



XIX CORPS NEWSPAPERS & PUBLICATIONS



MISSION ACCOMPLISHED

The story of the United States VII Corps 1944 - 1945

8 June 1945

To the Officers and Men of the VII Corps for whom this short account of our activities is primarily written, I want to say once more that all our success has been the direct result of your splendid teamwork. The proof of this is the fact that the fine divisions which have fought under us have been sorry to leave us and glad to come back. This means that the Corps Troops and Staff know their business and look after the divisions as they should. That can be true only because each one of us has had the true interests of the Corps at heart and has played his part up to the hilt. I am eternally grateful to each and every one of you.

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Lieutenant General, U.S. Army
Commanding VII Corps*

Introduction

In 1940, when many of us were still waiting for our "Greetings" from the President, Headquarters VII Corps., United States Army, was activated in the bustle of busy Fort McClellan, Alabama. It was 25 November 1940. Europe was at war. One unprepared country after another had fallen to the military might of a rearmed Germany, and Nazism and Fascism were spreading like plagues over Europe. The United States was preparing to defend itself, expanding its Army, Navy, and Air Forces, training and equipping hundreds of thousands of civilians against the threat of Axis domination.

Major General Frederic H. Smith, accompanied by his Chief of Staff, Lieutenant Colonel J. Lawton Collins, arrived in Alabama in January, 1941 to take command of the Corps, and later in that month the command post was set up in Ensley, a suburb of Birmingham, Alabama. The first job was to train three National Guard infantry divisions, the 27th, 33d, and 35th, all three of which had recently been activated in the Army of the United States. Several months of basic training and combat exercises culminated in Corps maneuvers in Tennessee during June, 1941, when these three divisions and the 5th Infantry and 2d Armored Divisions took to the field in mock warfare. It was the Corps; first taste of field operations, the forerunner of many days in France, Belgium, and Germany.

In July, 1941, Major General Robert C. Richardson, Jr. assumed command of VII Corps, and a few weeks later, during August and September, led the Corps through Army maneuvers in Arkansas and Louisiana. As troops of the Second and Third Armies attached, maneuvered, withdrew and attacked again in one of our biggest shows of American military might, VII Corps more than once distinguished itself in the sham battle. It still had its original three divisions, and maneuver directors attached the 2d Armored and 2d Cavalry Divisions to the Corps for several exercises. More and more people realized that their troops were now training and preparing for the real thing, the day when they would be called to repel an invader or to be invaders themselves against the Axis powers. Late in September the troops moved back to the comparative luxury of their barracks, to review the lessons they had learned and to correct the weaknesses that two months in the field had disclosed.

War struck quickly and without warning. Pearl Harbor was attacked by the Japanese on 7 December 1941, and within two days the United States was at war with Germany, Japan, and Italy. The West Coast was threatened, and our best trained troops were rushed to that area. Two weeks after the Jap attack on our Pacific island bases, Headquarters VII Corps was established in San Jose, California, where it served in the dual role of securing the Northern California Sector of the Western Defense Command from enemy attack and of training and preparing units for movement to the combat zones. The 27th and 43d Infantry Divisions were given their final training and combat equipment and shipped westward against Japan. Special training in amphibious operations was conducted for the 3d Infantry Division. The 7th Motorized Division stressed desert warfare. The 35th Infantry Division continued training while performing security missions in Southern California.

Desert operation was featured during the summer of 1942, when the Corps conducted maneuvers in the dry heat of the California desert in July, August, and September. Armored and motorized units of the 3d and 5th Armored and 7th Motorized Divisions drove across the wastelands in temperatures reaching 120 degrees F. in the shade, under conditions reported to be worse than on the North African desert battlefields. These grueling weeks emphasized more than ever the physical toughness required of the American Soldier and his combat equipment.

November, 1942, saw the Corps Headquarters once more on the move, this time back across the continent to Jacksonville, Florida. Under the Second Army, VII Corps carried out an extensive training program in the southeastern states, activating and initiating training of new divisions, testing the combat efficiency of others, and conducting field exercise and maneuvers. During the succeeding eleven months many units trained under the direction of the Corps, including divisions which have since proven their metal in the face of the enemy. The 63d and 66th Infantry Divisions were activated, the 4th, 30th, 79th and 81st Infantry Divisions were trained to a high degree of combat efficiency, and for short periods the 28th, 69th, 87th, and 99th Infantry Divisions were under Corps control for inspections and training.

More maneuvers were held in Tennessee during April, May, and June of 1943. Once more the 5th Armored division participated under VII Corps, and the 79th and 81st Infantry Divisions, having just completed division field exercises, took a post-graduate course among the Tennessee hills. In May, during the maneuvers, Major General Richardson was called to Washington for assignment to command the Hawaiian Department, and Major General R.B. Woodruff took command of the Corps.

After maneuvers, the Headquarters was given its introduction to war planning. Under a heavy veil of secrecy, officers and men worked night and day in guarded rooms planning the numerous details of loading ships, assaulting a fortified beach, and establishing a beachhead in Europe. Although the plan developed was never put in operations, the experience gained by the staff in preparing it was of tremendous value in later planning.

There was an unusual hustle of activity about Jacksonville in August and September, 1943, as the Headquarters prepared for its own movement overseas. The destination was England, the training ground, supply base, and springboard for the assault against Festung Europa. Late in September personnel and equipment moved to the New York Port of Embarkation and by mid-October the new command post was established in England at Breamore, Hants, not far from the historic city of Salisbury and the military training area on Salisbury Plain. Troops assigned to the Corps were located principally in the Southern Counties, where the waters of the English Channel constantly reminded them of the enemy just across the way. The 3d Armored Division, newly arrived from the States, joined the Corps again, and veteran division from the North African and Mediterranean theaters - the 1st and 9th Infantry and 2d Armored divisions - moved in to join forces for the big show.

Besides getting ready for the invasion, VII Corps was given the job of helping the British forces in case of an enemy invasion of the English south coast. Our first Anglo-American plans were developed, and several rehearsals and CPX's oriented us in the British ways of operating, and vice versa.

As soon as troops arrived in their UK billets, training for the invasion was intensified, stressing the details of amphibious operations and assault of fortified areas. Dummy landing craft were built far from the beaches so that units could practice loading and unloading their troops and equipment. Drivers were taught to "wade" their waterproofed vehicles through 3 to 4 feet of water, as some day they might to reach shore from their beached landing craft. Artillery units of the Corps conducted intensive firing exercises, troops trained at assault training centers, staffs studied for combined land-sea-and-air operations. Everywhere there was a purposeful spirit, a grimness and a determination to be ready for the task whenever the Supreme Allied Commander should give the word.

While troops were practicing their individual jobs for the biggest amphibious operation in all history, staffs were also training in working out all the details that must be arranged to support such an attack. Key staff officers studied the complexity of the problem at specially arranged schools and conferences. The experience gained in the Corps' first combat planning in the summer of 1943 was valuable now. As a preliminary to the invasion plan, and just in case Germany should collapse prior to the invasion, an operation was planned for the rapid Anglo-American occupation of Europe. Army, Navy, Air Force, and service of Supply staffs worked together under VII Corps direction, mapping out the American plans for participation and developing the teamwork and mutual understanding so necessary to put a smoothly functioning machine in action in France.

Every day, in every way, we were getting better and better, and the soldier's confidence in his ability to do the job was best shown in his favorite topic of conversation: "When do you think D-Day will be?"

Preparation for D-Day

The initial directive for VII Corps participation in the assault on Normandy was issued by Headquarters First U.S. Army on 1 February 1944, based on the Anglo-American "Initial Joint Plan." The operation was out-lined sufficiently to permit initial estimates of troops, supplies, and shipping requirements to be made. VII Corps was to assault a beach on the eastern coast of the Cotentin Peninsula, secure a beachhead, and capture the port of Cherbourg, while V Corps and British and Canadian units made landings farther east in the area north of Bayeux. The 4th Infantry Division, newly arrived from the United States, was designated to make the assault on the VII Corps beach, aided by airborne landings of the 824 and 101st Airborne Divisions. Naval and Air Force units would support the attack by bombardment of enemy defenses and communications, and Service of Supply organizations would mount and supply the operation.

On 14 February 1944, Major General J. Lawton Collins, the original VII Corps Chief of Staff, returned to take command of the Corps. As a division and corps commander in the Pacific theater he had already conducted several successful campaigns against the Japanese, and with an experienced and masterful hand he now took over the guidance of the biggest military operation of his career.

Corps headquarters fairly teemed with activity. Plans were developed, each increasingly more detailed than the last, providing against every need and every emergency. Training was even more intensified as individuals learned and rehearsed the particular tasks each was to do, physically hardening themselves to meet the rigors of combat. Supplies and equipment accumulated in English bases. To facilitate coordination of details of the planning with the naval force which was to provide the lift, escort, and support for the operation, a planning group from the corps staff established planning headquarters adjacent to the offices of U.S. Naval Force "U" in Plymouth. Air support plans of the Ninth U.S. Army Air Force were integrated with plans for naval bombardment, and both fitted into the overall plan for the operation.

As the preparations advanced, joint training exercises for small units of the Army, Navy, and Air Force were held. The most critical events expected in the Normandy invasion were carefully rehearsed as larger units were brought into the problems. Precise details of coordination were arranged and rehearsed, such as how contact would be established between the two airborne divisions and the seaborne assault troops and what aerial bombardment and naval gunfire would be brought on the known enemy defenses. Timing was worked out, routes of advance and contact points were selected, and every conceivable aspect of the coming battle was gone over time and again.

New information on the enemy situation was being received almost daily. So was information on new developments in our own techniques and equipment. Several details of the plans had to be changed as the result of this added knowledge, but everybody put forth his best effort and the adjustments were made rapidly. The spirit with which the troops accepted these changes and put their whole-hearted application into each improvement was a good indication of the full confidence they had in their leaders.

Training exercises increased successively in scope, culminating in the full scale dress rehearsal held in April on the Devonshire coast. Conditions were set up as nearly as possible like those to be encountered on the French coast and every detail of the operation was conducted just as it would be in France. This was our last "dry run". The next time would be for keeps.

Final revisions and corrections followed, last minute details were decided. Then, in the latter part of May, the largest military force ever to sail into action began to assemble in the Marshalling camps along the south coast of England. Our reinforced VII Corps, known during the assault phase of the operation as Assault Force "U", loaded its 30,000 troops and 3,500 vehicles on 4 troop transport ships and over 200 large landing craft at Plymouth, Brixham, Torquay, and Dartmouth, and there awaited orders to sail.

D-Day had been set as June 5th, but the forecast of unfavorable weather for the landing on that date resulted in the decision to postpone the attack one day. Beginning on June 4th, and following carefully arranged Naval plans, the great armada made up of the several assault forces of the Western Naval Task Force sailed out into the English Channel, slowest convoys first, fastest ships last. All were escorted, protected on the sea by units of the American and British Navies and in the air by a cover of Allied aircraft. Apparently either the German command was caught off guard or the German air and naval forces in France were so battered by the incessant Allied aerial bombardment that they were unable to oppose the crossing, and in the darkness of the short summer night these thousands of ships and boats assembled unmolested in their designated areas just off the French coast. Then, at the appointed hour, the naval crews went quietly about their well-rehearsed task of transferring the first waves of troops and equipment to the small, speedy landing craft which would carry them to the beaches.

Invasion!

For months the world had awaited the news that was to flash to every corner of the civilized world on the morning of 6 June 1944. The aerial assault of Europe had begun in 1942, and an ever increasing avalanche of high explosive and incendiary bombs was dropped on German factories, railroad centers, and key cities. The "rocket coast" of France, from which flying bombs were planned to be launched against London, was pounded daily by a constant shuttle of bombers from England. Fighter planes swept across France, attacking enemy planes and transportation on the ground and literally driving enemy fighters from the sky. Then, during the darkness of the early morning of June 6th, a new aerial blow was struck.

Beginning at 0130 hours, over 800 transport planes dropped the parachute elements of the 82d and 101st Airborne Divisions on the Cotentin Peninsula, just north of Carentan and inland from the beach where in a few hours troops of Assault Force "U" would land. The invasion had begun!

Meanwhile, the vast armada carrying the seaborne elements was assembling some eight miles off shore, undetected by the enemy. The numerous rehearsals of unloading the troops from transports to landing craft now proved their value, and the task was accomplished in the darkness without accident. With a hum of motors, the craft bearing the leading waves of assault troops circled, then chummed off to the west, leaving white wakes on the dark sea. Wave upon wave followed, amphibious tanks, LCVPs, LCMs, LCTs, LSTs, each bearing a chosen group of men and equipment specially selected for a specific task. The guns of naval ships flashed and roared, big guns of such vessels as the battleships USS Nevada and Arkansas and the heavy cruisers USS Tuscaloosa and Quincy, smaller rifles of the numerous destroyers, all carrying out a carefully scheduled plan of fires. Rockets fired from specially fitted landing craft screamed onto the beach. The earth, the sky, and the sea seemed to tremble with the roar of tons of explosives, each projectile directed at some target which might be a threat to the success of the landing. And out of all this din and tremendous mass of activity, the situation studied and planned for so long began to take shape.

The Iles St. Marcouf are two small islands lying about four miles east of the Cotentin Peninsula. Their importance to the assault lay in their position, since all the landing craft headed for Utah Beach must pass just south of them. If the enemy defenses included guns on St. Marcouf, they must be silenced quickly, so at 0430 hours on June 6th a specially trained assault unit of the 4th Cavalry Group landed there. Once ashore, the troops found both inlands undefended except by mines and a few booby traps, and both Army and Navy staff officers breathed a sigh of relief to know that one more possibility of enemy interference with our landing plans had been removed.

The hour for the assault landing had been carefully selected for the most favorable conditions of tide and light, and at 0630 hours the first wave of LCVPs touched down and disgorged their cargoes on Utah Beach. Resistance was light. The beach defenders were quickly driven from their pillboxes and strongpoints, and in a very few minutes fighting units of the 4th Infantry Division had assembled and were advancing inland across the inundated areas just off the beach.

Engineers began to clear the mines and obstacles in the shallow water, on the beach, and inland along the roads. More and more troops poured ashore with a seeming disregard of the coastal batteries that continued to shell the beach and craft nearing the shore.

Before daylight, the paratroopers of Major General Maxwell D. Taylor's 101st Airborne Division had seized the western ends of the beach to prevent enemy reinforcements from hindering the landing. All initial objectives of both this division and the assaulting 4th were quickly reached, and contact between the two forces was established in almost precisely the same manner as was planned and rehearsed back in England. By nightfall, it was apparent that the initial hold on the peninsula was about 4,000 yards wide and up to 10,000 yards deep, and that our troops were securely ashore.

On the following day, firm contact was established with elements of the 82d Airborne Division at Ste. Mére-Eglise. Enemy guns located north and south of the beachhead fired intermittently to harass operations on the beach. In spite of a heavy counterattack by the enemy, our troops continued to expand and consolidate their holdings, and by the end of their second day on the continent they had securely established their beachhead, thus completing the first step in the liberation of France and Europe.

Reinforcements continued to flow ashore, and soon the 90th and 9th Infantry Divisions joined the battle. The enemy had retired west of the Merderet River, but not without making our gains as costly as possible. He persistently launched small counterattacks late every evening in a series of attempts to regain ground lost during the day, but every one was decisively beaten off. He still held Carentan, preventing the juncture of VII Corps with V Corps. His defense in the fixed fortifications along the coast was tenacious, and our advance was slow.

On June 10th, Major General Matthew B. Ridgway's 82d Airborne Division pushed across the Merderet River in one of the most daring attacks of the campaign and succeeded in contacting elements of the division which had been isolated in that area since D-Day. Two

days later the 101st Airborne Division captured Carentan, lost it in the face of a strong enemy counterattack, then retook it and established contact with troops of the V Corps east of that city.

In the face of overwhelming allied air superiority, the German air force was unable to operate except in small nuisance flights, chiefly at night.

Interrogation of prisoners revealed that troops arriving to reinforce the three enemy divisions initially contacted by units of the VII Corps had had great difficulty in transit. Attacks of Ninth Air Force fighter-bombers had decimated whole units moving by rail or motor, and heavy and medium bombers had heavily and repeatedly bombed key railroad yards and road centers. French patriots added to the confusion behind the German lines by sabotaging communications and transportation, cutting telephone lines, blowing up bridges on roads and railways, ambushing convoys, and destroying precious fuel.

To prevent the arrival of additional reinforcements for the Cherbourg defenders and to forestall any orderly withdrawal of troops for the Cherbourg area, the VII Corps attacked west across the base of the peninsula. The 90th Infantry Division met stubborn resistance as it led off this attack, but the drive gained momentum with the commitment of the 82d Airborne and 9th Infantry Divisions. On the evening of June 17th, the troops of Major General Manton S. Eddy's 9th Division reached the west coast near Barneville sur Mer, isolating the enemy forces on the Cotentin Peninsula.

As the VII Corps pushed west and then north, responsibility for holding the defensive fronts to the south passed to VII Corps. Successively, the 101st Airborne, the 82d Airborne, and the 90th Infantry Divisions were transferred to that command.

Now our Corps Commander could turn his full attention to the capture of Cherbourg, important to the Allied cause as a seaport to supply the forces ashore. With the 4th, 79th, and 9th Infantry Divisions and the 4th Cavalry Group, the Corps attacked north. The brunt of the German resistance was borne by Major General Raymond O. Barton's 4th Division, while the 79th and 9th Divisions, attacking farther west, met much lighter opposition. Soon the defenses of Cherbourg were ringed by the attacking divisions.

When a ultimatum calling for the surrender of the German forces defending Cherbourg was ignored, the assault on the fortifications was renewed with attacks by hundreds of medium and fighter-bombers and the methodical reduction of the defenses by the ground troops. Naval gunfire joined field artillery fires and air attacks in supporting the advance into the city itself, and on June 27th the last resistance was eliminated.

Then turning its attention to the northwest, the 9th Infantry Division pushed the only remaining enemy forces into the Cap de la Hague area, where long range enemy guns were still firing. Resistance was stubborn, but it was a hopeless battle for the isolated enemy, and on July 1st the campaign ended with their surrender.

Thus closed the first campaign of the VII Corps, a campaign studded with success, in which a beachhead had been secured, a vital port had been seized, and practically the entire garrison of a key enemy coastal bastion had been captured or destroyed. A total of over 39,000 prisoners were taken by VII Corps units in this operation, against the cost of 2,800 Americans killed, 13,500 wounded, and 5,700 captured or missing. Most important of all, the way was now clear for an unlimited drive into the enemy's vital inland areas.

Southout of Normandy

While the main American effort was being made to capture Cherbourg and to clear the Cotentin area, German forces assembling south of Carentan were using the period of inactivity in that sector to prepare a strong defensive line across the base of the peninsula. Breaking through this defense was the next phase of our invasion, and on July 2d VII Corps took over a narrow sector between the VIII and XIX Corps in preparation for the drive south.

Major General Robert C. Macon's 83d Infantry Division held the new Corps sector, a narrow front where operations were canalized by the Taute River and the swampy inundations of the Prairies Marecageuses. The 83d's attacks to gain maneuver room for the commitment of more troops met determined resistance, built about the hedgerows characteristic of this area. Dug into the earthen walls that marked each hedge, the German positions presented a defense that could be eliminated only by slow, tedious, and costly attacks.

The 4th Infantry Division joined the struggle, and later the Corps zone was extended eastward to include the area of the 9th. The infantry-artillery duel continued, gains were small, counterattacks were numerous and determined. On July 11th a strong enemy thrust was launched, with elements of a newly arrived panzer division participating in the first large scale tank attack the VII Corps had experienced. Designed to regain Isigny and split the two main American forces, the attempt proved to be an expensive effort for the enemy, as our air and ground units destroyed or damaged 37 of his tanks. Having gained no ground, he resumed the defensive, withdrawing slowly under the pressure of continuing American attacks.

In order to gain a decisive victory and to break through the area of hedgerow defenses, the First U.S. Army planned Operation "Cobra", a coordinated attack by which the Army would drive south into areas more suited for the operation of its armored units. VII Corps was selected to make the main effort, and boundaries and troops were shifted to position the Corps better for the task. The 83d division passed to VIII Corps control, and the 1st and 30th Infantry and 2d and 3d Armored Divisions joined the VII Corps. After a tremendous air bombardment, the attack would be led by the 4th, 9th, and 30th Divisions, with the 1st, 2d, and 3d poised to exploit the attack once the crust of the enemy defenses was broken.

Poor flying weather twice delayed launching this offensive. Once the heavy bombers which were based in England had already taken off, and part of the air fleet bombed before it could be advised that the attack has been postponed another day. July 25th, however, filled the meteorological bill, and the operation was on. To provide a greater bomb safety zone, front line infantry units withdrew as much as 1000 yards northward. Then the planes came.

Over 3000 aircraft took part that day in the saturation bombing of enemy positions in an area five miles wide and two miles deep, just in front of the VII Corps sector. The bomb targets were all south of the St. Lo-Periers highway, and that road had been designated as the bomb safety line, north of which no bombs would be dropped. A tremendous roaring filled the air as 350 fighter-bombers opened the attack, and the earth trembled with the shock of tons of bombs dropped by 1800 heavy and 400 medium bombers, while 500 more fighter planes gave protection from possible German air attack. A great cloud of dust and smoke rose over the area, obscuring the road, and several planes dropped their bombs short of the target area, among the troops waiting to attack. Confusion at this unexpected turn of events partially disorganized those units which were hit, but adjustments were quickly made and the attack went on as planned.

Initially the advancing infantry met the fire of dug-in riflemen, machine guns, and artillery which had withstood the bombing, and gains were stubbornly contested. On July 26th, the Corps "Sunday punch" was committed, and the 2d and 3d Armored Divisions opened the first large scale armored action of the American forces in Europe. Closely supported by fighter-bombers of the IX Tactical Air Command, our armored columns drove eight kilometers to the south, while the infantry divisions widened the penetration and pressed southward to support the tanks. On the following day, the enemy's positions were completely overrun. The days of hedgerow fighting were over.

After three weeks of slow advance, VII Corps in one mighty drive had pushed 40 to 50 kilometers and had burst completely clear of the base of the Cotentin Peninsula into more open terrain where increased freedom of movement meant even greater progress. It has paved the way for the VIII Corps drive down the west coast and for the entrance of the Third U.S. Army into the battle.

During Operations "Cobra", air-ground coordination reached a superior degree of efficiency. Fighting-bomber attacks alone during the period July 26 - 31 accounted for 362 enemy tanks destroyed and over 200 damaged, and 1337 other motor vehicles destroyed. Squadrons on armed reconnaissance in the VII Corps zone of action attacked and destroyed whole columns of enemy vehicles and they attempted to withdraw to the south. The narrow country roads were so blocked with the debris of these columns that they could be used by the advancing Americans only after bulldozers had cleared paths through the ruins.

The drive begun July 25th was sustained against the rear guard defense of the German forces. Resistance was generally light, but scattered pockets of enemy fought tenaciously. Near Mortain, opposition on the east stiffened and only limited advance was made, although units on the right of the Corps zone met little resistance and continued their advance. On August 6th, elements of the 1st Infantry division reached and occupied Mayenne, while the 4th, 9th, and 30th Divisions engaged a stubbornly defending enemy north and south of Mortain.

The race across France

During the early morning hours of August 7th, the enemy struck with the greatest counterattacking force he had been able to muster since D-Day. It was an attempt to drive a wedge between the American First and Third Armies, to reach the sea along the axis: Mortain - Avranches. A strong force of German tanks and infantry led the attack, and the brunt of the blow fell on the sector of Major General Leland S. Hobbs' 30th Infantry Division in the vicinity of Mortain. Some penetrations were made, but all were contained and the counterattack was halted. However, the enemy reentered Mortain and Barenton (a town about 7 miles southeast of Mortain) and succeeded in isolating the 2d Battalion of the 120th Infantry (30th Division) on a hill just east of Mortain.

Enemy attempts to enlarge his penetrations and carry his attack farther west were continued for several days, but they were all disorganized and scattered by the efforts of our Corps artillery and supporting air units before any major drive could be launched. Major General Paul W. Baade's 35th Infantry Division moved east to bolster the defense south of Mortain. Small groups of enemy infiltrated in several sectors, but all were quickly eliminated. On August 9th, the 9th, 30th, and 35th Infantry and 2d Armored Divisions renewed the attack, but met determined opposition and gained little ground. For several days the enemy continued a stubborn defensive battle, launching numerous small counterattacks in his effort to stop the powerful American advance. He denied all our attempts to relieve the battalion surrounded near Mortain until August 12th, when the 30th Division reoccupied that city and freed the isolated troops.

On the following day, VII Corps, with the 1st, 4th, and 9th Infantry and 3d Armored Divisions, attacked northeast in an attempt to make a juncture with the British and Canadian forces and to cut off the now retreating German Seventh Army. In the four day race that ensued, German rear guards did their best to hold the shoulders of the escape gap open, while Allied artillery and air pounded the fleeing troops. Enemy rear guards broke. Withdrew to the west, struck with the wreckage of hundreds of tanks and thousands of vehicles.

troops. Enemy losses were heavy. Withdrawal routes were strewn with the wreckage of hundreds of tanks and thousands of vehicles. Farther east, Allied air attacks also destroyed large numbers of barges and ferries loaded with troops and vehicles attempting to escape eastward across the Seine River. Finally, on the 17th, contact was made between elements of the XXX British Corps and our 1st Infantry Division, and the Falaise - Argentan pocket was no more.

The German supply situation was now desperate. Somehow they had succeeded in finding sufficient gasoline to rescue much of their armor from the trap by moving it 40 or 50 miles to the east, but practically every supply dump of the German Seventh Army west of the Seine River had been over-run. The Third U.S. Army, operating south of the zone of the VII Corps, had advanced rapidly eastward, and even now elements of Lt. General Patton's command were probing as far as the Seine.

For several days the units of VII Corps were out of contact with the enemy, preparing for the next move, the pursuit eastward across France. When the drive began on August 21st, the 1st and 9th Divisions, the 3d Armored Division, and Col. Joseph E. Tully's reinforced 4th Cavalry Group moved rapidly against little or no opposition, making gains of from 25 to 45 kilometers each day.

Corps units crossed the Seine at Melun on August 25th. On the 27th bridges our engineers built across the Marne carried our troops into the battle fields of World War I, past places famed for the glorious fighting of American troops in 1917 and 1918 - Soissons, Chateau Thierry, Belleau Wood. On and on, beyond the Aisne, past the ancient fortified city of Laon, the advancing VII Corps dashed - the Spearhead (3d Armored) Division leading, closely followed by the 1st and 9th Infantry Divisions and screened on the south flank by the Corps mechanized cavalry. So quickly did these flying columns move that the German command did not know where to expect them next. Motor convoys were overtaken trying to escape to the east. Even railroad trains, loaded with troops and supplies and operating in what their crews believed to be the safety of rear areas, were surprised and destroyed by our armored spearheads. Everywhere in France the German Army was in chaos, and there seemed no safe place to reorganize it short of the German border.

On August 31st our orders were changed, and the direction of our attack was altered from northeast to north. Perhaps we could cut off the retreating enemy columns, headed for the refuge of the West Wall fortifications. VII Corps troops crossed the international boundary into Belgium on September 2d in an attack that carried as far as 40 kilometers in some sectors of the Corps zone. Armored elements reached Mons, meeting only scattered rear guard action. Where was the German Seventh Army? The events of the next three days answered that question with a reply that nearly wrecked the war plans of the German High Command.

On into Germany

While the 9th Division and the strongly reinforced 4th Cavalry Group swung east to probe crossings of the Meuse River, the attack of the 3d Armored Division was temporarily halted near Mons by lack of fuel for its vehicles. The supply lines which furnished food, gasoline, and ammunition to the troops dashing across Europe were getting longer and longer, and in spite of every effort to move these very necessary items up more quickly, the trucks on the "Red Ball" highways could carry only a portion of what was needed. Units had to economize in using their vehicles, troops fed on captured German rations. So the Spearhead was stalled while the Corps collected the gasoline to move it.

As Major General Clarence R. Huebner's Fighting First Division moved north to relieve the armor around Mons, it encountered large numbers of enemy troops marching east, apparently unaware of the presence of American forces in the area. Long columns of motor vehicles and horse-drawn equipment approached from the west, and both 1st and 3d Armored Divisions were heavily engaged. Here was the German Seventh Army, retiring under orders to occupy the Siegfried Line and to keep the American forces out of Germany. During the next three days the carnage continued. Our road blocks and hastily constructed field fortifications stopped the enemy movement to the east, and in the fighting the disorganized enemy suffered heavy casualties, both in killed and wounded. Our artillery and airplanes pounded the long columns on the narrow roads, and the German retreat became a smoking ruin. Elements of 20 enemy divisions were captured or slaughtered as they moved straight into the fires of our troops.

Meanwhile, the remainder of the Corps had moved east, occupying Namur and establishing crossings of the Meuse River there. Resistance east of the Meuse and south of Liege stiffened slightly, but our drive never slackened.

By the time the last remnant of the enemy force was mopped up at Mons, supplies had once more accumulated enough to support the continuation of our armored drive, and the 3d Armored tanks, closely followed by the 1st Division's infantry, moved quickly to Charleroi, then on to Liege, Verviers, and Eupen. The enemy had planned to set up a defensive line in the Verviers-Eupen area to keep the Americans off the "sacred soil" of Germany but our rapid advance completely disjointed all such ideas. We were there before he could do much of anything about it. His minefields and stubbornly defended roadblocks slowed our advance momentarily, but no definite line or organization of the defense was encountered. His lack of first-line troops in the sector was apparent, since he was using home guard, security, antiaircraft, radar, engineer, signal, military police, and training units in the vain attempt to stop the advance of American fighting men and equipment.

Under orders to reconnoiter the defenses of the Siegfried Line, the 3d Armored and 1st Infantry Divisions crossed the border into Germany on September 12th, reached and probed the outer line of fortifications. On the following day, the entire VII Corps threw its weight northeast to crack the defenses of the world-famed West Wall in the area south of Aachen. Enemy delaying action was determined, but was soon overcome, and our tanks and infantry moved through the rows of tank traps into the pillbox defenses. Here the enemy fought stubbornly from as many pillboxes as he could find personnel to man, but many of the fortifications were found undefended, their machine guns still in place. This, then, was the decisive effect of our intercepting the German Seventh Army back at Mons. The German soldiers who were meant to man those guns and defend those bunkers were now on their way to Allied prisoner of war camps, their part in the fighting finished, their job left undone.

By the 15th, VII Corps units had penetrated the Siegfried Line in three places and were advancing inside the defenses south and east of Aachen. Resistance was scattered but determined. The enemy was doing his best to bolster his defenses, but he couldn't stop the VII Corps. In fact, it took a much more powerful factor to halt that drive, but halt it did.

Slow and steady

Even through the enemies main defensive line had been penetrated, he had managed to move up troops to occupy the adjacent sectors of the much vaunted West Wall, and the slow struggle to drive him from the fortifications continued for several weeks. While the main strength of the Corps was punching a hole through these defenses, Tuller cavalry pressed on to the east into the heavily forested areas of Mensch and Hurtgen. On September 17th several determined counterattacks were made in a futile enemy attempt to restore the broken line, and on the following day the German forces resumed a defensive role.

There was street fighting in Stolberg, Aachen was threatened, and on the south the cavalry had reached the pillboxes of the Siegfried Line, deep in the forests. Units fighting through the gaps blasted in the defense were advancing against somewhat lighter resistance, and the battle seemed on the verge of being a complete American victory, when one of the most difficult decisions of the campaign was made. VII Corps would forego the attack and would hold and consolidate its positions.

Supply problems beyond the control of the Corps or of the Army dictated that the advance should be held up, at least temporarily. The unexpected speed of the move across France and Belgium could not be met by the Allied agencies furnishing food and fuel to the fighting troops. Gasoline could not be brought up fast enough to refuel the armored divisions leading the drive. Ammunition for a major battle could not be delivered to the guns. Troops ate captured German rations and concentrated American rations to conserve shipping space. VII Corps, leading the First U.S. Army, had outrun its supplies, and its drive was stalled. Only by the whole Army's husbanding critical items was it possible to move up the Corps on either flank. But the drive had been successful. Germany's inner line of defense had been pierced and our troops were securely through the hole.

However, minor operations continued, reducing and destroying the pill-box of the West Wall, probing known defenses, patrolling in the quiet sectors. Aachen, ancient capital of the Holy Roman Empire, was partially surrounded; Stolberg was captured; and units moved up through the forests on the Corps south flank into the defenses of the Wall. VII Corps was carrying on an active defense, holding and improving its positions, waiting while the flank Corps worked up abreast of it and while supplies accumulated for a coordinated large scale attack.

The German Air Force participated in a day of unusual activity on October the when approximately 75 enemy aircraft operated over the VII Corps sector. Antiaircraft artillery units of the Corps had their best day of the war, shooting down a total of 27 planes and probably destroying 24 more.

On October the, Major General Louis A. Crags the Infantry Division began a battle which was to prove one of the bloodiest of the war in Europe and which was to go on for four months-the battle for the Roer River dams. As long as these dams were held by enemy, they were a constant threat to any attempt at crossing the Roer River, for by destroying the main dam, sufficient water could be released to flood the Roer Valley, blocking our crossing or isolating whatever troops might be across the river when the dam was blown. The threat of this mass of water had been worked into the German defensive plans for the area, and the fury and tenacity of the defense of the dam area bears witness to the importance they placed on holding the advantage of the situation.

For several days the PST Division attacked to contact troops of the IX Corps northeast of Aachen in order to cut off reinforcements to that beleaguered city, and on October 16th the juncture was made in spite of stiff opposition. Meanwhile an ultimatum calling for the surrender of the city was issued and expired without reply, and on the 11th, infantrymen of the 1st Division, supported by artillery and air bombardment, began a systematic reduction of the defenses in the city. For five consecutive days the enemy launched unsuccessful counterattacks to relieve Aachen, where the defenders were fighting a house-to-house battle. Finally, on October 21st, after the German garrison had been driven into one small portion of the city, its leader capitulated, and the first major German city to fall to the allied attack surrendered to the VII Corps.

By the 16th, the attack of the 9th Division to gain control of the Roer dams had reached an impasse, and for several days the Corps' activity was limited to patrolling and artillery shelling. The enemy was defending the Siegfried Line fortifications in front of the XIX and V Corps on the left and right of VII Corps, and while our neighbors attacked to clear out the pillboxes, our Corps defended.

Bad weather which prevented air support also prevented the coordinated attack of VII and XIX Corps to penetrate the main enemy defenses which had been formed east of the ruptured West Wall, and it was November 16th before this new assault began. An aerial bombardment in which over 4,000 planes of the Eighth and Ninth Air Forces participated provided the prelude, smashing enemy concentrations and communications in the Eschweiler area. Based on the experience of heavy bombing in the Normandy break-through, additional safety precautions had been devised, and as 1,300 heavy bombers dropped their cargoes on the target area, no damage was caused by bombs dropping short of their targets.

The 1st and 4th Infantry and 3d Armored Divisions, all old timers with VII Corps, and a newcomer, Major General Terry Allen's 104th Infantry Division, fought their way through well prepared defenses against heavy resistance. Gains on the north and in the center were slow but satisfactory. Eschweiler fell. The Timberwolf (104th) Division found the answer to the challenge of defended towns surrounded by flat, open country in their night attacks as, under cover of darkness, their troops crossed the open areas of successfully carried the fight into the enemy village strongpoints. The armor of the Spearhead Division was pinched out on the twelfth day of the attack, and the doughboys continued to slug their way forward. In the Hurtgen Forest area where the 4th Division has relieved the 9th, Major General Barton's D-Day veterans were having the toughest fight of their career.

VII Corps antiaircraft units had another field day on December 3d when approximately 60 enemy ME 109s and FW 190s attempted to bomb and strafe in the Corps sector. Credit for 25 planes destroyed was confirmed, and 10 more were probably knocked down.

During the next few days, for the first time since November 15th, no offensive action was taken by VII Corps. Battle weary divisions were relieved by fresh troops. After 30 days of fighting in the gloomy forest, the 4th Division was relieved by the 83d. The 9th relieved the 1st, which moved back into Belgium for a well earned rest. The 3d and 5th Armored Divisions assembled to rest their men and service their thanks.

But the rest was a short one, and on December 10th VII Corps launched an attack to reach and clear the west bank of the Roer River. That the enemy intended to defend every yard of German soil was obvious. He fought from open field fortifications, from villages, and from pillboxes. When he was forced to yield ground, he counterattacked fiercely to try to regain his positions. On the second day of the attack, Major General Lunsford E. Oliver's 5th Armored Division was committed on the right of the 83d to bring more weight to bear on the stubbornly defended Roer dam area. By the 14th, the northern half of the Corps zone had been cleared to the river and the enemy-held area west of the Roer was slowly dwindling.

During the next few days the VII Corps sector remained quiet, but some 40 miles to the south a new situation was developing. Enemy attacks drove into an inactive and lightly held sector of the V Corps lines in the Ardennes area. German patrols infiltrated into rear areas and information was confused as whole companies and battalions of American troops were cut off from contact with other friendly units. On the 17th the German Air Force was active along the entire Army front, bombing, strafing, and at night dropping parachutists behind the American lines. Rear area security troops very effectively threw out dragnets for these paratroopers, who were scattered far from their intended dropping zone, and no damage was sustained in the VII Corps sector. Although not clearly apparent at the time, this was the beginning of von Rundstedt's Ardennes counteroffensive, the drive that for some time threatened to cut the first Army's supply line.

Adjustments were quickly made to permit V Corps to concentrate all its efforts on its threatened sector, and VII Corps assumed control of additional areas held by the 8th and 78th Infantry Divisions. The 1st, 9th, and 3d Armored Divisions were dispatched to the breakthrough area, and on December 19th VII Corps assumed the defensive along the Roer.

The initial confusion of the first days of the German offensive through the Ardennes cleared enough to show the enemy's intention, and first Army moved swiftly to counteract the growing threat to its line of communication. VII Corps was selected to assemble a hard-hitting force back in Belgium, to be used to counterattack the penetration which had broken through some 35 miles into Belgium and Luxembourg. At midnight on December 21st, XIX Corps relieved VII Corps of its sector, and the Corps Headquarters and Corps troops moved westward without delay.

The Battle of the Bulge

By noon of December 22d, VII Corps had set up its new command post and was fighting an entirely different sort of battle from the one it had just left. The original intention was for the Corps, its divisions, and Corps troops to assemble out of contact with the enemy, prepared to counterattack and seal off the enemy penetration. The 2d Armored and 75th Infantry Divisions and Corps artillery, cavalry, engineers, and service troops were still arriving in their assembly areas, but the 84th Division, which had earlier assembled around Marche, was actually in contact with leading elements of the German columns. It had quickly gone on the defensive and had repelled several small enemy attacks. Instead of being assembled in reserve, VII Corps found itself holding a 65 kilometer front between the American XVIII Airborne Corps and the British XXX Corps.

With the German attack through the Ardennes in its seventh day, the enemy's intentions and order of battle began to crystallize. St. Vith had fallen, Stavelot and Bastogne on either shoulder of the breakthrough were still in American hands. Units of three panzer corps, including four SS panzer divisions and four others, had been identified in the 35 mile penetration. The German High Command had mustered some of its very best troops for this bid to cut the supply lines behind the American and British forces on the northern half of the Western Front. It was an all-out effort, and the battle was bound to be hard fought.

During its second day in the new area, our Corps formed a defensive line by establishing road blocks and outposts east and west of Marche. Corps troops played an integral part in this defense, with our engineers, cavalry, artillery, antiaircraft artillery, tank destroyers, tanks, and even service troops manning defenses behind our front line divisions in event of an enemy infiltration or breakthrough. Numerous small enemy armored thrusts from the southeast and southwest were either repulsed or destroyed. The 3d Armored Division was attached, and the VII Corps line-up to stop the offensive drive was, from east to west: 3d Armored, 84th Infantry, and 2d Armored divisions, with the 75th Infantry Division in reserve.

The enemy continued to build up his forces in the Marche-Hotton area with the apparent intention of launching a new drive for the Meuse River, and his reconnaissance and probing of our line resulted in numerous pitched battles with small groups of infantry and tanks.

The day before Christmas, the Corps received instructions releasing it from all offensive missions and giving it the job of stabilizing the right flank of the first U.S. Army sector. While these instructions released us from the responsibility of carrying the offensive to the enemy and stressed our defense of the area, they did not prohibit us from attacking, and the Corps Commander directed an active defense, including several limited objective attacks to improve our positions. We would stop the enemy drive where it was, east and south of the Meuse.

Both friendly and enemy lines were fluid during the early days of the fighting, and several of our units were temporarily cut off by the German columns. Task Forces Hogan and Richardson of the 3d Armored Division were isolated in two different spots. Richardson attempted to fight his way back, but every route was blocked. Hogan carried the fight far in advance of other elements of his division and had too little gasoline and ammunition to return. In the little town of Marcouray he set up his defense and waited for reinforcements of supplies. Attempts were made to drop gasoline and ammunition to his force by plane, but none were successful. Eventually, both forces disabled their equipment to prevent it from being used by the Germans and made their way back to our lines on foot. The 3d Battalion, 335th Infantry was outposting the area south and west of Rochefort when it was cut off by advancing enemy tanks. Finding all roads north to their division sector blocked, they withdrew by circuitous routes, moving west of the Meuse, then north, rejoining their regiment several days later.

Several more German tank attacks were repulsed on Christmas Day, and heavy losses were inflicted on the enemy, both in prisoners captured and in tanks and equipment destroyed. An Attack of the 2d Panzer Division south of Ciney was checked by the 2d Armored Division, and in the ensuing three-day battle, the German tank outfit was badly mauled by our armor.

Although visibility in our area continued to be poor and close air support of our units was not practicable, planes of the Allied Air Forces flew thousands of sorties over the battle areas farther east and claimed an impressive total of tanks and motorized equipment knocked out. In the five days when operations were possible in the latter part of December, air attacks scored 210 tanks and armored vehicles destroyed and 80 more damaged, and 820 motor vehicles destroyed with 250 more damaged. Such losses as these are bound to have had an adverse effect on the enemy's ability to carry on the battle.

Our line continued firm and was strengthened all along the front as our attacks pushed the enemy from his newest gains and repulsed all his attempts to work farther to the north. The 83d Infantry Division rejoined the Corps and assembled in Corps reserve. Our contact with the XVIII Airborne Corps and the British XXX Corps on either flank was strong, and by December 28th the punch of von Rundstedt's drive was gone. Thereafter, contacts became lighter as German elements generally assumed the defensive or withdrew under the constant pressure of our attacks. Another mission had been accomplished by our Corps. The right flank of the Army was stabilized - the Ardennes counteroffensive had been stopped.

The German drive had been stopped and now it must be thrown in reverse, so on 3 January 1945, First Army launched its attack to wipe out the bulge in its lines that had been caused by the initial German successes. VII Corps sideslipped its divisions to the east, then attacked southeast in the Army's main effort to cut off or drive back the enemy forces remaining in the bulge. The 2d and 3d Armored Divisions led the attack, closely followed by the infantry of the 84th and 83d Divisions, while the 75th held its defensive line. The weather was bitterly cold, snow and ice made the roads slippery and hampered the movement of our tanks, but the attack made slow, steady progress. Resistance was stubborn, terrain favored the defenders, snow and poor visibility interfered with tank and artillery firing, but still the armor pushed on, driving some of the best troops in the Wehrmacht back, or bypassing pockets of resistance for the supporting infantry to mop up. There were the usual enemy counterattacks, but none proved profitable, and the Germans went back to the defensive, trying to hold back the relentless pressure of our men and armor.

By the 9th it was indicated that the German commander was gradually displacing his divisions to the east, withdrawing his best troops first, leaving his second and third rate units to delay our advance. Resistance on the west had considerably lessened, but on the east every kilometer was bitterly contested. Gradually our infantry divisions worked past our armor, giving the tankmen a chance to rest and repair their equipment. Enemy pressure continued to be heavy, and the delaying forces withdrew only when their positions became untenable. Our successes were due to the continuous American offensive pressure and certainly not to any decline in the German defense. With minefields, road blocks, dug-in tanks and guns, he executed the maximum possible delay to our advance.

The winter weather, snow, and ground practically eliminated air support during the operation. Twice the skies cleared enough to let fighter-bombers attack, but for the remainder of the offensive the ground troops fought it out without aerial help.

Gradually the gap between the Third and First U.S. Armies narrowed. Third Army units relieved the beleaguered 101st Airborne Division in Bastogne after their gallant defense of that city and continued the drive north toward Houffalize. Every day more of the area north of the Ourthe River was cleared by the attacks of the VII and XVIII Corps. To our west, British units were driving eastward, maintaining contact with both First and Third Army elements. Finally VII and VIII Corps linked forces at Hoffalize and along the Ourthe on January 16th, pinching the British units out of contact. The bulge was only a bump, and that was fast disappearing.

By January 19th the enemy forces were definitely attempting to withdraw, leaving the usual delaying forces to cover the extrication of their best troops and equipment. Most of the VII Corps front was pinched out by continued advances of the VIII Corps of the south and the XVIII Airborne Corps on the north, until only the 84th Division remained in the battle. As Corps units were relieved, they assembled to refurbish their equipment and to shelter and rest their men. On the 24th, Major General Alexander R. Bolling's 84th Division reached its objectives, completed its mission of mopping up the remaining Corps front, and was attached to XVIII Corps.

For a brief period (January 21 - 23) the weather cleared enough for fighter-bombers to operate on armed reconnaissance in the area east of the First Army front, and the havoc they caused among the withdrawing enemy columns reminded us of the days of the Normandy breakthrough and the Falaise-Argentan gap. For three days our planes dived on the crowded roads, and the tally showed 71 tanks and armored vehicles destroyed, 94 damaged, over 1600 trucks and other motor vehicles in ruins, and another 1700 damaged. In the same period, attacks on German railroads east of the bulge netted over 850 railroad cars damaged or destroyed.

Now completely out of contact with the enemy, and even out of hearing of the guns, VII Corps assembled in the vicinity of Ochain, Belgium to rest its personnel and to service and repair its vehicles and equipment after the gruelling winter battle. This was the first real rest the Corps Headquarters and some of its troops had had since D-Day, and every effort was made to house the personnel comfortably. For twelve days the troops enjoyed the comparative luxury of their Belgian billets, then on February 5th VII Corps returned to Germany, to the same sector it had left before the Battle of the Bulge.

Rhineland reoccupied - 1945

Back in Germany, VII Corps took over much the same sector it had held in December before the bitter interlude of the Ardennes. Its two front-line divisions, the 8th and 104th Infantry Divisions, held sectors along the west bank of the Roer River with little enemy contact. Enemy forces opposing them were generally inactive, but were being reinforced as troops shifted north from the Ardennes sector to bolster the Roer defenses against the inevitable attack across the Cologne plain.

While VII Corps continued its inactivity, the XVIII Airborne Corps on its right attacked to seize the Roar River dams, to force the enemy's hand with respect to this continued threat of several million gallons of water. Efforts made to capture the dams had so far been unsuccessful, and aerial bombardment of the largest dam by special units of the British RAF had only pocked the huge earth-and-concrete structure. Now the barriers must either be captured or be blown up; in either way the threat would be removed. The enemy resisted bitterly, as before, but the attack was not to be denied, and slowly but surely the Americans closed in. Finally on February 11th the Germans destroyed the outlet gates on the largest dam, releasing the water, but not fast enough to cause the devastating flood that had been feared.

The Roer rose until it filled its banks brimful with the swift-flowing waters, and for several days it continued to present a formidable obstacle for our advance, but the uncertainty of the threat had been removed. The attack of Cologne could go on as soon as the water receded.

During this quiet period in the VII Corps sector, troops were being regrouped and plans completed for the river crossing and the drive to the east. The 3d Armored Division and 4th Cavalry Group moved back into Germany from their Belgian rest areas, and the 99th Infantry Division joined our forces.

6,000 Allied airplanes began on February 22d a series of mass attacks against German transportation, bombing and strafing railways, roads, and canals. German units had been moving from one threatened area to another as Allied and Soviet pressure increased or lessened, and to prevent this shuffling of troops it was necessary to paralyze German transportation. In two days of the operation, planes of the IX Tactical Air Command flew hundreds of sorties in front of the First Army sector, destroying 481 railway cars, damaging 556 others, exploding 52 locomotives, and cutting rail lines in over 100 places.

Before daylight, 23 February 1945, the Ninth U.S. Army opened its drive to the Rhine and the Ruhr industrial area, and at 0330 hours on that date VII Corps attacked across the Roer River to protect its right flank. The 8th and 104th Infantry Divisions crossed the still swollen stream with some difficulty because of the speed of the current. In the Timberwolf zone, downstream, the bridgehead was established quickly and bridges were soon carrying supporting weapons and supplies east of the stream, but Brig. Gen. Gryant E. Moore's 8th Division had trouble bridging the swifter current. Several attempts to build crossings failed when enemy artillery and the fast moving water combined to prevent their completion. However, by February 25th all units held their initial bridgeheads and crossings.

The 8th quickly occupied Duren, and both divisions attacked off across the plain against an enemy defending the villages with intense fire from self-propelled guns, dug-in tanks, and artillery. The technique of attacking over the open plain by night and mopping up resistance in the villages by day, first exercised to any great extent by the 104th Division, paid big dividends as the advance pressed forward with a minimum of losses. The 4th Cavalry joined the attack east of the river, and on the 26th the armor was committed to spearhead the drive to the northeast, gaining 5 miles that day in spite of poor roads and heavy mud. Air assistance, both in close support of the attackers and on armed reconnaissance in the zone of the Corps' advance, continued whenever the weather permitted.

In the first four days of the attack, VII Corps advanced 15 kilometers, cleared the city of Duren and 25 other towns and villages, and took 3,500 prisoners. Although forced to withdraw east of the Erft River, German troops defended every foot of the way to the maximum extent of their ability, using all their known available forces west of the Rhine in a desperate final defense of the approaches to Cologne and the Ruhr.

The Erft River and canal system proved no barrier to our infantry and tanks. The German Air Force made a desperate bid to destroy our bridges and bomb our troops along the waterways, but the attempt was costly. 34 planes were shot down by our antiaircraft defense and 10 more were probably destroyed, yet our troops suffered no damage or casualties in any of their attacks.

The advance of Ninth Army was progressing well, and Maj. Gen. Walter E. Lauer's 99th Infantry Division was committed to protect the Army's right flank and to keep contact with the remainder of VII Corps as its uninterrupted advance rolled on across the plain. III Corps units on our right, crossing the Roer in the VII Corps bridgehead, widened the First Army's hold east of the river and drove Rhineward along with our units. Prisoners were taken by the thousand on all fronts as scores of villages were cleared in spite of their stubborn defense.

Elements of 3d Armored Division reached the Rhine on March 4th, then the tanks swung southeast to join the infantry of the 104th Division, fighting their way into Cologne on the 5th. Backed against the Rhine and forced to yield the high ground which was the last natural barrier before the river, the enemy who had fought so tenaciously to defend the approaches to Cologne were unable to prevent our entry into the city. Now a pile of rubble from thousands of tons of Allied bombs, this had once been the Queen City of the Rhine, the third largest city in Germany, and was the largest German city* to fall to the attack of British or American forces in this war.

Enemy resistance west of the Rhine and north of Cologne was quickly mopped up, and the city was cleared after 57 hours of street fighting, but the 8th Division was still fighting farther south as the enemy attempted to hold open the ferry sites which provided their only escape routes across the Rhine.

On March 8th the 1st Infantry Division was attached to our Corps, and we were given the added mission of taking Bonn, the university city. The 1st met stubborn resistance in and around that city as the enemy made a "last ditch" stand, but on the next day all resistance in the VII Corps zone ended as Bonn fell. Since the attack began on February 23d, VII Corps units had captured over 18,000 prisoners and had cleared 84 kilometers of the west bank of the Rhine.

Suddenly the military world was electrified by the news that on March 7th elements of the 9th Armored Division (III Corps) had seized intact a crossing over the Rhine - the Ludendorff railway bridge at Remagen, a few miles south of our Corps sector.

** Berlin, the largest city, was captured by Soviet forces, and Hamburg, second largest, was declared an open city in the face of the British advance, so was not attacked*

The Rose Pocket

While VII Corps was clearing its zone along the west bank of the Rhine, troops of the III Corps streamed across the bridge at Remagen and pushed on to establish a bridgehead over the river. Although harassed continually by fire from German 88's on the hills overlooking the crossing and by suicidal dive-bombing attacks of the German Air Force, traffic continued to flow across the fateful bridge. At sites that were often under enemy fire, engineers quickly built additional floating bridges to carry more troops and supplies into the bitterly contested bridgehead, and gradually the Americans' first slim toe hold east of the river became a foothold.

VII Corps once more came into the fray when elements of the 1st Division crossed the Rhine and assembled in First Army's week-old bridgehead. The 78th Infantry Division, already attacking to clear more territory north of the bridge sites, was attached to our Corps and continued its attack. Then on March 17th both divisions joined in a renewed attack to widen the foothold east of the river to permit construction of additional bridges. The terrain was rough, hilly and wooded, and well suited to the enemy's defense. In an attempt to contain our troops and limit their advance east of the Rhine while he mustered forces to wipe out our bridgehead, the German commander had moved two divisions and parts of five others into the hills surrounding our forces. Pressure on our attacking units was heavy. Enemy artillery fires were particularly active as the defenders reacted violently to our advance in the eastern part of the sector.

Critical terrain features were usually defended by small arms, mortar, artillery, and self-propelled gun fire, and some tanks were encountered, supporting small groups of infantry in defensive or counterattacking roles. Enemy troops formed up repeatedly for counterattacks, but our artillery fires usually dispersed these threats before they could strike.

VII Corps engineers completed their first bridge across the Rhine, a floating treadway 1,176 feet long, on the 17th, and as the attack cleared more and more of the east bank of the river, two more crossings were built.

Gains up to three kilometers a day were being made in the difficult, wooded terrain of the Sauerland. Numerous local counterattacks struck our infantry as they slowly pushed the enemy back, but all were mopped up quickly. By the 21st, Major General Edwin P. Parker, Jr.'s 78th Division had cleared its zone north to the Sieg river, which made a natural protective barrier for that flank, and was pushing on to the east along that stream. The daily gains of the 1st and 78th had provided additional room in the VII Corps sector of the bridgehead, and more Corps units moved across the Rhine to join the fight. The initial Army bridgehead line was reached on the 23d. VII Corps held a sector 15 kilometers deep, and its units re-grouped for the next attack, all the while continuing to exert pressure on the enemy. The 104th Division joined the eastward attack of the 1st, while the 78th protected the Corps left flank along the Sieg. Enemy delaying action gave way to bitter fighting, and counterattack after counterattack was repelled as successive waves of enemy forces were driven back.

On March 25th First Army launched its attack to burst out of the bridgehead, with the VII, III, and V Corps all driving eastward. The 3d Armored Division passed through the 1st and 104th in four columns, closely followed by the supporting infantry, and despite difficult terrain, minefields, and enemy fire from small arms, self-propelled guns, and tanks, good progress was made. Using strong forces of tanks and infantry from reinforcements rushed into the threatened area, the enemy unsuccessfully attempted to stem our advance. Eight enemy divisions were identified on the VII Corps front, but in spite of the number of units, the quality of many of the troops was low.

In the first day's drive our armored columns advanced 20 kilometers. Resistance to the advance of the 104th Division on the south was moderate, but the 1st Division farther north fought off determined counterattacks as it moved east and also protected part of the Corps left flank. In another day the leading columns dashed 35 kilometers farther to seize all assigned objectives, and the Corps had contact with the enemy on a front along the west bank of the Rhine and the south bank of the Sieg for 97 miles.

Once more elements of the VII Corps had achieved a breakthrough, - now to exploit the situation. While our armored columns raced ahead, meeting only moderate resistance, our infantry cleared town after town, taking over a thousand prisoners a day. On the 28th the attack swung north-east and armored units sped another 35 kilometers to capture Marburg. The Corps advance had moved so fast, covering 90 kilometers in only three days, that this city of 25,000 population, famed as one of Germany's cultural centers, was virtually undamaged. Its 13th Century cathedral and its university founded in 1527 escaped completely the destruction that attended the capture of Aachen, Duren, Cologne, and Bonn. Several German military hospitals were overrun here, and thousands of soldier-patients became our prisoners. How little the Germans expected the arrival of our forces was shown when a railroad train loaded with civilians and convalescent soldiers being taken to Marburg for a rest and vacation was halted just outside the city by our tanks. But there was no rest or relaxation for our troops either, for now the Corps front extended approximately 200 kilometers, or 125 miles.

From Marburg the racing armor drove north. In a single day's record advance of 90 kilometers, several thousand more prisoners were taken, and our spearheads reached the area just south of Paderborn. This maneuver was of far-reaching importance to the allied cause, for by this action the enemy defending the Ruhr valley were practically cut off. VII Corps forces now encircled them on the west, south and east along a 200 mile front.

To protect our long left flank against possible counterattacks in strength was a big task. The 78th Division extended its zone farther eastward along the Sieg and the 4th Cavalry Group and 8th Infantry Division moved in to relieve elements of the 1st Division still farther east, while the 86th Infantry Division took over the defense of the Rhine's west bank, a task from which VII Corps was soon relieved.

As the 3d Armored columns closed on Paderborn, they encountered increasing resistance from enemy strongpoints, roadblocks, and stubborn opposition in defended villages. While First Army was breaking out of its bridgehead, troops of the Ninth U.S. Army had crossed the Rhine north of the Ruhr and were now driving east toward Paderborn, paced by the tanks of the 2d Armored Division. A link-up of the two American armies in this area would be a crushing blow to Germany, for it would isolate one of the Reich's largest industrial areas and the thousands of troops defending it. And so thousands of SS troops, the elite of the Wehrmacht, were thrown into the battle as the enemy attempted to stabilize his defenses and to hold Paderborn's important road center, to keep his Ruhr escape route open.

On March 31st the United States Army lost one of its great battle leaders when Major General Maurice Rose, commanding the 3d Armored Division, was killed in action near Paderborn. General Rose had commanded his division since the Normandy breakthrough, and it was under his leadership that it had earned its nickname of the "Spearhead Division". The great work and brilliant success of the division reflected the ability and spirit of its leader. Because of the importance of the attack in which he was leading his division when he lost his life and to honor his personal courage in battle, VII Corps and First Army adopted the name of the "Rose Pocket" for the operation which isolated the Ruhr.

While the 3d Armored Division was driving north to close the pocket, the 104th was following closely in the eastern part of the Corps zone, and the 1st was moving more slowly against stiffer resistance farther west. Intelligence was received of a proposed enemy attack to break out of the rapidly closing Ruhr trap by a tank-and-infantry drive east in the vicinity of Winterburg. The attack to the north was therefor suspended for one of the regiments of the 104th Division, and it deployed to the northwest to counter the threat. With characteristic Timberwolf speed, our troops seized the enemy's line of departure before he could attack, and for the next four days beat back all enemy attempts to penetrate the VII Corps ring in that area.

An armored task force from the Spearhead Division made a firm junction with elements of the 2d Armored and 83d Infantry Divisions (XIX Corps) at Lippstadt on April 1st. The Ruhr trap was closed, a trap which isolated about 5,000 square miles of enemy territory, including some of the most highly developed industrial area in Europe. Completely encircled by American troops, over 350,000 enemy, units of German Army Group D, were cut off from supplies and reinforcements. This was one of the greatest operations of its kind in all history, and a heavy blow to the already hard-pressed German army and nation.

Thousands of prisoners continued to flow through our PW enclosures each day as all along the VII Corps left flank our units regrouped and continued their attacks to improve local positions. The 9th Infantry Division was attached to the Corps and joined in the ring around the Ruhr, and the 4th Cavalry and Brigadier General Clift Andrus' 1st Division moved farther north. On the day after the Rose Pocket was closed, the sector held by the 78th and 8th Divisions went to control of the XVIII Airborne Corps, and three days later most of the remainder of the Corps front on the pocket was taken over by the III Corps.

Then while troops north and south of the remaining VII Corps front attacked to shrink the pocket and release the rest of our troops, the 3d Armored Division, now commanded by Brigadier General Doyle O. Hickey, launched a new drive to the east.

Wehrmacht Kaput

After pausing briefly following the encirclement of the enemy forces in the Rose Pocket, and while infantry elements of the Corps regrouped in preparation for another drive to the east, tanks and infantry of the 3d Armored Division struck out to secure crossings of the Weser River. Moving rapidly, they advanced 35 kilometers before a strongly organized antitank defense slowed them just short of the river.

While it continued its operation to clear the Rose Pocket, First Army opened a drive on April 7th that was its last major operation of the war, a drive to advance eastward toward Leipzig and Dresden to gain contact with the Soviet forces advancing from the east. Leaving a task force consisting of the Corps cavalry and one regimental combat team of the 1st Division to secure the VII Corps sector on the Rose Pocket, the remainder of the Corps reached and crossed the Weser River. In relinquishing the ground west of the river, the enemy seemed primarily concerned with delaying our advance long enough to permit the withdrawal of his troops across the stream, and he fought bitterly from village strongpoints, destroying bridges and underpasses wherever possible.

VII Corps was finally relieved completely of its sector on the Rose Pocket front and turned its undivided attention eastward to the task of crossing and bridging the Weser, a mission accomplished on April 8th by our infantry divisions. On the following day, armored elements attacked through the infantry's bridgehead, meeting strong resistance from a stubborn enemy tank delaying action, but nevertheless making gains of 20 kilometers during the day. Infantry followed the armored attack, mopping up whatever resistance remained in the wake of the tanks.

50 kilometers more of enemy territory fell to the relentless tank-and-infantry advance on April 10th. Prisoners by the thousand overtaxed our PW facilities, and the enemy organization showed signs of disintegrating. Only fanatical groups defending towns along the routes of advance offered any sizable resistance, and that appeared to lack coordination as our units made deep thrusts into the area just south of the Harz Mountains. While enemy infantry and tanks made determined stands at some points in attempting to delay our advance, other columns met practically no resistance. In one case the enemy effectively defended a bridge crossing by placing heavy artillery fire on the crossing site, but failed to oppose with even small arms fire other crossings of the same river farther south.

The capture of the city of Nordhausen opened our eyes to the sort of people we were fighting and showed us why Germany's surrender must be complete and unconditional. When the leading armored columns drove into the city and began to ferret out its last Nazi defenders, the amazed tankers unearthed one of Germany's most infamous concentration camps. Thousands of slave laborers, men and women displaced from Russia, Poland, France, and other conquered areas, were kept here to operate the huge V-bomb factory built deep into a hillside a short distance out of town. The in-humanity of their living conditions was appalling. The dead far outnumbered the living. Thousands of bodies were discovered in the partially destroyed barracks, lying in the fields, or stacked at the crematory, waiting to be burned. Bodies were found lying where their owners had died, or were crammed into rooms set aside for the dead and so full that the bony remains tumbled out when the doors were opened. It was not a pretty sight. Most of the dead had died of starvation. The living were practically dead, lying in the same rooms, even in the same beds with their dead and dying comrades, too weak to move. Troops seeing this hell-hole needed no urging to get back into the fight against a race that could care so little for human life. In retribution for their parts in this awful crime, whether their parts consisted of active support of those who directed such horrors or merely of passive acceptance of the regime, all the male citizens of Nordhausen were made to dig graves on a hillside overlooking the city and to carry and bury all the bodies in this cemetery which will always bear evidence to the brutish sadism of the Nazis.

Indications of an enemy stand in the rugged Harz Mountains became more apparent as resistance stiffened considerably along the southwestern fringe of the wooded area. All approaches into the mountains were actively defended by enemy tanks and self-propelled guns. By-passing the Harz for the moment, our attack advanced another 45 kilometers eastward against light resistance. Infantry mopped up behind the tank columns and blocked the southern exits from the mountains, and our cavalry entered the western approaches to the Harz area. The wooded hills and narrow roads assisted the enemy defense, and their roadblocks and minefields, defended by small groups of infantry supported by tanks and self-propelled guns, forced the mechanized troops to dismount and fight their way laboriously around these obstacles.

While the Spearhead Division continued its drive eastward to the Saale River, the remainder of VII Corps brought its pressure to bear on the defenders of the Harz Mountains. The 1st Division joined the 4th Cavalry in attacking into the western end of the mountain area, the 104th blocked along the southern exits of the hills, and the 9th, once more rejoining our Corps, attacked north into the eastern part of the mountains. Thus ringed on three sides, the defenders delayed stubbornly in small groups, but surrendered when their positions became untenable. Our prisoner census mounted steadily, gaining from 2,000 to 4,000 or more each day, as the enemy situation became increasingly more hopeless.

As the advance of the 1st and 9th Divisions released the 104th in the Harz area, the Timberwolves resumed their drive eastward to Halle, and the 3d Armored moved on toward Dessau to seize a crossing of the Mulde River there. On April 15th, the Mulde was designated as the restraining line for our advance, and the Spearhead Division withdrew the bridgehead it has seized over that river. The advance of the Soviet forces east of the Elbe was driving steadily westward, and to prevent any accidental clash of American and Soviet troops, a sort of no-man's land was established between the Elbe and the Mulde Rivers.

Although the City of Halle was by now encircled, its defenders fought desperately in a house-to-house battle that lasted for five days. 5,000 to 10,000 new prisoners flooded our PW camps daily, and, as the pressure in the Harz area increased, more and more Germans surrendered. Our air support was active, and enemy vehicular losses were heavy as their remaining forces, compressed into a smaller and smaller area, became targets for our dive-bombers. Organized resistance was rapidly disintegrating except for small fanatical groups, and on April 20th it ended in the VII Corps portion of the mountains with the capture of over 18,000 prisoners. Opposition from the remaining troops in that area was disorganized and ineffectual as the key terrain features and towns were cleared by our forces pushing northward to link up with elements of the XIX Corps. This juncture was accomplished on the 21st. Farther east in the VII Corps sector the enemy were cleared from all the towns, and on 23 April 1945 all resistance in the Corps zone ended. VII Corps' last combat mission of the war in Europe was accomplished.

For several days Corps units rounded up stragglers of the broken Wehrmacht in our rear areas and apprehended many more Germans fleeing westward from the Soviet advance to surrender voluntarily to the American forces.

The initial contact between Americans and Soviet troops was made by Major General Emil F. Reinhardt's 69th Infantry Division on April 25th. The contact point was just south of the VII Corps zone, and on the following day patrols of the 9th and 104th Divisions met elements of Marshal Koniev's First Ukrainian Army along the Elbe.

On April 28th the VII Corps zone was enlarged by the addition of the area and troops of the V Corps, including the 69th and 2d Infantry and 9th Armored Divisions. Operational emphasis was now placed on the organization of the Corps zone for military occupation and government, centered about the Corps Headquarters located in Leipzig.

After eleven months of operation under First U.S. Army, VII Corps was placed under operational control of the Ninth U.S. Army on May 6th, as First Army, its European mission accomplished, prepared to become non-operational. On the occasion of the end of the war in Europe (9 May 1945) and of the separation of VII Corps from the Army Headquarters under which it had served during its entire period overseas, General Courtney H. Hodges, the Army Commander, addressed the following letter of commendation to Lieutenant General Collins, who had lead the Corps through all its combat service:

"On the cessation of hostilities in Germany, I want to congratulate you and to express my appreciation to you, and through you to your staff, Corps troops, and divisions under your command, for the outstanding record you have made since the landing on D-Day, nearly a year ago.

"Your brilliant direction of the rapid advance of VII Corps from Utah Beach to Cherbourg and your successful assault against that vital port contributed significantly toward the establishment of a firm foothold on the Continent. Our careful timing and coordination of the successful break-through at Saint Lo, coupled with the magnificent fighting qualities of your men resulted in the rapid drive through northern France and Belgium spearheaded by the VII Corps.

"After liberating Liege, with your usual drive and dynamic energy, you captured Aachen and advanced to the Roer River. When the Germans attacked on 16 December, your Corps was shifted to the south where it sealed off the point of the enemy penetration, then counter-attacked to hurl the Germans back to the Rhine. Your rapid reduction of Cologne and swift advance across Germany east of the Rhine are tribute to your outstanding skill as a commander and to the selfless devotion to duty you have inspired in your subordinates.

"Yours has always been our spearhead corps. I desire to commend you on the outstanding performance of that corps. I desire to commend you on the outstanding performance of that corps as well as on your own tactical abilities, inspiring leadership, and personal courage.

"My best personal wishes to you and to VII Corps for continued success wherever you may go."

Another addition was made to the Corps sector with the attachment of the 8th Armored Division, and there were further adjustments of troops and areas as the corps continued its occupation and government of 47 German political areas (stadtkreise and landkreise), totalling approximately 8,000 square miles. Each division occupied and secured a number of these political subdivisions, and the Corps troops, - the antiaircraft, armored, cavalry, chemical, engineer, field artillery, medical, military police, ordnance, quartermaster, signal, tank destroyer and other units whose continued functioning and supporting assistance played such a big part in achieving the magnificent record of the VII Corps, - these troops likewise had occupational duties to perform.

At midnight, 11 June 1945 (D+370), VII Corps Headquarters became non-operational, relieved of its command by XXI Corps, and two days later began its redeployment back to the United States, where leaves and furloughs for its personnel would be followed by a new assignment, a new mission to be accomplished.

