force soon established itself on the hill, but although the German front line had been pushed back, a counter-attack was still feared.

General Gerhardt now modified his plan, no longer committing the 29th Division along the main road, but instead along the Martinville ridge. The 115th Infantry would also attack towards the ridge from the Luzerne area, in the north. As they advanced along the ridge, 3/116 were caught under German fire and in the meantime, 2/175 were only able to advance 400m as they attempted a diversion along the main road. In the afternoon, twelve P-47s attacked the German batteries at La Barre-de-Semilly and their position

at La Madeleine. By nightfall, General Gerhardt would issue the following order for the day: 'This day, 15 July, we will throw the entire weight of our division into battle in order to achieve our objective by the evening. Every soldier will have to fight until the end. Fix bayonets! 29th, advance!' And so, around 7.30pm, 1/116 advanced to the left of the ridge, with 2/116 on the right. By nightfall, they were ordered to remain where they were. Major Dallas (1/116) complied with the order, but Major Bingham (2/116) used a telephone wire to guide him and advanced with the head of his battalion on La Madeleine, while the rest fell back along the ridge. At 116th Infantry's CP, the following message was received from Major Bingham: 'The battalion is busy digging in for the night. Let's organise a defensive perimeter around the forward positions.' The battalion was isolated and unable to fall back during the night, meaning that General Gerhardt decided to wait until the morning before proceeding anything further.

Coming from La Luzerne, in the north, 1/115 had cleared out a group of houses in a marshy area facing a wood at La Planche, where the German paratroopers were positioned. On the right flank, Lieutenant William Kenney was leading his men in 'C' Company, but was wounded before continuing the attack and then evacuated on the orders of Major Johns. By the evening his company would number only thirty-five men and territorial gains would remain very limited in this sector.

Sunday 16 July

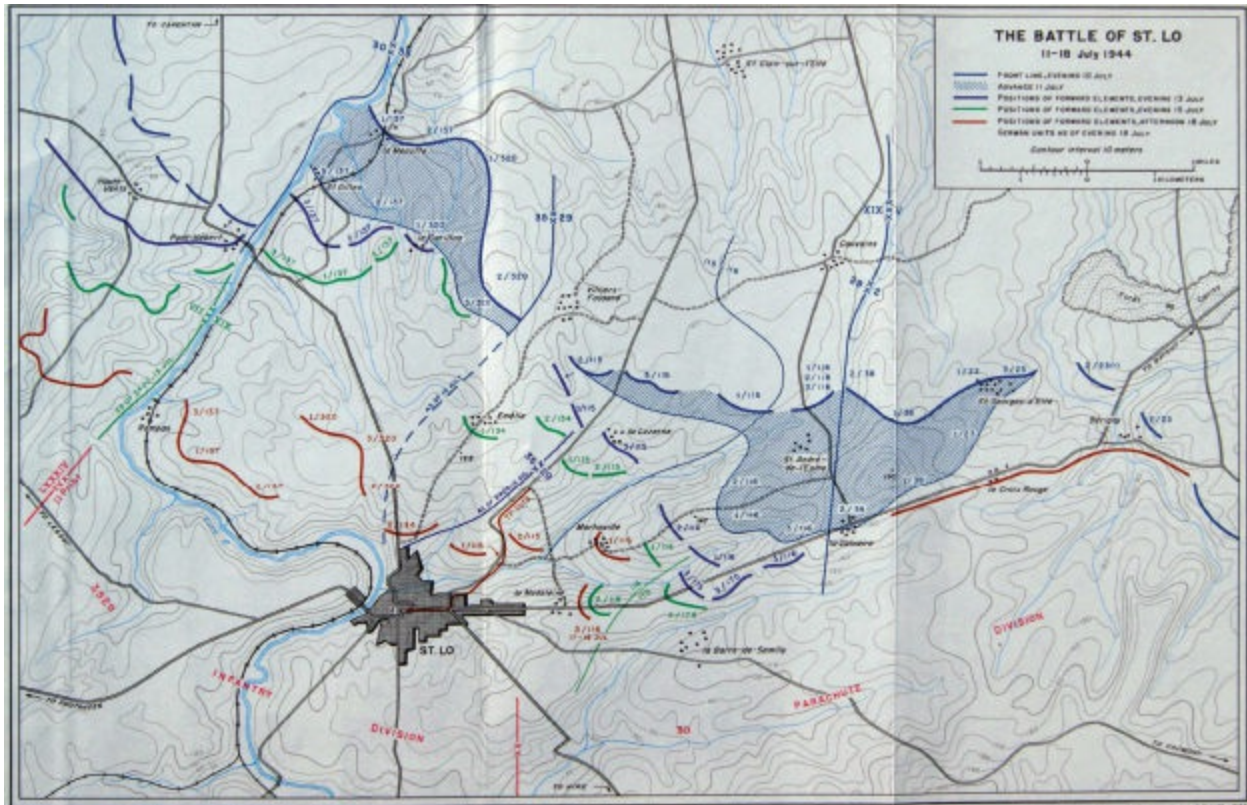
To the north, the 115th Infantry were unable to do any better on this day than they had the previous day; advancing only 300m after eight hours of fighting, with the Germans preventing any forward progress along the Isigny road. In the mean time, the paratroopers of FJR9 abandoned their positions at Bretel and La Luzerne (the most advanced part of the line in the northern sector that effectively formed a salient), in order to strengthen their front line. Further east, the regiment had maintained its position at La Planche, Martinville (a hamlet that comprised of only eight houses, according to Rudi Frühbeisser) and le Mesnil Sigard, before the American's broke through the line here, led by Major Bingham.

General Gerhardt and Colonel Dwyer had come up with a plan to rescue

Major Bingham and 2/116 from their isolated position along the Martinville ridge, but were halted by a German counter-attack. Rudi Frühbeisser recalls seeing a group of Americans (Major Dallas' 1/116) trying to sneak off towards La Planche in the morning, just as the fog was lifting. Word was immediately sent to First Lieutenant Glaser's 13th Company, who proceeded to fire his mortars. Corporal Kulesa sent a radio message to the regimental CP from his observation post, and a rain of steel then began to fall on the US soldiers, who flung themselves to the ground for protection. The American artillery soon answered back and Kulesa was wounded by one of the shells. The US version of what happened reports that Major Dallas' 1/116 endured an unusually violent German counter-attack, which had been preceded by a two-hour artillery barrage. The paratroopers then launched an attack with around 100 men (13./9), who soon came under fire from the American machine guns as soon as they reached open ground. The second German attack, along the axis of the ridge, hit 'A' Company (1/116), which had already been severely depleted and was currently under the command of Sergeant Harold Peterson. He tried to stop one of the panzers by firing at the surrounding Germans from one of the American-held hedges, before pulling back to the CP, along with Fried and an Indian called 'Chief'. The panzer was eventually pushed back along the ridge by a grenade launcher, but in the meantime, 'A' Company had lost thirty-seven men. There paratroopers were reinforced by the men from Second Lieutenant Geck's motorcycle section, who had been sent by Major Stephani. On this day the entire FJR9 would suffer fifty-four casualties (seventeen killed, thirtysix injured and one taken prisoner) and the regiment's CP was now located at a farm in the valley, near Fumichon, where it had been moved on 14 July.

At La Madeleine, Major Bingham's 2/116 clung on to its position in the hedges behind the orchard, undergoing heavy artillery and mortar fire all day, but without any physical attacks. Ammunition and food were scarce, while the thirty-five wounded were tended to by a captured Austrian medic, although three of the men would later die. 16 July was proving to be very disappointing for General Gerhardt and the 29th Division. The 35th Division, however, would have a much better day. At dawn a reserve battalion was sent forward, but was soon stopped when the German launched a counter-attack

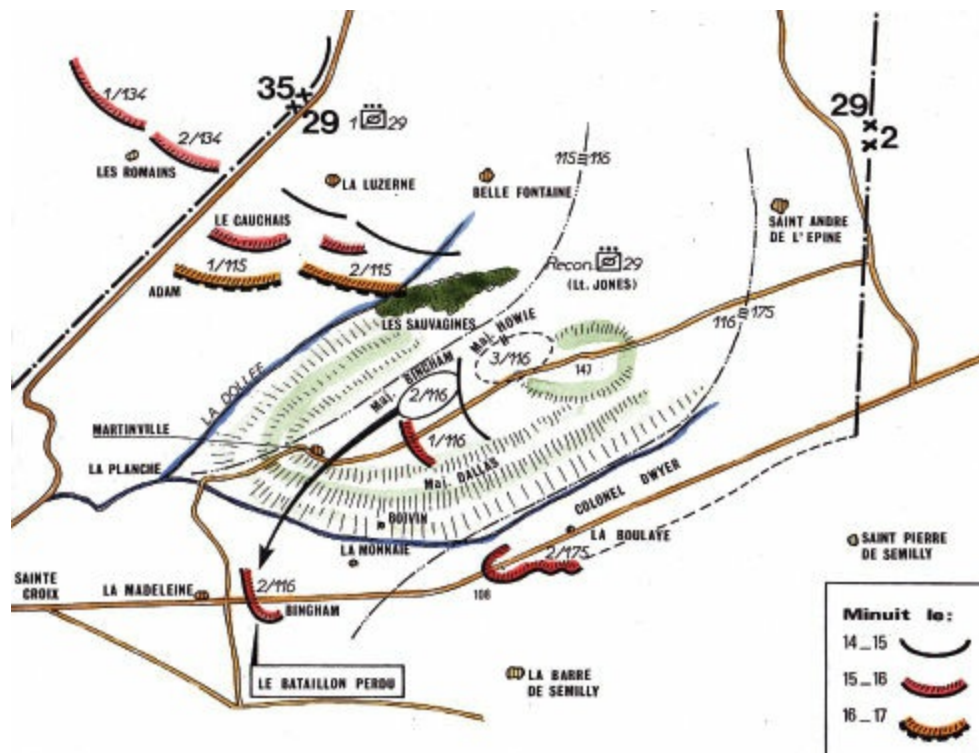
supported by artillery and mortars, leading to the GIs having to retreat to Emélie. But the 35th's response to this was more successful; the men were sent back into the fighting, eventually managing to capture Hill 122, despite the German artillery. From the top, the view of Saint-Lô, only 1.5km away, was excellent and the capture of the hill meant that the battle was virtually won: the German front line at Saint-Lô had reached its breaking point.



Following the attack of 11 July by 35th, 2nd and 29th Division, Hill 192 was finally captured. However, progress would remain slow until the capture of Hill 122 by 35th Division on 17 July, beginning the final offensive on 18 July. (US Army)



On the morning of 12 June, 2/115 captured Bourg-d'Enfer but reached only as far as Emélie, when the Germans counter-attacked between the two battalions and disrupted the companies. The area was finally taken on 15 July by 134th IR, 35th Division. This photograph shows the village of Emélie, north of Saint-Lô, and was taken shortly after the fighting. (A. Pipet/Heimdal)



Progress remained slow for 29th Division. Major Bingham's 2/116 was isolated near the hamlet of La Madeleine, as the German paratroopers continued to hold the Martinville ridge. (A. Pipet/Heimdal)

Monday 17 July

The 35th Division improved its position as the 137th Infantry pushed forward along the Pont-Hébert/Saint-Lô road on the right flank (west), with the division meeting little resistance as it moved along the eastern bank of the Vire. In the north, the German position at Carillon remained a salient in the American front line, but as the 35th advanced, the Germans of the KG Kettner abandoned it, surrendering to the 320th Infantry without a fight. This meant that even though it had no experience and had only recently arrived on the frontline, the 35th Division had won the battle for Saint-Lô. However, the glory of the victory was given over to the 29th Division, who had had to battle the elite, fearsome 'Green Devils' of the 3. Fallschirmjäger-Division.

General Gerhardt ordered Colonel Ordway's 115th Infantry to attack along the high ground north of La Madeleine, in order to take the German front line at Martinville. The 116th Infantry were to push forward towards Major Bingham and the 175th Infantry were to take Hill 108 along the Bayeux road.

With 450 men from 2/116, Major Howie was ordered to launch a surprise dawn attack on the Martinville ridge, 'making good use of grenades and bayonets'. At 4.30am, in the midst of the fog that would remain dense until around 9am, Major Howie and his men slipped between the two companies of paratroopers positioned on the ridge, and who had been ordered to hold it until the last man. The Americans reached La Madeleine around 6am and proceeded to share their rations with their stranded comrades of 2/116. Unfortunately, Major Bingham was unable to continue further and so Major Howie uttered the now famous phrase, 'It's alright, see you in Saint-Lô!' However, just as he was preparing his men for the attack, a mortar shell landed right next to him, killing Major Howie instantly. His command was taken over by his deputy, Captain Puntenny, but he was unable to continue the attack due to the heavy German artillery fire. At 6pm, a German attack allowed twenty GIs to reach the crossroads and Captain Puntenny withdrew his outposts on the La Planche road, but maintained control of the road to Bayeux. An aerial attack struck the Germans at around 9pm, who retreated, but there were now two US battalions still encircled at La Madeleine.

From his position at Martinville, Major Dallas tried desperately to

reinforce those men who were stranded and 2/175 attempted the same from their position along the Bayeux road, resulting in the death of Lieutenant Colonel William Terry. 'G' Company now only had eighty-five men, 'F' Company had sixty and 'E' Company only fifty: the battalion was now on the defensive for the night. On the other hand, to the north of the ridge, 2/115 managed to achieve a spectacular advance forward, and captured Martinville. It suffered heavy losses in the process, due to mortar fire, before being ordered to take advantage of the dark and descend down to La Planche and prepare for the attack. As for the Germans, FJR9 recorded only six losses on 17 July: two killed and four injured.

Tuesday 18 July

Now 35th Division had reported that the Germans had broken off from their positions at the front, the moment for the final attack on Saint-Lô appeared to have arrived. The commander of XIX Corps, Major General Corlett, ordered General Gerhardt to send a task force into the city and take control. And so 29th Division's 'Task Force Charlie', under the command of Brigadier General Cota, had the honour of entering Saint-Lô on behalf of the 'Blue and Gray Division', who had suffered such heavy losses in this sector for over a month. The task force consisted of two platoons from 29th Reconnaissance Troop, Sherman tanks from 747th Tank Battalion, a section from 175th IR, a section from the regiment's anti-tank company, a Military Police detachment from 29th Division, a section from 121st Engineer Combat Battalion, a section from 821st TD-Battalion, 'B' Company from 803rd TD-Battalion, as well as additional artillery observers.

Leaving La Luzerne at 3.10pm, the task force descended down the Isigny road and headed towards Saint-Lô. Major Glover S. Johns, who was already engaged in fighting along the road, was ordered to join the task force, which was preceded by a truck in order to detonate any mines. At 2.30pm, Lieutenant Jones, who had now taken over command of the 29th Division's reconnaissance unit, was at the head of the task force and would thus be an important witness regarding its entrance into Saint-Lô, which he described to Albert Pipet:



Crossroads on the Martinville ridge, leading to Saint-Lô. (GB)



The view south-west from the ridge, looking out over Saint-Lô and its water tower. (GB)

A leading group with an M8 machine gun was at the front; I was directly behind with my armoured command vehicle and Lieutenant Strickland followed with the rest of his section. From Couvains, we arrived at 'Mortar Corner' on the Saint-Clair/Saint-Lô road, where the 29th Division had its HQ. My jeeps had closely followed the engineers from the 121st, who were busy removing mines from the road. The Chief of Staff, Colonel McDaniel, arrived and ordered me to get going. I told him that it was madness and had already seen the engineers extract two road mines right in front of me. We pushed on, but nothing exploded. As we descended into the valley, we came under fire from both German and American soldiers, resulting in several injuries. I radioed back and was told to leave the wounded at the side of the road. There was no artillery fire, just snipers. Many American soldiers died here and there, as well as those who were injured. We arrived at the

last bend, opposite the distillery, when a sudden burst of fire coming from the cemetery greeted those in the advance party. We climbed up the slope again and opened fire on the anti-tank gun in its fortified position. Heavy fire broke out again on both sides and I answered back with my 0.50 machine gun, directing my fire at the fleeing Germans. At that moment, a tank arrived and I ordered him to support us. It fired several shells before stopping at la Bascule crossroads, blocking the road. Once the way was cleared, we entered the town.

While my scouts crept through Saint-Lô, I headed for the place du Champ-de-Mars, to organise a defensive perimeter around the square. We were supposed to patrol the town in our armoured cars and tanks, but it was impossible to get very far because the rubble [from the buildings] blocked the streets, sometimes up to a height of three or four feet! The amount of destruction was frightening and instead I decided to post the jeeps and armoured cars around the square, as well as a platoon of Tank Destroyers and an infantry section.

We were waiting for a counter-attack, but meanwhile my men captured several prisoners and destroyed any positions previously held by the Germans. After forty-five minutes, the Germans finally realised that we were inside the town and emerged from cellars or buildings preparing to being their counterattack, only to be stopped by our fire. During a lull at around 5pm, I took a picture of the beautiful Saint-Lô 'cathedral', little knowing that two hours later, one of the spires would collapse. I continued my task of strengthening our position with more men and equipment and covering our trenches with beams, or whatever else we could find. All of my vehicles were carefully camouflaged, although I had to constantly keep the engines running as the numerous radio transmissions being sent seriously depleted our batteries.

Next to me, General Cota was seriously wounded in the arm by a piece of shrapnel and in a short time I could see his sleeve turn red as the blood flowed down to his fingers. Our own artillery started up in response and the firing would continue throughout the night.

As we have seen, Major Johns and his battalion (1/115) provided infantry support to Task Force Cota, providing cover on each side of the advancing

column and being subjected to particularly heavy fire from the direction of the Moulin Bérot. Behind them, Lieutenant Jones' reconnaissance group was to organise three points of support: the crossroads at La Bascule, the crossroads at the hospital (at the place des Alluvions) and the crossroads at rue des Noyers. As they arrived in Saint-Lô the infantry set up seventeen key defensive positions , which were supported by armoured vehicles, M8s and tanks. In the meantime, the CP was established at the Malherbe restaurant, at the crossroads at La Bascule, on the Isigny road. Lieutenant Jones' CP was his own, camouflaged M8 Greyhound, set up in the Champs de Mars. The task force's CP, along with Lieutenant Colonel Meyer, was set up in the distillery at the bottom of the valley, which was also used as a collection point for the wounded.



The 320th Infantry using an old German position to the left of the sunken road at Carillon. The road led to the German CP in the old house. (*US Army/Coll. M. Chan.*)

As Major Johns joined the rest of the battalion, his jeep descended towards the distillery and he suddenly noticed a soldier huddled in a ditch. He stopped to try and encourage the man to continue further, but soon realised that both of his feet had been blown away at his ankles. There was another terrible sight awaiting the major as he entered the town; the body of a civilian, dressed in a small blue shirt, with neither arms nor legs. When he reached the Bascule crossroads, Colonel Alfred V. Ednie asked him for four or five men to act as protection for each tank. The colonel also told the major that as there were only infantrymen available, he would therefore have complete authority over all of the troops within the town. It was now 4pm and Major Johns directed two men (Weddle and Grimsehl) to take their two companies and clear the town, with any last pockets of resistance finally being eliminated by nightfall. He also pointed out to the wounded General Cota and Colonel Ednie that defences had to be set up to combat any possible German counter-attack.

Meanwhile at the Bascule crossroads, a tank fired at an observation tower to the east of Baudre, but was unable to reach it. A tank destroyer also attempted to hit it, but in the meantime, a German 88 shell blew a hole in the CP's wall before hitting the tank destroyer with the next blast. Colonel McDaniel arrived with the 29th's flag and hung it from the side of the building (see [image 2 page 232](#)). A message was soon received from Major Johns at the division's CP: 'The town of Saint-Lô has been cleared. It is firmly in our hands at 17.30hrs, 18 July 1944'. Soon after, the chief tank commander at the crossroads, Captain Sidney A. Vincent, was killed, and the Germans would continue to attack this particular area, which was soon nicknamed 'Mortar Corner'.

By the evening of 18 July, the south-west of the town was under the control of Lieutenant Grimsehl's 'A' Company, while Lieutenant Weddle's 'B' Company took the south-east. 'C' Company provided support for the tanks, but the American artillery remained on alert as its German counterpart was still very active. On 19 July Major Johns abandoned his CP at the Bascule crossroads, which were too exposed, and instead moved it into the Blanchet family's mausoleum in the cemetery. The map room was set up in the lower chapel, and the Germans, who were hidden in the cemetery's

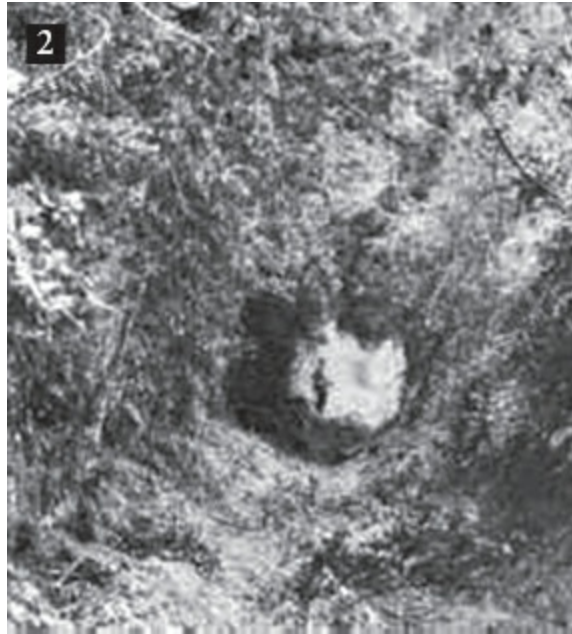
vaults, attacked the CP's guards.

After the death of Major Howie, his body had been covered with a blanket and brought to the town by jeep in the evening of 18 July. At 7.30 the following morning, the men wrapped his body in a US flag and respectfully laid it on a pile of stones at Sainte-Croix church. Shortly before his death, Major Howie had told his men that he would 'see them in Saint-Lô', and so they were determined to honour his last wish. He became the 'Major of Saint-Lô' and a monument has been erected there in his memory.

On 19 July the Germans retreated and established their lines 1km south of Saint-Lô. On that day and the next, the regiments of the 29th Division were relieved by the 35th Division and brought back to the south of Saint-Clair to relax, thus marking the end of their forty-five day operation, with the total loss of 7,000 men. The capture of Saint-Lô now cleared the front for Operation Cobra, which would be launched on 25 July.



1. A soldier from 320th IR, 35th Division, at the entrance to a sunken road at Carillon. (*US Army*)



2. The opening of the sunken road south-west of the position at Carillon, towards la Petite Ferrière, leading west to la Crêterie, where the previous image was taken. *(GB)*



The remains of an American position in the same area. *(GB)*



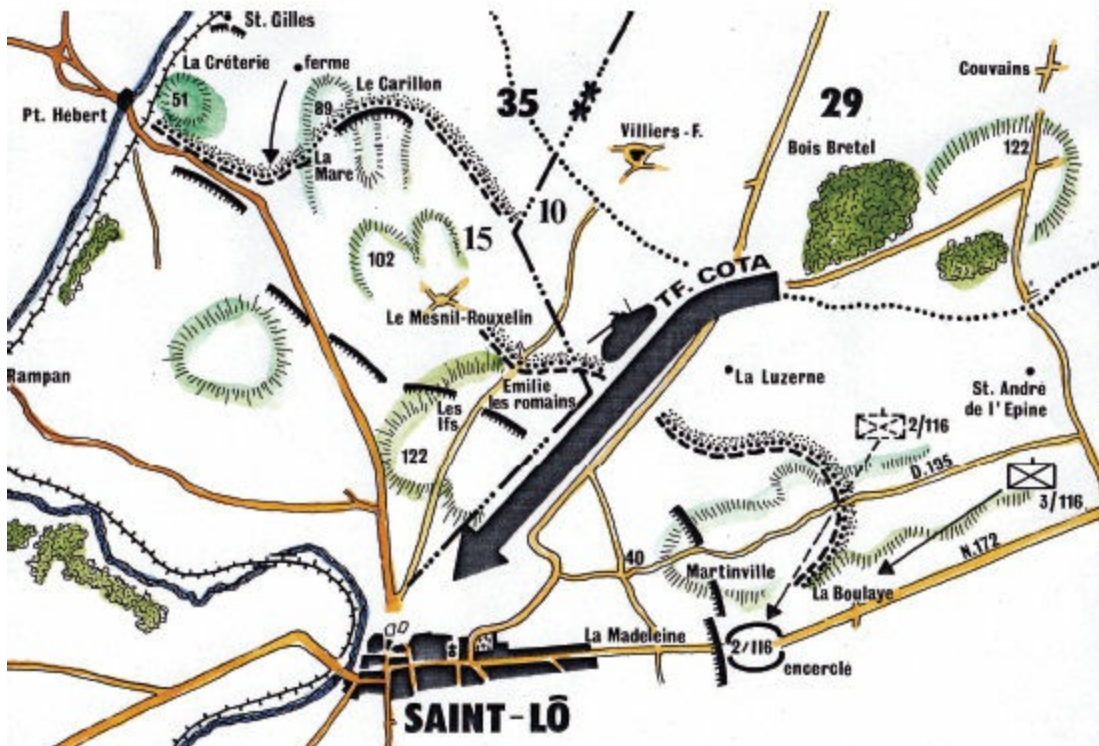
American position at the top of the Carillon road. (*US Army/M.Chan*)



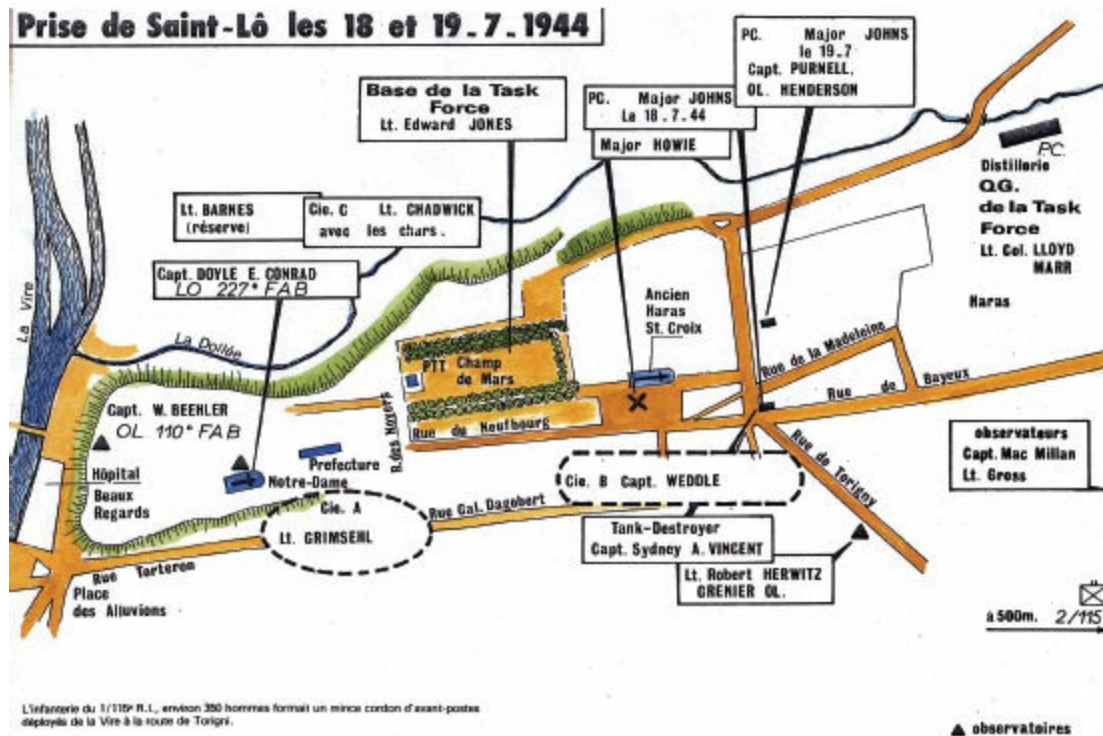
The crossroads at la Madeleine, east of Saint-Lô, on the defensive perimeter held by 2nd and 3rd Battalions, 116th IR. The crossroads were an essential supply route for German ammunition to get through.



The main road from Isigny leading straight to Saint-Lô, looking northwards, from where the armoured task forces arrived from Couvains. The road on the left (heading northwest) leads to Mensil-Rouxelin. (GB)



Map showing the general situation at Saint-Lô on 18 July. (A. Pipet/Heimdal)



Positions of Task Force Cota and the advance parties of the 29th Infantry Division in Saint-Lô, 18 and 19 July 1944. (A. Pipet/Heimdal)

19 and 20 July 1944



1. Armed with an M1 rifle, an American infantryman looks out on the centre of Saint-Lô (you can see the imposing ruins of the post office), while taking shelter from potential German snipers.



2 & 3. As Task Force Cota moves towards the centre of Saint-Lô, some US infantrymen pause in front of a German sign showing a diversion to avoid the town centre. The German artillery fired on the road (from Lison) and the Americans named it '88 Alley', in honour of the famous German '88s'. A half-track armed with a DCA provides some protection. In the second image, the advance continues onwards.



4. A Dodge command car has just been hit by a German shell and is still burning as American troops enter Saint-Lô.



5. Reconnaissance vehicles from 29th ID and M8 machine guns create a traffic jam in the ruined centre of town.



6. The centre of Saint-Lô is still under German artillery fire, as men from the 29th run for cover. (*Heimdal*)

19 July 1944 - la Bascule crossroads



1. Task Force Charlie arrives in Saint-Lô at the crossroads of la Bascule, where the roads from Bayeux, Isigny and Torigni-sur-Vire meet. The troops are accompanied by tanks and head right, towards the town centre.



2. Major Johns (1st Battalion, 115th IR) set up his CP in the corner restaurant, where the blue and grey flag of the 29th now flies. The CP would come under fire from the German 88s, blowing holes in the wall and destroying Captain Sidney A. Vincent's Tank-Destroyer.



3. A Sherman tank progresses along the middle of the roads, through the rubble. (*Heimdal*)



4. Approaching the crossroads. The flag hung by Sergeant Davis, from Bellfontaine, Ohio, unfurls, showing the number '29'



5 & 6. Further ahead, a road sign points the way to Isigny. The road on the right, passing in front of the burned-out house, leads to the Place Sainte-Croix and the town centre.

19 and 20 July - Centre of Saint-Lô



1. An American patrol carefully descends down rue Saint-Georges, searching houses that might be hiding German snipers.



2. Clearing out a house.



3. American infantrymen from 29th Division throw themselves to the ground and crawl forward in an attempt to avoid German snipers.



4. Infantry and armoured vehicles advance along the middle of the rubble-filled streets, between la Place Saint-Croix and the town centre.



5. Infantrymen from the 29th pass along the Place Saint-Croix and down Rue du Neufbourg, towards the centre. (*Heimdal*)



1. US infantrymen from the 29th advance through Saint-Lô, most likely along Rue du Neufbourg, passing in front of an American anti-tank gun, which has been destroyed by a German shell.



2. Among the ruins of the devastated town, a GI from the 29th has captured three German prisoners, tow of whom no longer have jackets or boots.



3. A German sergeant has been injured in the leg and is captured.



4. The sergeant is now loaded onto a half-track to be taken to an American field hospital. The vehicle probably belongs to the 13th Cavalry Group, which was temporarily attached to the 29th from 18-20 July 1944.



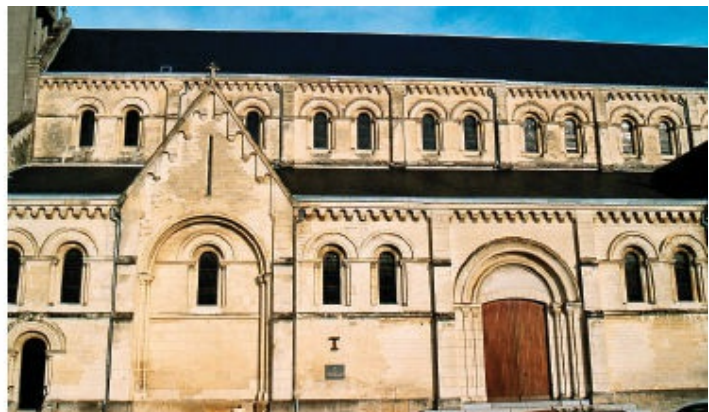
5. As he is loaded onto the vehicle, the German grimaces from the pain caused by his wound. (*Heimdal*)



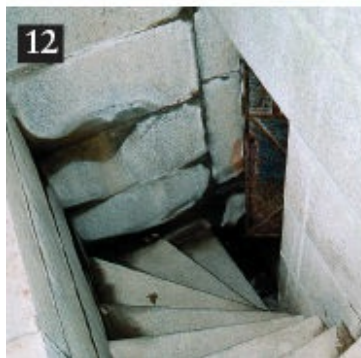
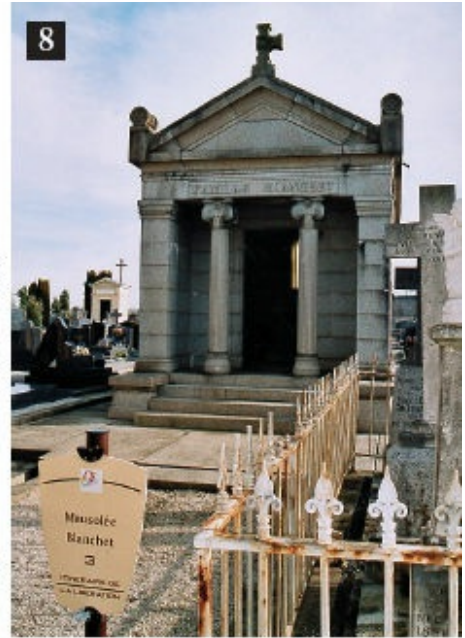
1 & 2. Major Howie, commanding his men from 3rd Battalion, 116th IR, told his men on 17 July: 'See you in Saint-Lô!' He was killed shortly afterwards when a mortar exploded near him at La Madeleine, a crossroads east of Saint-Lô. His men carried his body to Saint-Lô and laid it in the ruins of a side aisle at Sainte-Croix church. In the foreground, two soldiers from the 29th have positioned their Browning machine gun in a shell hole.



3. This soldier has written 'Cry Baby' on the butt of his M1 Garand rifle, showing the dark humour enjoyed by many US soldiers. The photograph was taken in the town centre, where a telephone exchange has been set up in a cellar.



4 & 5. The body of Major Thomas D. Howie was laid on a pile of stone blown from the walls of the church. His remains were covered by a US flag and surrounded with flowers. Major Howie would pass into history as the 'Major of Saint-Lô'.



6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11 & 12. Major Johns' CP was set up in the cemetery, in the Blanchet family tomb to be more precise, on 19 July (8348)



13, 14 & 15. Shell impacts can still be seen.

The Americans in Saint-Lô, 19 July



1. This photograph is symbolic of the battle for Saint-Lô by 29th Division, which had involved a month and twelve days of intense fighting in order to get here. In the background is Notre-Dame church, with one of its two bell towers still intact (the spire would be hit a few days later by German artillery). On the left, behind the Sherman (named 'Hun Chaser'), one can just make out the upper parts of the ruined Palais de Justice and the prison.



2. The upper town emerges from the ruins: the rubble must be cleared in order to let vehicles through.



3. The body of a German soldier lies in the midst of the rubble, between the upper town and the Vire. (*DAVA/Heimdal*)



4. This Stuart tank, reinforced at the front with sandbags, passes through the centre of Saint-Lô to arrive at the Bascule crossroads, where there was much less destruction.



5. A little further ahead, this armoured German reconnaissance vehicle has been put out of action due to the intense shelling. It is a Schwerer Panzerspähwagen (8 Rad) (Sd.Kfz 231); an 8-wheeled reconnaissance tank with four crew and a 2cm KwK 30 and MG34 gun. It could consume 45-50ltrs of fuel per 100km.



1. Bypassing the upper town to the north, this US column looks out over the Dollée valley, which has been obliterated by the shelling and transformed into a post-apocalyptic landscape. The rubble has blocked the flow of the Dollée, forming a small lake. This lunar landscape made such an impression that it was photographed several times and used to symbolise the destruction of Saint-Lô. The jeeps are arriving from the east and descending into the valley, passing the foot of the upper town.



2. This colour photograph, taken in the summer of 1944, provides a better indication of the extent of the destruction, and the size of the lake created by the Dollée river, which had been blocked by the buildup of rubble. The road that passes at the foot of the upper town has been cleared, and is being used by columns of vehicles skirting the town from the north, heading south.



3. This other colour photograph is taken looking north, towards the Dollée valley. The jeep is heading east up the road, in the opposite direction to those in Image 1.



4. This photograph is also taken looking north and shows the lake and the severely damaged old houses of the district. (NA/Heimdal)

The Dollée valley



1. This colour photograph was taken in the summer of 1944 from the Dollée valley, at the foot of the upper town. It shows the town ramparts, Notre-Dame church with its truncated tower, and on the right, the ruins of the prefecture (the town's administrative offices) .



2. From the same spot, American convoys blow up clouds of dust along the road.





3 & 4. Also from the same spot, this time looking right, are more ruins, including the prefecture. Image 4 was taken by Heinrich Hoffmann on 16 June, when the Germans still held the town, following the terrible bombing of 6 June. The image was used as German propaganda, with the caption 'hundreds of French are buried under the ruins of their houses'. (NA/Heimdal)

The Dollée district



1. A close-up of the ruins from Image 4, those of the prefecture, located above the Dollée.
(DR)

2



2. The small lake formed by the Dollée, with the Pont-Hébert/Carentan road in the background. (*Heimdal*)



3. Another view of the Dollée valley from the upper town, looking right. (*Heimdal*)



4. From the steeple of Notre-Dame church, the Dollée valley presents a spectacle of desolation, with the blocked river forming a lake among the ruins. (*La Manche Libre*)



5. Looking left, the way leads to the Pont-Hébert road. Images 2 and 3 were taken in 1945, a year after the events. The desolation is still complete and the civilians had no choice but to traverse the fields of ruins. (*Heimdal*)

Saint-Lô: 'Capital of Ruins'



1. Aerial view of Saint-Lô upper town. On the right is Notre-Dame church, now without its second spire. The whole of the upper town surrounding the church is nothing more than a field of ruins. The station and the Vire river can be seen in the top-left.



2. The devastated facade with its collapsed tower.



3. An American patrol in the ruins of Notre-Dame church, 26 July.

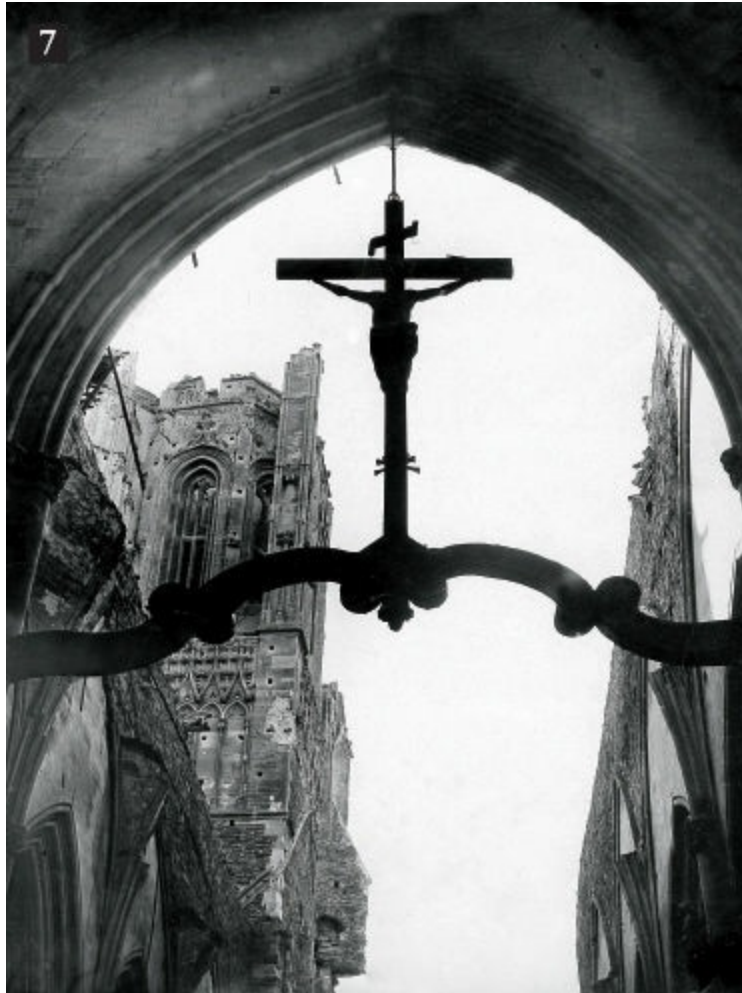


4. Colour photograph taken in 1944, looking west, showing the church surrounded by ruins.

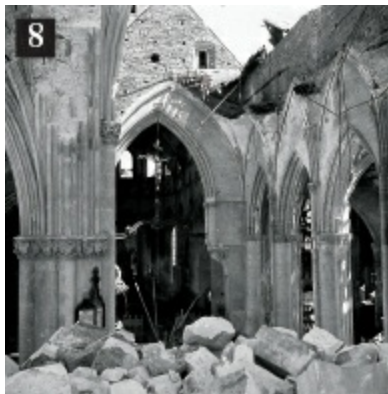


5. The ruined facade of Notre-Dame church on the arrival of the 335th Engineers.





6 & 7. The ruins of the church seen from the choir, looking west, towards the collapsed facade. This image was taken in the opposite direction to that in Image 3.



8. Another view of the ravaged nave.

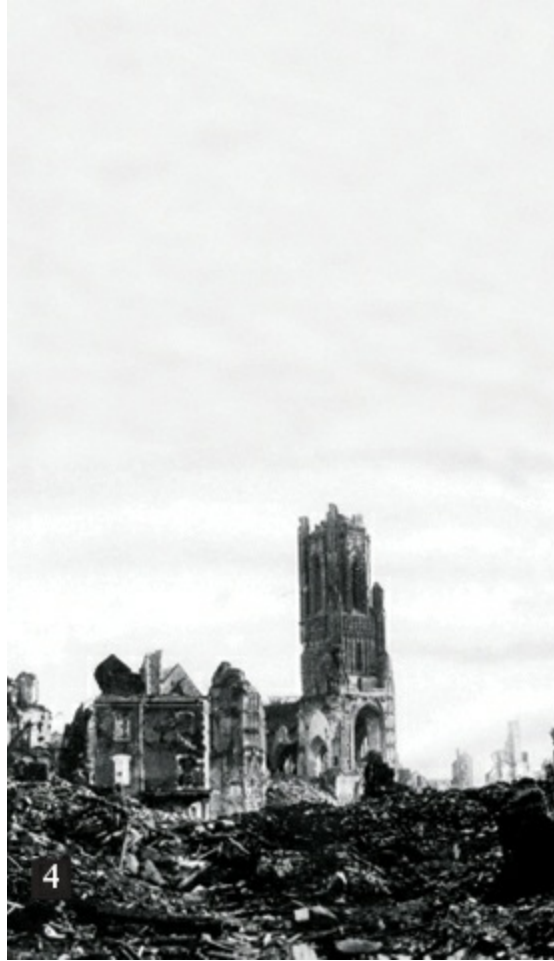
Saint-Lô: the devastated upper town



1 & 2. This photograph, taken from the church tower, looks right, showing the Place des Beaux-Regards, Rue Thiers and Rue Dame Denise. The whole area has now been completely rebuilt, including a new prefecture. The station and the Saint-Lô d'Agneaux school in the background. Image 2 shows a more close-up view, complete with German sign.



3. Taken from the plateau, south of Rue Torteron, one can see the ruins of the upper town, dominated by the damaged Notre-Dame church.



4. The single tower of Notre-Dame church stands isolated amid an ocean of rubble.
(*Manche Libre Collection, NARA/Heimdal*)





5 & 6. Both images taken in 1944 from the still-standing tower of Notre-Dame church.

The civilian victims of Saint-Lô

Around 4.30pm on Tuesday, 6 June, the first bombs fell on Saint-Lô station. A few hours later, at 8pm, fourteen Flying Fortresses flew over the town, dropping their bombs at random. Various neighbourhoods were affected and although the exodus intensified, there were already many dead and wounded lying under the rubble. The destruction continued throughout the night of 6-7 June, at midnight, 3.30 and 5am, with hundreds of planes continuing to sow death and destruction. By dawn, Saint-Lô was no more than an immense brazier. More than 500 corpses were removed from the rubble, with as many people missing. The total number of victims following the bombing was estimated at more than 800, from a population of around 10,000.



1. This photograph shows the damaged bell tower of Notre-Dame church, surrounded by crows at nightfall, symbolises the terrible drama suffered by the town.



2. A photograph taken by the Germans before the final battle, showing the ruined Rue Torteron looking towards d'Agneaux, with its damaged school visible in the background.



3, 4, 5, 6, 7 & 8. Near Sainte-Croix church, the tombs of the civilian victims testify to the horrors endured. These examples include: (3) 'ossements' (bones) - rue de la Poterne; (4) 'ossements' - rue de la Marne; (5) 'ossements' - hospital; (6) 'jeune fille' (young girl) - gendarmerie; (7) Mme Marie Marguerite - presumed; (8) 'restes humains' (human remains) - rue Dame Denise.



9. These women and children of Saint-Lô were luckier and are seen leaving their shelter after seeking refuge from the bombing. The image was taken on 26 July. (*DR/Heimdal/EG*)