

LE TOMAHAWK

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XIX CORPS CRACKS SIEGFRIED LINE

FIRST MEN OF CORPS LANDED NORMANDY D+1

The distinction of being the first of XIX Corps to touch down in Normandy is shared by Majors John J. Mikell and George F. Graybill. They accompanied an assault division — the 29th — when it landed, as advance guards for XIX Corps. They both arrived near Vierville-sur-Mer on D + 1, 7 June 1944. They were followed by two other officers the next day; and by General Corlett and certain of his staff on D + 4.

XIX Corps became operational at noon on June 14, taking over the central sector of the American front on the Cherbourg Peninsula. V Corps operated on its left; VII Corps operated on its right. Together the three Corps made up the First U. S. Army. In addition to its own artillery, tanks, TD's, engineers, and reconnaissance troops, the XIX Corps at that time consisted of the 30th Inf Div and the 29th Inf Div. The 30th Inf Div held the right half of the Corps front, starting approximately at Carentan and running east to the Vire River to Aire. The 29th Inf Div held the line from Aire southeast to the boundary with V Corps. Hedgerow terrain, which proved of such tremendous value to the German defense, characterized the entire Corps sector.

Major General Charles H. Corlett, then in command of XIX Corps, called for an attack by his two divisions the morning following his assumption of operational command. The attack was merely a "limited objective" attack, designed to put the Corps in a good defensive position until such time as enough power could be built up in the First U. S. Army to enable it to break through the hard crust of the German defenses. The advance proved more difficult than was expected and was halted after three days, since by then most of the Corps line, though untidy long for an attack by two divisions, was along the natural defense line of the Vire River and the Vire-sur-Mer Canal.

On July 7th the Corps attacked to reduce the German salient west of the Vire River which reached up to within 3 or 4 miles of Carentan. The attack was launched by the 30th Inf Div. After this division had established a bridgehead south of the canal and west of the Vire River, it was joined by the 3d Armored Division, and together the two divisions slugged it out until by July 16 the German salient within the XIX Corps zone was wiped out. At that time responsibility for the line west of the Vire River was transferred to VII Corps, which assumed command of both the 30th Inf Div and the 3d Armored Division.

ST. LO FALLS, 18 JULY

In the meantime, on 9 July the 30th Inf Div had been attached to XIX Corps and had taken over the right half of the 29th Inf Div's front immediately east of the Vire River. Two days later these two divisions attacked abreast, with the important communications center of St. Lo as their objective. After a week of bitter hedgerow fighting St. Lo fell. The town itself was captured by a task force headed by Brig. Gen. Norman D. Cota, Assistant Commander of the 29th Inf Div.

With St. Lo in American hands, Gen. Omar Bradley was prepared to launch the next major offensive of the First U. S. Army, the attack on July 25 to break out of the Cherbourg Peninsula. XIX Corps' part in this operation began on July 28, when V Corps relieved XIX Corps east of the Vire River and XIX Corps took over about a five mile front west of the river. XIX Corps' line-up in the new sector was the 29th Inf Div, the 30th Inf Div, the 2d Armored Div, and the 28th Inf Div. Its initial mission was to prevent the enemy from bringing reinforcements in from the east and thus interfering with the drives on Coutances and Avranches. In fulfilling this mission the Corps encountered two of Hitler's crack outfits, the 2d Panzer Div and the 116th Panzer Div just north and west of Tessy-sur-Vire. In some of the hardest fighting of this war, both of these divisions were fought to a standstill and then forced to retreat to the south and east.

TESSY CAPTURED, 1 AUGUST; VIRE, 6 AUGUST

The Corps took up the pursuit, with the mission of securing Vire and the high ground immediately west of that city. The capture of Vire was of critical importance since Gen. Eisenhower's plan called for the First and the Third U. S. Armies to pivot on Vire, attacking northeast, then north, and finally northwest to bottle up the German Seventh Army. Tessy-sur-Vire fell on August 1. The same day the 28th Inf Div captured Percy. By August 5 XIX Corps troops had covered 18 miles of hedgerow country and were assaulting Vire. The town was captured on the night of 6 - 7 August by troops of the 29th Inf Div.

STOP LAST GERMAN OFFENSIVE

The following week the Corps' progress was slow. The Germans had moved all but one of their panzer divisions from the British front to the American front in an all-out effort to drive a wedge from Mortain to Avranches and thus split the First and Third U. S. Armies. After the 30th Inf Div, then operating with VII Corps, repulsed this most serious threat, the Germans tried to withdraw rapidly to the northeast to avoid encirclement. While the VII Corps and Third U. S. Army were outflanking the Nazis on the right, the XIX Corps changed direction from southeast to northeast, and by maintaining constant pressure on the retreating forces, forced them to leave several extra divisions behind to fight rear guard actions in the Falaise - Argentan pocket. These divisions were caught in the moose and eventually captured.

Although close to 100,000 German troops were bottled up in the Falaise - Argentan pocket, some units escaped and on 19 August were desperately attempting to cross the Seine River. To envelop the left flank of these forces, the First U. S. Army was given the mission of driving northwest from the vicinity of Dreux to Elbeuf on the Seine.

CORPS H. Q. CROSSED SEINE 1 SEPT.: CROSSED SOMME 2 SEPT.: ENTERED BELGIUM 3 SEPT.:

The first XIX Corps troops crossed the Seine on August 28 with the mission of driving northwest as fast as possible. The bulk of the German Army in the west was retreating as fast as it could to prevent any further encirclement and to gain time in which to prepare an organized defense of the homeland. Only rear guards were left behind at critical communications centers and natural defense lines, such as river crossings and ridge lines. At the time, however, no one could be sure where the Germans would choose to defend in force. In this situation the Corps made a remarkable advance. On September 1 it crossed the Somme. On September 2 its advance elements crossed the Belgian border at O930, the first Allied troops to enter Belgium. Later in the day the first large Belgian city, Tournai, fell to XIX Corps troops, and by midnight three-fourths of the Corps was north of the Belgian border.

CROSS ALBERT CANAL AND CAPTURE FORT EBEN EMAEL

But the Corps now had to pay a price for its rapid advance. It had to mark time for several days while its supply line was pushed across all of northern France. The Corps waited no longer than absolutely necessary. As soon as enough gasoline was secured to move even part of the Corps troops, the advance was resumed -- this time to the east. By September 8 a cavalry reconnaissance screen had driven across all of southern Belgium and reached the Albert Canal. The 2d Armored Division, however, could get only enough gasoline to move one combat command at a time, and the 30th Inf Div had to cover the ground on foot. The Germans employed the precious time thus gained to reorganize their forces and prepare an initial defensive line east of the Meuse River and a MIR at the West Wall. Luckily, they did not have time to refit and man the famous Belgian fortress of Eben Emael, which was captured without a fight by the 30th Inf Div on September 10.

ENTER GERMANY, 14 SEPTEMBER

All bridges across the Albert Canal and the Meuse River were blown, however. To avoid delay, mechanized cavalry on September 11 made simultaneous end runs through the British sector on the left, where a bridgehead over the Canal was already established, and through the VII Corps on the right, where a crossing of the Meuse at Liege had been secured. The two cavalry forces then turned back into XIX Corps' sector and established bridgeheads which the Corps' armor and infantry promptly occupied and expanded. On September 12 30th Inf Div troops entered Holland, the first Allied troops to enter the country. The next day Maastrecht fell. On September 14 Valkenburg was captured and advance elements of the 30th Inf Div entered Horbach, Germany.

On September 16 the XIX Corps and the VII Corps launched a coordinated attack in an effort to reach and smash the West Wall before the enemy could thoroughly man its defenses. Troops of XIX Corps encountered a well-prepared line approximately two miles in depth running northwest from Valkenburg to the Meuse River. It took hard fighting to break through this line, but on September 17 Heerlen was captured and two days later the Corps front faced the Siegfried Line.

INCIDENT AT ST. LO

They rode him in, propped straight and proud and tall,
Through St. Lo's gates... He told the lads he led
That they would be the first at St. Lo's fall---
But that was yesterday---and he was dead:
Some sniper put a bullet through his head,
And he slumped in a meadow near a wall;
And there is nothing further to be said;
Nothing to say---nothing to say at all.

Ride, soldier, in your dusty, dizzy jeep,
Grander than Caesar's chariot! O ride
Into the town they took for you to keep,
Dead captain of their glory and their pride!
Ride through our hearts forever, through our tears,
More splendid than the hero hedged with spears!

This was written by the American poet Joseph Auslander to memorialize the taking of the body of Major Thomas D. Howie into St. Lo by his troops. He was the commander of the 3d Bn., 116th Infantry, and had promised his men "You will see me in St. Lo." When he was killed just outside of St. Lo General Gerhardt, the 29th Division Commander directed that his body be taken in with the vanguard of the task force that captured the town. His body was placed on a bier in the main square of the ruined and still being shelled city.

Gen. Hodges assigned this mission to XIX Corps. On August 18 and 19 the 2d Armored Division and the 30th Inf Div, respectively, were moved 65 miles to the new sector, and on August 20 the two divisions launched an attack northwest across the Avre River. The 28th Inf Div joined the attack on August 22. Evreux fell on August 23 and Elbeuf on August 25. The advance covered 60 kms in five days and effectively prevented the retreating Germans from crossing the Seine at Elbeuf or any point east thereof.

On 26 August the boundary between the British and the First U. S. Army was moved west to run from approximately Mantes - Gassicourt on the Seine to Lille near the Belgian border. XIX Corps was placed on the right of this enlarged British sector. The composition of the Corps became 2d Armored Division, 30th Inf Div, and 79th Inf Div.

TOMAHAWK CORPS DESTROYS ALL PILLBOXES BETWEEN IT AND RHINE, COMPLETES ENCIRCLEMENT OF AACHEN

Launching a powerful offensive, the XIX Corps cracked the concrete and steel portion of the Siegfried Line on its front, opened up a hole 11 miles wide and four miles deep, and driving south, cut the last escape route from Aachen.

The Corps was originally scheduled to attack the Siegfried Line on September 20. Poor visibility delayed the attack two days. In the meantime, it was learned that the 29th Inf Div, which had been sent to Brittany to help in the reduction of Brest, would shortly be reattached to the First U. S. Army. General Hodges decided to postpone the scheduled attack until the 29th Inf Div could be moved from Brittany to Holland to take over the guarding of the Corps' exposed left flank. Due to logistical difficulties, the 29th Inf Div did not arrive until September 29. The next day it took over the Corps' long left flank.

The Corps attack on the Siegfried Line was scheduled for 1 October, but was postponed because of poor visibility that day. With improved weather on 2 October, the assault began at 0900 with a planned "saturation bombing" of the target area, a rectangle east of the Wurm River between Geilenkirchen and Herzogenrath. At 1100 30th Inf Div attacked in the direction Waubach-Rimburg with the 117th Inf and the 119th Inf abreast. By nightfall both regiments had crossed the Wurm River and the 117th Infantry had broken through the enemy MLR on the east side of the river, reducing 11 pillboxes by infantry action alone and occupied Palenberg. Both before and after the start of the attack the 29th Inf Div launched diversionary attacks northwest of Geilenkirchen.

On 3 October the 117th Inf continued its advance eastward and with the help of advance elements of GOC, 2d Armored Division, cleaned out Ubach. The 119th Inf with tank support captured the moated castle of the famous von Brautlach family east of the Wurm River and made considerable progress in cleaning out the wooded slope beyond it, knocking out at least eight pillboxes.

On October 4 the Germans launched four serious counterattacks, all of which were repulsed. Artillery fire on the Corps' troops that day and the following was heavier than any experienced since Normandy days. Taking advantage of cloudy weather, the Luftwaffe also engaged in its greatest air activity yet seen on the Corps front. Five "category ones" and five "category twos" were credited to our anti-aircraft fire. On October 5 the 2d Armored Division expanded the bridgehead over the Wurm River north and northeast, while 30th Inf Div pushed south and southwest. A strong German counter-attack on October 6 pushed the 30th Inf Div back 800 yards, recaptured 4 pillboxes and caused considerable casualties. But by nightfall the lost ground was regained and the division continued to exploit its penetration by capturing Herzogenrath and Aisdorf. General Hodges instructed General Corlett to concentrate the Corps' efforts on making early contact with the VII Corps east of Aachen. To avoid over-extending the 2d Armored Div, its attack to the northeast was called off and some of its tanks used to reinforce the drive south of the 30th Inf Div.

GERMANS GO 250 MILES FOR REINFORCEMENTS

The Germans reacted strongly to the Corps' efforts to join forces with the VII Corps. Heavy reinforcements were brought up to prevent this junction taking place. There were numerous counterattacks during the week October 8 - 15 against the 30th Inf Div and two of them were strong enough to blunt the advance temporarily. The Germans recaptured Bardenberg on the night of October 9 - 10. After bitter house-to-house fighting and concentrated artillery fire the counterattacking forces were driven out on the 11th.

Most of the German reinforcements fortunately never reached the front. Visibility was excellent during this period and the Corps was able to employ artillery and air support with great effectiveness. On October 12 alone 16 squadron mission (fighter bombers) were requested and flown with good results.

AACHEN ENCIRCLED, 16 OCTOBER

The last four days of the operation were characterized by bitter fighting in the heavily built up area northeast of Aachen. All avenues of attack were covered by dug in Mark VI's and Mark VII's. Our General Sherman's were too canalized to be of much assistance. The infantry had to slug it out yard by yard. Finally the 30th Inf Div made a strong artillery demonstration on its left and center and followed it by diversionary ground attacks in that sector. These feints drew the heaviest concentrations of mortar and artillery fire which the 30th Inf Div ever received. Meanwhile, the main effort of the division was made on the right and by nightfall had reached its objective. From this position patrols crossed and made contact with the 1st Inf Div to close the Aachen gap.

FACTS AND FIGURES

D-Day to 15 October

1. Prisoners captured	29,867
2. Enemy airplanes shot down	55
3. Bridges built (with a total length of 13,356 ft.)	150
4. Major Rivers Crossed: (Vire, Seine, Somme, Meuse)	4
5. Medals to Corps:	
D. S. C.'s	26
Silver Stars	737
Bronze Stars	3,390

XIX CORPS IN ACTION



JUNE 10, 1944

GEN. CORLETT landed on our NORMANDY BEACH on 10 June at COLLEVILLE-SUR-MER.

At ST. JEAN-DE-DAYE we stopped our first German counter-offensive.

A milestone in our progress was the capture after a long bitter struggle by the 29th Division on 18 July of ST. LO.

At TESSY where the XIX CORPS stopped its first major German attempt to halt the American drive into Brittany by attacking the east flank of the penetration.

VILLEDIEU

THE FOREST OF ST. SEVER was the largest German dump yet captured by us.

ST. SEVER-CALVADOS

VIRE was the first on which the THIRD and FIRST ARMIES swung to liberate first BRITAIN then FRANCE.

VILLERS-BOCAGE

The German bunkered country made every field a ready dug trench system admirably fitted by nature to putting a defense and to repelling an attack.

ARGENTAN

ELBEUF is the furthest north we pushed to drive the Germans into the sea.

MERU

Crossed the SEINE RIVER on the 1st September.

MANTES

DREUX

NONANCOURT

MORTAGNE

ALENCON

BARENTON

DOMFRONT is where we wounded the shoulders of the penetration and started north to cut off those German units that might escape from the pocket of ARGENTAN-FALaise.

CHARTRES

ENGLISH CHANNEL

LE HAVRE

NORMANDY

BAYEUX Captured intact by the British on D Day

CAEN Center of British drive to destroy the German armor unused to repel their landing.

FALaise

FRANCE

LIBERTE - EGALITE - FRATERNITE

BELGIUM

BRUSSELS

WATERLOO

Tournai where the 2nd Armored Division entered Belgium the 2nd September

CAMBRAI

BRAY

ST. QUENTIN

HOLLAND

HEERLEN

GULPEN

Crossed the MEUSE RIVER on the 20th September at MAASTRICHT

XIX CORPS attacked and penetrated thru the SIEGFRIED LINE on the 2nd October.

MAASTRICHT

LIEGE

Bridged the ALBERT CANAL the foremost anti-tank barrier in the world at FT. EBEN EMEL.

GERMANY

DEUTSCHLAND UNTER ALLIES

will be the 1944 edition of the German national anthem.

LAST ACTE

ARMEE BLANCHE

We were helped in numerous ways by the Belgian resistance.

The FRENCH FORCES of the INTERIOR were of great assistance in liquidating and harassing us of "le site Becke."

Even our Headquarters Commandant captured 150 German prisoners within 400 yards of our C. P.

If here we even interposed German march columns along our fast moving column - to their regret!

The welcome given by a grateful FRANCE was touching - sometimes the apples and pears came too fast to dodge.

We went so fast past WORLD WAR I battlefields that all we really saw were the neat little cemeteries of our military predecessors here.

Crossed the SEINE RIVER on the 1st September.

PARIS and VERSAILLES, so near and yet so far. While we saw the famous EIFFEL TOWER and liberated ST. GERMAIN, the XIX CORPS had to plan to visit them both "après la guerre."

XIX CORPS

FROM D DAY (6 JUNE 1944) TO GERMANY

MAJ. GEN. CHARLES H. CORLETT - COMMANDING

BRIG. GEN. GEORGE D. SHEA - ARTILLERY COMMANDER

BRIG. GEN. H. E. MAGUIRE - CHIEF OF STAFF

The Corps was organized 20 August 1942 at Camp Polk by Major General Crittenden as the III Armored Corps; participated in the Louisiana maneuvers under the Third Army; in August 1943 the Corps commanded 12 Infantry Divisions, 2 Armored Divisions, 15 separate Tank Battalions and other Corps troops; Louisiana maneuvers again in November 1943; 16 December 1943 advance detachment to Ft. Houlton for England; 29 January 1944 main body arrived Brest; prepared for the invasion at Camp Knuck, Warrminster, Wiltshire, England; participated in the Normandy, France, Belgium and Holland Campaign somewhat as shown by this crude map; and cracked the German "West Wall" or "Siegfried Line" on 2 October 1944.

Drawn by T-7 Henry J. Mc Millan. Reproduced by G-2nd Eng. Top. Co. U. S. Army Nov. 1944.

See Surrender 5-7-45